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ISIS: What it Means for Muslim Outreach

In John 5:19, Jesus tells the disciples, “I only do what I see the Father doing.” This is a central concept of Kingdom culture often overlooked among Christians, and in the operation of churches.

There are two choices to make decisions: (1) make a decision and pray that God will bless it; or, (2) watch where God is blessing and do that, see where God is moving and go there. The second approach is reflective of John 5:19. It creates a Kingdom culture of being a “God watcher.”

In the news, almost daily, we see the evil of ISIS: beheading innocent people, abducting young school-children, burning people alive, acts of terrorism, crucifixions of innocent Christians. As God watchers, Kingdom Christians see this and ask, “What will God do with this?” The fundamental question is, “Can God use this awful behavior in a way that helps me reach people for Jesus Christ?” As God watchers, we should see a golden opportunity. Even out of evil, God can create good.

Kent Hunter is a Consultant to pastors, churches, denominations and ministries. He has consulted POBLO (People of the Book Ministries) for over ten years. Kent is Founder of Church Doctor Ministries and the Author of several books.



www.churchdoctor.org

Email Kent: kenthunter@churchdoctor.org

POBLO

For over a decade I have had the privilege of consulting a ministry in the Detroit area, called POBLO. They are a group of Christians with a heart for missions. Their goal is to reach Muslims for Jesus Christ, particularly focused on those who have immigrated to the U.S.

POBLO helps Christian churches develop “International Friendship Centers” in areas

MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

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where there are high concentrations of Muslims. These Centers provide services to help new Muslim immigrants assimilate into American society. In the process, they build relationships and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. As POBLO raises leaders among former Muslims who have converted to Christianity, they train and deploy them as missionaries, to reach those still Muslim with the Gospel.

My role of consulting the POBLO leaders is to provide guidance in mission strategy. In the process, I have learned so much about reaching Muslims. I feel that POBLO has contributed much more to me than I have contributed to them. This includes the very interesting perspective of how God is using the horrific behavior of ISIS to impact the many Muslims who have relocated in North America.

Among those who work with POBLO is "John." (This is not his real name. I have used a pseudonym for his name because there are radicalized Muslims who could harm him and his outreach efforts to Muslims).

"John" is an Iraqi man who was both deeply into the Quran as a teacher and was also a Shia political leader who opposed and tried to kill Sunni president, Saddam Hussein. As one who was "sold out" to Islam, "John" was shocked when a Muslim man who had left the faith and no longer believed in God challenged him to read the Quran, "not as a Muslim", he said, but objectively. "John" accepted the challenge. The more he read of the Quran, the less he found it to be credible. Reading it in this way left him with many questions, but he could find no Islamic leaders willing to give him answers. This futile experience led "John" to no longer believe as a Muslim, but with an aching void in his heart, still wanting to meet the "true God".

Eventually, because he was a political leader who opposed Hussein, "John" was shot by Hussein's elite soldiers sent out to murder him. "John" showed me the bullet holes in his right arm and left leg, scars he will carry the rest of his life, a signature from Saddam Hussein. "John" somehow got away and survived, but was later caught and sent to prison to await execution by firing squad. However, prior to his execution, the U.S. and Allied soldiers liberated Baghdad and "John" was set free, and eventually as a refugee, came to the United States, still searching for the "true God". "John" came to know the true God, our God of love. It all began with listening to a Christian radio program in Arabic. He called the station and subsequently came to know an Arab Christian businessman who sent him a Bible. Reading the entire Bible through eight times in three months, John had a multitude of questions, but his Christian friend never tired of receiving phone calls to ask about the meaning of this verse or that verse. Finally, "John" had no more questions, but He did find himself with faith in the Savior. It was then that the Lord revealed to "John" in a dream that his life had been spared twice for a reason: he would now share the truth

TEN WAYS TO REACH MUSLIMS FOR CHRIST

1. See the opportunity: the mission field is coming to you.
2. Do not be afraid: most Muslims feel the same about terrorism as you do.
3. Recognize that immigrants in a new country are eager to make friends. This makes them receptive to your Christian faith.
4. Do not hesitate to start a conversation, to ask if they are practicing Muslims.
5. Be sensitive to gender appropriate conversations.
6. Learn more about how to approach Muslims. Check the resources listed in this issue.
7. Invite a Muslim family to your home for a meal, and build a relationship that might lead to a faith conversation.
8. Ask your new Muslim friend if he/she is practicing their faith.
9. Seize THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY presented by the publicity surrounding ISIS. Most nominal Muslims are against violence.
10. Contact POBLO to help your church reach Muslims in your community.

about the God of love with those still Muslim. In his own words, "When I read the Bible, I was surprised to find the God of love, not hate. I found the real God in Jesus Christ."

Today, "John" presents a weekly radio broadcast, in Arabic. He preaches the gospel to a nationwide Muslim audience and takes phone calls. God can work good from evil! "John", who came out of a sea of violence, now sees ISIS as a "Golden Opportunity" to reach Muslims for Jesus Christ. (What follows, comes from a report "John" gave me).

Golden Opportunity

[These are "John's" comments, given in Arabic, translated by his Christian translator]

ISIS is a threat which all Christians need to seriously pray about. But ISIS also presents a great opportunity. You could say that because of the violence done in the name of the god of Islam, Islam itself is being unveiled. That is, when innocent people are being beheaded, and every sort of minority group is being innocently murdered, including Christians being crucified and Christian children beheaded, this is the very face of evil. This is the full force of evil out in broad daylight, not even hidden a bit. And you have to know a bit about Islam to understand why this is an open display of evil. It is such an enlightenment for tens of millions of Muslims who previously thought otherwise. You see, Muslims are taught that Islam, Christianity, (which came before it), and Judaism, (which came before that), are all part of the same family. The belief is that the one god revealed himself and sent scriptures to different groups of people at different periods in history. Islam simply happens to have come last. As this reasoning goes, since the three religions are from the same god, their scriptures should all contain similar messages.

Now, when these millions of people who previously thought of Islam as a religion of peace see the evil of Al Qaeda and now the evil done through ISIS, their previous belief is shaken. They have been told it is peace, but instead of peace, they see open slaughter.

As a result, as a missionary to America, I declare this time in history to be THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY to tell Muslims the truth, the truth about Christ, and even the truth about Islam. On my radio show which goes out across the U.S., I get hundreds and hundreds of calls from Muslims who want to ask questions about the Bible and the Quran. As a missionary, I do not mince words. I am ready to tell it like it is concerning Islam, but I begin by speaking about the peace and the love which are found only in Jesus Christ. The contrast between the two religious systems could not be greater, and many listeners have already surmised this, even without being told.

So THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY is to speak the truth in love, I would say. If we do not come forward to speak the truth, to tell them the truth about God's love and the free salvation which is in Christ, then we are missing our cue. We are blowing it. This is the time that millions and millions of Muslims will be most open to hearing the message of peace and the message of the Prince of Peace. So we simply have to tell them. In March, 2015, a man who heard my radio show came to me, already convinced by the example of ISIS, that things were not right in the religion. So, it was my GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY to show him the peace, love, and salvation which are found only in Jesus Christ. As a result, today, he is one of our new brothers in Christ.

The Muslim world has experienced the results of discovering these truths about Islam. Assessing its long history of violence, forced conversion, and discrimination of minorities, many who once called themselves Muslim have renounced Islam as a viable faith for these many reasons. A major example took place over thirty years ago. It was in the country of Iran. It was "In the name of God" that millions of peace-loving and freedom-loving citizens experienced sheer terror. In their own country, trying to live peacefully as Muslims, they were hounded, harassed, interrogated, beaten, jailed, and had to flee the country. Why? Because people came in the name of Islam and told them that they were not good Muslims, not fundamental enough, not strict enough.

These people got “burned out” on Islam. As a result, millions and millions of Iranians, over the years, went over to Christianity, converting primarily in the west. And now, it is likely that the majority of Iranians living in Iran do not think too highly of the religion of Islam. Secretly, in their hearts, they do not think of themselves as Muslim and do not want to practice Islam. That is why the underground Christian church in Iran is growing so rapidly at present that nobody can really keep up with it. It has become a movement of conversion to Christian faith.

We do not want to ignore history. Going back to the time of Muhammad and then, the Caliphs (leaders representing Islam) who followed him, we can see the whole long history of conversion by force. ISIS is a movement. And the movement is an attempt to go back to the 5th Century A.D.: the conquering of Egypt and the slaughter of Christians and Jews, the conquering of the rest of North Africa, the Middle East, North India and the subcontinent, (present day Pakistan and Bangladesh), was just that. People were told by those who held swords to convert or else. As a result, today there are a half billion Muslims in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh alone. Then there was the slaughter of Armenian Christians by the Turks. Two million people lost their lives. That was a religious movement, not a clash of cultures. And now, in our day, this same movement to conquer the world for Islam has become apparent.

So there are two things to say in summary. It will be difficult to stop this kind of movement. We hear of twenty to thirty European women a day going to the Middle East where they will marry Muslim men and procreate lots of children so that the number of Muslims will continue to grow in the world. The major world powers will not allow ISIS to take over vital interests, including the world’s oil supply. However, ISIS will likely continue to create instability throughout the region, and it will require the same vigilance on the part of the west to control it.

However, at the same time, we hear of so many young people in northern Iraq who are coming to Christian faith. They are from the Kurdish minority, and they are leaving Islam in droves. The reason? It is the violence. They have seen the true face of the religion. When the devil can be seen this clearly, people know where not to go.

--“John”

KEY RESOURCES

- Answering Islam.org.* www.answeringislam.org.
- Anyabwile, Thabiti. *The Gospel for Muslims*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.
- Atkins, Wade. *Sharing Your Faith with Muslims*. Garland: Hannibal Books, 2011.
- Bary, Rifqa. *Hiding in the Light: Why I Risked Everything to Leave Islam and Follow Jesus*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2015.
- Garrison, David. *A Wind in the House of Islam: How God is Drawing Muslims around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ*. Monument: Wigtake Resources, 2014.
- Housney, Georges. *Engaging Islam*. Boulder: Treeline Publishing, 2010.
- Jacoby, Douglas. *Jesus and Islam*. Spring: Illumination Publishers, 2009.
- Loewen, Joy. *Woman to Woman: Sharing Jesus with a Muslim Friend*. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2010.
- Masri, Fouad. *Ambassadors to Muslims*. Colorado Springs: Book Villages, 2011.
- POBLO International. *Evangelical Christian organization that trains and educates churches on how to engage in cross-cultural outreach to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs (training)*. www.poblo.org
- Oureshi, Nabeel. *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Rhodes, Ron. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2002.

Your Opportunity

You have some choices. You can complain about all the Middle Eastern immigrants coming to North America, or you can see it as a mission opportunity. You can be a missionary without traveling overseas. You have a second choice: you can avoid Muslims or you can engage them in conversation. If you do, you have the opportunity to share your faith, as a Christian. You have a third choice: you can

allow yourself to be afraid of people who are very different, or you can ask God to overcome your fears, and give you “the peace that passes all understanding”. You can calmly get to know these new Americans. These are your choices.

How can you start? Begin by being friendly. New immigrants to any country are more timid and afraid than you are. Most new immigrants, including those with a Muslim background, are very interested to engage others in conversation. Be cautious, however. The Muslim culture is one where women do not converse with men in public unless their husbands are present and approve. Be sensitive to that cultural gender issue.

If you want to start a conversation, ask the person if they grew up in your area. (This is better than assuming they are “foreigners,” only to discover they are a second generation person who grew up in your area). If they say they are relatively new to this country, ask where they came from.

If a person says they have come from a country that is primarily Muslim, ask if they grew up in a Muslim home. If they did, say that you grew up in a Christian home (if you did, or if you didn’t, tell them how you became a Christian).

Ask them if they are practicing their faith in this country. Practicing Islam includes reading the Quran, praying five times a day, and attending the mosque. Chances are very good that you are conversing with a nominal Muslim (“in name only”). Many Muslims, without the pressure of their parents, (who are still in the “old country”), are not practicing the faith.

Share the benefits you experience, growing up in a Christian home and, now, being a Christian. Underscore God’s love, forgiveness, peace, joy. Be honest about your challenges and speak about how your faith in God helps you cope. Talk about other Christians and how they encourage you. Don’t talk much about your church, unless they ask. Keep the conversation focused on your personal life and your growing relationship with Jesus.

One of the key elements of Middle Eastern culture (and the culture of many of the predominantly Muslim countries), is hospitality. One of the most powerful ways to develop a relationship is by inviting a Muslim neighbor and his family to a meal at your house. If you do this, make sure that, if you have a dog, it is outdoors and out of sight. (A dog is an unclean animal for those from the Muslim culture).

If there are many Muslims coming into your community, contact POBLO (www.poblo.org). Ask them to come to your church and show you how to develop a Friendship Center. Pray for and financially support POBLO. With all the hype about ISIS, it is possible to focus on the *problem*, and become discouraged. Contact POBLO, and let them help you see the *opportunity* you have to be part of the *solution*.

To schedule a phone appointment to discuss this topic further with Kent, call Terry Atz at 1-800-626-8515.



Church Doctor® Ministries
1230 U.S. Highway Six Corunna, IN 46730 USA (800) 626-8515
www.churchdoctor.org info@churchdoctor.org www.twitter.com/churchdoctor