



Facing the Challenge: What **Muslims** believe

A training session for home groups and cell groups

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Introduction to the Leaders' Guide

Welcome to this training session on 'What Muslims Believe.' This is designed to be used with the 'Facing the Challenge of Other Faiths' course.

This training session is intended for people who live near Muslim communities or who encounter Muslims socially or at work, and who want to learn more about their beliefs and way of life.

We recommend using this training session on 'What Muslims believe' **in place of** one of the sessions from the 'Facing the Challenge of Other Faiths' course – for example, in place of the last session.

This session has a slightly different format from the other sessions, because it contains more information specifically about Muslim beliefs and practices. It will probably take about two hours to complete. Alternatively, you could split it into two fifty-minute sessions.

This is the leader's guide. It's designed to help you lead your group through the session. If there's more than one leader, each leader needs a copy of this guide. However, don't give it to members of the group! Do give each member a copy of the question sheet for group members that goes with the session.

Give out this sheet in advance of the session, if you can. This will help members of the group to get the most out of the study, by giving them a chance to think about the questions and to look up the Bible references before the session. If you do this, you may want to give group members an opportunity at the beginning of the session to mention any particular questions or difficulties they've had. Don't necessarily respond to these straight away, but do make sure that you cover them in the course of the session.

What does the session include?

Purpose

A brief explanation of the purpose of the session – what we hope group members will learn through this session. The purpose of this session is to understand what Muslims believe, how it affects their way of life, and how we can engage them most positively with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Getting started

The session begins with some questions to get people thinking and talking about the key issues.

The Bible

This section includes some Bible passages to look up, and some questions to help group members think about them. For more information on the passages referred to, we recommend www.bible.org. Use the '[List articles... by passage](#)' link to help you find the appropriate resources.

Real life

This part of the session looks particularly at what Islam teaches, and at what is involved in living as a Muslim.

To do

This section encourages the group to spend some time praying for Muslims they know.

Going deeper

This includes information about some additional resources – web sites, books, and training courses – for people who want to find out more about what Muslims believe.

You may copy or print the question sheet that goes with the session, to give out to members of the group.

We would like to hear how you get with using this material, and how it could be improved for future users.

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What Muslims believe

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand what Muslims believe, how it affects their way of life, and how we can engage them most positively with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Getting started

1. If a Muslim came to a service in your church, what differences do you think he or she would observe from his or her own experience of worship?
2. Have you ever met a Muslim and been able to speak with them about God and your faith? What were their main concerns about the Christian faith?
3. Have you ever visited a mosque? How was it different from the place of worship that you attend?

The Bible

4. Read Jonah chapter 4:1-11. What did Jonah learn about God's attitude to the people of Nineveh (central Iraq)? How did this compare with his own concerns?

5. Read Acts 10:1-48. What was the main lesson God had for Peter concerning his sense of racial superiority?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. What practical lessons is there here that would help us reach Muslims for Christ?

Real life – what does Islam teach?

There are 1.3 *billion* Muslims in the world – almost a quarter of humanity. Five times a day, all round the world, millions of Muslims stop what they are doing, turn their faces to Mecca and prostrate themselves in prayer. They believe that there is one God:

- He is merciful, eternal, and all-powerful.
- He is the Lord of everything in existence, including the whole of humanity.
- He brought the whole Universe into being in an act of divine creation.
- He will end it when He wills.
- A Day of Judgement will follow the end of the Universe when all humanity will be resurrected. Individuals will be called to account, and sent either to Paradise or Hell for all eternity
- Muhammad (who lived from AD 570-632) was His prophet - the Last Prophet.

- The words of the Qur'an were dictated to Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel. They embody all the guidance that is needed for both society and its individual members to live by.

How Muslims see Christianity

Muslims respect devout Christians as 'people of the book.' However, there are huge differences between their faith and ours, especially in regard to our understanding of the divinity of Christ. They believe that:

1. The Qur'an is the only true source of information about Jesus or Christianity. Any Muslim accounts of the life of Jesus are based on information found in the Qur'an.
2. Jesus does not introduce anything that is original to himself. It was either found previously in the prophets, or confirmed by Mohammed.
3. Jesus is a prophet whose role is to announce the coming of Muhammad. As God has promised deliverance to the believers, He is concerned to see that his Messenger triumphs. So their 'Jesus' escapes crucifixion.

Jesus is mentioned ninety three times in the Qu'ran. It says that:

- He is a prophet (3:84-85, 4:163)
- He was born of a virgin (3:45-49)
- He performed many miracles (5:110)
- It is blasphemy to elevate him to the place of God (5:17, 6:101-102)
- Jesus is not divine, but he is unique (4:171-172)
- Jesus was not crucified (4:157-159)

Muslims believe that Christianity is a corrupted religion. Since Jesus did not write down the revelation he received, they believe that it was changed by his followers, and by scholars through the ages since.

What Do Muslims Believe?

Anyone can become a Muslim by reciting (in the presence of two witnesses) the creed: there is only one God whose name is Allah and Mohammed is His prophet.

However, to remain a Muslim, someone must accept certain duties. These are called *'ibada,*' which means 'worship' or 'service.' This is used to speak of our relationship with God as servants, obeying him as master and lord. (Of course, this is a very biblical idea, but we would go further and say that God wants us to know him as sons and daughters, and to come to him as our Father.) Muslims would say that their submission to God must be a voluntary submission.

There are five main 'pillars' to the Islamic faith. Although these are obligations, Muslims would say that they accept them freely, and without compulsion. By accepting these obligations, the believer builds his or her entire social and religious world around devotion to Allah. (So there is no separation between Church and state in Islam.)

The First Pillar: The Creed (Shahada)

This includes seven main beliefs.

1. **Allah:** There is one God, who is eternal, creator, omnipotent, infinitely good, harsh on those who oppose him, forgiving to those who ask, and who punishes the wicked. The Qu'ran continually stresses the oneness (Tawhid) of God (Surah

112:1-4). This is not simply unity, but absolute oneness. It does away with the notion of persons participating in the divinity. There are ninety nine names for God, which are used in worship. The believer submits absolutely to the will of God (the word 'Islam' means 'submission').

2. **Angels (Mala'ikah):** Humans consist of 'clay' (*hayula*) and spirit (*jinn*). Jinn existed before the creation of the Earth. Those not given human form are the angels. There is a hierarchy of angels, at the top of which is Gabriel, who brought the revelation to the prophets. Each person has two guardian angels. Satan was the king of the angels, but then he disobeyed Allah. Satan became jealous of Adam and refused to serve mankind as Allah commanded. Satan was banished and Gabriel took his place. Satan decided to destroy mankind by leading it into paganism and eternal hell. Satan attempts to get Muslims to turn away from the Qu'ran. Their only protection is remembrance of Allah and the word of the Qu'ran.

3. **The Holy Books:** Each of the four great messengers brought a book:

- The Torah or Tawrat of Musa (Moses)
- The Psalms or Zabor of Dawood (David)
- The Gospel or Injil of Isa (Jesus)
- The Qu'ran of Muhammad

In effect the first three are dismissed as having been corrupted and of no real value.

4. **Prophethood:** A prophet is someone through whom Allah speaks. The prophets all brought the same message - that there is only one God. Muhammad is the 'Seal of the Prophets' – the final and complete message from Allah to humanity. The prophets are sinless and infallible.
5. **The Day of Judgement:** The end of the world will come with apocalyptic power (Surahs 81 and 82). There will be salvation for those who have repented. Particularly serious and unforgivable is the sin of 'shirk,' or associating any created person or thing with God the creator. Those who have committed 'shirk' are beyond salvation. As a precursor to the Day of Judgment, Jesus will come again and turn all unbelievers into good Muslims.
6. **Life after Death:** Muslims believe in Paradise for the believers - a state of bliss, peace and tranquillity. For unbelievers there will be hell - fire and torture in an existence without Allah. Prominent Muslims who die as martyrs will have special honour. All will be judged on the basis of their actions. The balance needs to be in favour of good.
7. **Predestination:** Muslims believe in the 'the divine decree for good and evil, sweet and bitter.' That is, Allah decides everything. So you must be content whatever circumstance you are in. It is held that human responsibility belongs together with divine sovereignty. Everything comes from God, but people are responsible for what they do.

The Second Pillar: Obligatory Prayer (Salat)

Prayer takes place five times a day and is obligatory for every man and woman. At noon on Fridays men are supposed to pray at the mosque. Prayer is undertaken in a state of ritual purity. They pray on a mat, to ensure that they are on clean ground. Prayer proclaims the greatness of God and your obedience to Him.

The Third Pillar: Social Tax (Zakat)

All Muslims living above subsistence level should in theory pay a tax for the relief of the poor. This is not seen as charity - it is the legal right of the poor to receive this tax. Nowadays this has lapsed in all but very traditional countries or among those keeping the law very strictly. The amount is fixed at 2.5%.

This tax is payable to:

- The poor
- Muslims only
- Those who need to be drawn to Islam with gifts
- Slaves/Debtors
- Those for whom jihad has led to penury
- Travellers cut off from their revenue

The rich man can purify his wealth by paying Zakat.

The Fourth Pillar: Fasting (Sawm) (2: 183 and 187)

Muslims keep the month of Ramadan as a strict fast. They are allowed neither food nor water from sunrise to sunset. In the evening prohibitions cease so that people eat at night and before sunrise.

The Fifth Pillar: Pilgrimage (Hajj)

Every Muslim man is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in his life. The significance is two-fold:

1. It is a penitential act – it secures remission of all former sins.
2. It emphasises the strength and unity of Muslims.

To do

Take a few moments to pray for any Muslims you know. Pray that they may be drawn to think again about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Muslims in closed countries are receiving dreams and visions in which they see the Lord in a new way. Pray that this may happen for the people you know.

Going deeper

Web sites:

- For a basic overview to help orientate yourself go to:
<http://www.portal.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/campaigns/islam/ixislam.xml> and
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/index.shtml>
- For an Islamic perspective on Jesus go to:
http://www.al-sunnah.com/truth_aboutjesus.htm
and read the article, *The Truth about Jesus* by M. Al-Johani.

Further reading:

- Chapman, C, *Cross and Crescent: responding to the challenges of Islam*, (Leicester: IVP, 2007)
- Ruthven, Malise. *Islam: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Belteshazzar & Abednego, *The Mosque & its Role in Society*, (Pilcrow Press, 2006)
- Riddell, P. and P. Cotterell. *Islam in Context*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003)

Training courses:

- Cross and Crescent:
www.faithtofaith.org.uk/islam.htm
- 'Encountering the World of Islam':
www.encounteringislam.org
ISBN: 1-932805-24-9.

What do Muslims believe?

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Going deeper

Web sites:

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- For an Islamic perspective on Jesus go to: http://www.al-sunnah.com/truth_aboutjesus.htm and read the article, *The Truth about Jesus* by M. Al-Johani.

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