

**THE HADITH:  
WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW  
ABOUT THE ISLAMIC TRADITIONS**

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**1 Introduction**

Twenty years ago my wife and I drank tea with a Muslim couple. The topic turned to the number of cups a guest needed to drink to be polite. The answer was an odd number; one, three, or five, but not two or four. I mentioned to my friends that I believed this came from their Islamic traditions, the hadith (ha-DEETH). Earlier that week I had read the tradition dealing with this. Although the wife said, “No, that’s not possible,” the husband corrected her, stating that I was correct. Following that incident I wondered if the hadith might provide answers to other quandaries in understanding my Muslim friends.

I started reaching out to Muslims sharing the hope of Christ more than thirty years ago. Since that time I watched as westerners—including myself—made many errors in relating to Muslims. In my opinion, the majority of these were due to simple misunderstandings. Unfortunately, what we don’t understand we fear. And what we fear we try to avoid. If avoidance is impossible, then conflict becomes inevitable.

So what is the cure? We must travel to a Muslim’s core beliefs.

Although core beliefs may not always match exactly with specific actions, they will always provide the framework for a person’s decisions and ultimate goals. If we are to understand Muslims, we must know what they believe at the center of their being. Is Islam really a religion of peace? Do women have to wear the veil? What do they believe about heaven and hell, terrorism, freedom of speech, or the state of Israel?

The answers to these tough questions are not, as commonly supposed, found primarily in the Qur’an. In fact, many of them are not found in the Qur’an at all. If we rely strictly on the Qur’an for information, we will find verses that support both sides of these many

coins. Coming to firm conclusions is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. Most Christians and other non-Muslims studying Islam have relied almost exclusively on the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, as well as other books written about Islam by non-Muslims. When discussing this uniform reliance on the Qur'an, a close friend commented, "Ed, we've only been playing with half a deck."

Years ago I felt slightly myopic regarding Islam. What do Muslims believe? How do they think and why do they do what they do? Studying the hadith was like putting on a pair of prescription glasses; everything became clear. I want it to become clear for you too.

My source of information was "the other half of the deck", the hadith (the Islamic traditions). These are their major books of religious instruction. I read the complete works of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Ibn-Majah, Nasai, Tirmidhi, and Malik's Muwatta. In addition, I read through two of the most respected books of Shi-ite traditions, Kitab al-Kafi (Part I, Usul al-Kafi, online) and Kitab-e-SulaymIbnQays al-Hilali, for a total of more than 37,000 Arabic traditions. The foundation of this article is that these traditions – the hadith - "complete the deck" and answer most of the difficult questions non-Muslims ask about Islam. They helped answer my own! I hope they do the same for you too.

As I studied, I prayerfully kept my eyes, ears, and heart open for those topics that tend to cause difficulty for non-Muslims. For all hadith presented in this article, the translations from the original Arabic are my own and were checked against existing English translations of respected Islamic translators. For any mistakes in my own translations, I take full responsibility.

By way of clarification, note that the Arabic word "hadith" is officially singular in form. The plural is "ahadith" or "hadiths" if Anglicized. However, much common usage today by both scholars and laymen, both Muslims and Christians, use "hadith" as a collective noun with the number being determined by the context. For this reason, as well as for the sake of readability, that is how it will be used in this article.

In addition to relating to hundreds of Muslims over the years other questions arose from my study of the hadith. Is knowledge of

the hadith limited to educated Muslims? Are men more likely than women to know the hadith? How about geographical differences? That is, since the hadith were written originally in Arabic, are Arabic-speaking Muslims more likely to be familiar with them? In addition, from the valuable informational aspect, a delightful surprise was finding many examples where their prophet evidently borrowed freely from the Bible. As a result, I wanted to see if the hadith could be used as conversation-starters with my Muslim friends, i.e. bridges to real Gospel truth. In order to answer those questions I spent the last five years field-testing what I learned from the hadith with Muslims from at least 30 different Middle Eastern, African, Asian, and Far Eastern Islamic countries and all walks of life. These dear Muslims have been my real teachers.

In the paragraphs to follow I present my boiled-down findings for your benefit.

The purpose of this article is threefold. The first is to introduce you to the Islamic traditions – the hadith. The second is to give you a taste of how the hadith provide answers for the difficult questions non-Muslims ask about Islam. The final goal is to show how I used the hadith in relating spiritual truth to my Muslim friends.

As a final introductory note, in this article there is not time nor space available to give detailed answers to the previously mentioned difficult questions. Those are available in the book, *A Muslim's Mind: what every Christian needs to know about the Islamic traditions*.<sup>1</sup> But concerning those questions I must warn you - not all of the answers will be popular or politically correct, but they are there in the hadith and they are clear.

And now – on to the hadith!

## **2 What are the Hadith?**

Muslims believe the Qur'an is the mechanically dictated, verbatim word of Allah delivered from the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) to the prophet Muhammad over a period of 23 years. It concluded with his death.

Muslims also agree that because the Qur'an is heavenly; it is also mysterious and it does not completely address every minute aspect

of life. It can only be fully understood by Allah himself. Therefore, the most complete way to know, understand, and apply the Qur'an to daily life is to scrutinize every word, gesture, and deed of their prophet. Muslims believe Muhammad was the only man to perfectly live out the Qur'an. If the Qur'an is the skeleton, then Muhammad is the flesh on the skeleton, which puts all of Islam into action.

The introduction to the *Mishkat al-Masabih* states, "In the Qur'an Muhammad was given the actual words of God; in the tradition the words used were his own but they were uttered under divine guidance."<sup>2</sup>

One Muslim told me, "The Qur'an tells us to pray, but it doesn't tell us how. The hadith gives us the details of how to do it."

From the early seventh century A.D., every word and deed of Muhammad was chronicled and memorized by his immediate family and close friends (companions), then told to others (followers) who related them to still others. These stories include everything Muhammad did, from dressing to dining, marrying to mating, and details of birth and death. It encompasses dreams and visions, crime and punishment, as well as buying and selling. It even includes sneezing and passing gas. There is no aspect of Muhammad's personal life left untouched. Muslims believe that Allah, through his prophet, provided for every situation.

Because these stories were related from person to person over many years, each hadith consists of two parts: an *isnad* (iss-NAAD) or chain of transmitters, and a *matn* (MA-tin) or main text. The chain appears something like this: "I heard so-and-so mention that he heard on the authority of so-and-so, who related to him that he heard such-and-such companion say that the prophet said . . ."

For ease of readability I have put all hadith used in this article in bold print. I have also included the first and last names of each chain transmitter in the endnotes. In addition, some of the hadith presented in this article contain the initials "pbuh" following the name of Muhammad. This stands for "prayers and peace be upon him," the typical Islamic words of respect Muslims apply to the name of their prophet. Whenever they occur in the original text I have included them in my English translation.

More than a thousand collections of hadith existed by the beginning of the ninth century A.D. These were filtered down to the *Sihah as-Sittah* (si-HAAH as-SIT-tah) or “the authentic six,” and are the collections of the following six Imams (ee-MAMs), or religious teachers: al-Bukhari (810–870 A.D.), Muslim (819–875 A.D.), at-Tirmidhi (d. 893 A.D.), Abu Dawood (817–888 A.D.), IbnMajah (825–887 A.D.), and Nasai (831–916 A.D.). A seventh collection is also considered next to the authentic six, Imam Malik’s *Muwatta* (712–796 A.D.). Because they are the most respected hadith collections throughout the Sunni Muslim world, these are the ones I chose to survey comprehensively.

Even among these seven works there is a gradation of acceptance. The most respected collection of all is the *Sahih* (sa-HEEH, “for sure”) al-Bukhari. The second most respected is *Sahih Muslim*. The next four are still considered good and authentic but are called *sunan*(SUU-nan), plural for *sunah* or practice. One reason Bukhari’s collection is considered preeminent is because three of the other “authentic six” were his pupils (Muslim, at-Tirmidhi, and IbnMajah). I have never met a Sunni Muslim who did not accept the *Sunnah* (collection of hadith) as authentic and authoritative for practical living.

### **3 The Hadith Shedding Light on Islam**

The premise of this article is that the hadith clarify questions non-Muslims ask about Islam. Even though there is not time nor space for a comprehensive review, I still want to give you a taste. In order to do that I selected a few representative (and hopefully balanced) topics: Muhammad, Islamic Potpourri, Women, Jews & Christians, Jihad, and finally Jesus. Here goes!

#### ***3.1 Muhammad***

Most people know Muhammad as a lawgiver, a statesman, and the founder of a new world religion. It’s not hard to find answers to many of the basic questions about his life: Where and when was he born? How did his ministry begin? When did he die? But, if you’re like me, the easy answers aren’t sufficient. The hadith give surprising insights into his life and fill in the white spaces on the page, the gaps between the facts.

### **3.1.1 His generosity**

According to the hadith, one hallmark of Muhammad's character was his generosity. How did he respond when others came to him with requests?

The messenger of Allah (pbuh) was never asked for anything and he said, "No."<sup>3</sup>

### **3.1.2 His courage**

The following episode shows how Muhammad's courage turned the tide of battle:

The messenger of Allah (pbuh) got down from his mule. Then he grabbed a handful of dust from the ground and threw it in their faces and said, "May their faces become ugly!" And there were none of those whom Allah created but had their eyes filled with the dust from that handful and they fled.<sup>4</sup>

### **3.1.3 His violence**

Muhammad did not shy away from violence.

Then he [Muhammad] killed their men and divided their women, children, and property among the Muslims, except for some of them who joined the messenger of Allah (pbuh). He kept them safe and they became Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.1.4 His care for the poor, widows, and orphans**

He was concerned for widows, and the poor.

The prophet (pbuh) said, "Caring for a widow or a poor person is like a fighter in the path of Allah or standing [in prayer] all night and fasting all day."<sup>6</sup>

### **3.1.5 His position on the Day of Judgment**

He saw himself in an exalted position.

The messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, "I am the Lord of the descendants of Adam on Resurrection Day, and the first who will be taken from the grave, and the first to have the right of intercession, and the first to intercede."<sup>7</sup>

### **3.1.6 Was he truly illiterate?**

Muslims believe the Qur'an is miraculous. One reason for this is that they teach Muhammad was illiterate. The tradition below suggests an alternate view. While negotiating a written treaty, Muhammad was asked to agree to a title for himself other than "messenger of Allah." His companion and scribe flatly refused and urged Muhammad not to agree.

So the messenger of Allah (pbuh) took the document and wrote, "No arms will enter Mecca except in their scabbards and no one of the people [of Mecca] will be allowed to go with him [Muhammad] even if they want to follow him and he will not prevent any of his companions from staying [in Mecca] if they want to remain."<sup>8</sup>

## **3.2 Islamic Potpourri**

### **3.2.1 The Five Pillars of Islam**

Many have wondered where the "Five Pillars of Islam" come from. Now you know – from the hadith.

The messenger of Allah said, "Islam is based on five [pillars]: testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah; to offer prayers; to give charity [Zakat]; the Hajj [pilgrimage]; and fasting during Ramadan."<sup>9</sup>

### **3.2.2 What about "the 99 Names" of Allah?**

With lots of work the "99 names" of Allah can be ferreted out from the Qur'an. Wouldn't it be nice to have a composite list?

The messenger of Allah said, "Truly, Allah has ninety nine names, one hundred less one. Truly He is odd [in number] and loves odd numbers [witr]. He who memorizes them enters paradise; and these are . . . [a complete list of the ninety-nine is given, including merciful, generous, just, and ninety-six others]."<sup>10</sup>

### **3.2.3 How was the Qur'an collated?**

By the time of Muhammad's death, many individuals had memorized the entire Qur'an. The Qur'an also existed in numerous fragments which were written on parchment, flat bones, and animal skins. After a battle in which many of the Qur'an "memorizers" were killed, Uthman, the third Caliph after Muhammad, made it his goal to unify and preserve the Qur'an from loss.

Uthman sent a message to Hafsa, “Send us all the copies [of the Qur’an] so we can transcribe them into one copy. Then we will return it to you.” . . . Uthman ordered Zaid bin Thabit, Abdullah bin az-Zubair, Saeed bin al-As and Abdur-Rahman bin Harith bin Hisham to transcribe them into [perfect] copies. . . . [Uthman] sent to every province a copy of what had been transcribed and ordered all the rest, whether whole copies of the Qur’an or fragments, to be burned.<sup>11</sup>

### **3.2.4 Fighting against other Muslims**

Is it any wonder that Muslims hesitate to join efforts to fight other Muslims?

The messenger of Allah said, “A Muslim is a brother to a Muslim. Do not oppress him nor hand him over [to an oppressor].”<sup>12</sup>

### **3.2.5 Admitting mistakes/confession of sin**

Being able to say, “I’m sorry” or “I was wrong” is almost unheard. This is one reason why.

The messenger of Allah said, “All my followers’ sins will be forgiven except those made public. That is, when a man commits a sin at night and then makes it known during the day, even though Allah has screened him at night.”<sup>13</sup>

### **3.2.6 The Law of Apostasy**

Isn’t the law of apostasy just something fabricated by radicals? Unfortunately, the punishment for leaving Islam is unequivocal.

According to the statement of the messenger of Allah saying, “Whoever changes his religion, kill him.”<sup>14</sup>

## **3.3 Women**

Muslims tend to see people not as separate individuals but as members of a larger group. As a rule, societal rights of the larger group are not voluntarily sacrificed in favor of a single member. Additionally, one of the most important commodities in this culture is honor. Female modesty and morality rank near the top of the list. Keep that in mind as you read the following.

### **3.3.1 Do women have to wear the veil?**

While the Qur’an does not absolutely command the veil, the issue is clearer in the hadith.

“O messenger of Allah (pbuh), righteous as well immoral people come in on you. So command your wives to wear the veil [al-hijab, hi-JAAB].” Then Allah revealed the verses of al-hijab.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.3.2 Why might marital age differences mean less than in the West?**

Even today, having Muslim marriages with this much age gap is rare.

The prophet (pbuh) . . . married Aisha when she was six years old and cohabited with her when she was nine.<sup>16</sup>

Before we label the above hadith as distasteful we must remember that Muslim girls are eligible for marriage as soon as they start having menstrual cycles.

### **3.3.3 Could they have a greater fear of hell?**

This one must be especially discouraging for women.

The prophet said, “I was shown the fire [hell] and behold, most of the occupants were unbelieving women.”<sup>17</sup>

### **3.3.4 The best in character**

The wives he admired were those who were practical, affectionate, and responsible.

I heard the messenger of Allah (pbuh) say, “The Quraishi women are the best women. They ride camels, are affectionate with their children and watch over their husbands’ wealth.”<sup>18</sup>

### **3.3.5 Parts of the body to be covered**

In conservative Muslim families it is common to see nothing but face and hands:

The messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, “When a woman starts menstruating it is not proper for her to expose more of herself than this and this.” He pointed to the face and the hands.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.3.6 Treat them well!**

In this hadith Muhammad encouraged kindness to women.

The messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, “Treat women well. A woman is made from a rib and the highest part is the most curved. If it is straightened it will break. If you leave it alone it will remain curved. So be nice to them!”<sup>20</sup>

### ***3.4 Jews and Christians***

What do Muslims think about Jews and Christians? Another question logically follows: What do they believe about Jesus and the Bible? It only takes a quick glance at the day's headlines to see that there is much tension between Jews & Christians, and Muslims. Many Muslims see Jews and Christians as destabilizers and usurpers who stole the land in the Middle East that rightly belongs to them. Often the U.S. (which they consider a "Christian nation") is seen as the modern exploiters and colonizers of the world, much as England was during the height of the British Empire. Let's see what the hadith has to say.

#### **3.4.1 How far back do problems go?**

In my comprehensive survey of the hadith the overwhelming majority of hadith I found were decidedly negative and similar to the one below.

When the messenger of Allah was dying he said, "May Allah curse the Jews and the Christians . . . for they make places of worship out of the prophets' graves."<sup>21</sup>

#### **3.4.2 Has the Bible been changed?**

Some Christians believe that Islam supports the authenticity of the Christian scriptures. In places, the Qur'an does appear favorable to the Bible. But the hadith makes it clearer. Muhammad categorically stated that Jews and Christians distorted the Bible.

Allah has told you that the people of the book [Jews and Christians] distorted Allah's book and changed it.<sup>22</sup>

#### **3.4.3 OK to tell their stories**

Here is one of the few positive hadith I found.

The prophet said, "Tell the stories of the people of Israel for it is not sinful to do so."<sup>23</sup>

#### **3.4.4 Respect for their souls**

Here is another one of the few I found. It shows respect for Jews.

A funeral bier passed in front of him [Muhammad] and he stood up. He was told it was a Jew. He said, "Wasn't he a soul?"<sup>24</sup>

### ***3.5 Jihad***

#### **3.5.1 Has Islam been “high-jacked?”**

Is it possible that violent radical fundamentalists are interpreting the hadith in a more literal fashion than their peaceful counterparts?

The messenger of Allah said, ‘I have been commanded to fight people until they say, “There is no god but Allah.”’<sup>25</sup>

#### **3.5.2 The tangible benefits**

This promise here is an immediate ticket to paradise.

The messenger of Allah said, “To the one who fights in Allah’s path and who goes out for the sake of jihad and belief in His words, Allah promised to admit him to paradise or return him to his home with the booty he has earned.”<sup>26</sup>

#### **3.5.3 Non-violent Hadith – Performing the Hajj**

Out of the many thousands of hadith I read I found only four that could be considered non-violent. Three of them dealt with performing the hajj for women, the weak, and the elderly. This one concerns women.

‘I (Aisha) said, “O messenger of Allah (pbuh), shouldn’t we fight and go on jihad with you?” He said, “the best and most beautiful jihad is the hajj, the righteous hajj.”’...<sup>27</sup>

#### **3.5.4 Non-violent – Speaking truth to an oppressive ruler**

Here is the fourth one and deals with courage.

A man asked the prophet (pbuh) as he put his foot into the stirrup, ‘Which jihad is the best? He said, “A word of truth before a tyrannical ruler.”’...<sup>28</sup>

In these final examples let’s prime the pump for redemptive analogies as we segue way into the last section - using the hadith to build bridges for the gospel.

### ***3.6 Jesus***

#### **3.6.1 His uniqueness**

I love this one. It can generate great discussions with my Muslim friends.

The prophet (pbuh) said, “At birth, every son of Adam [human] is touched by Satan’s two fingers except Jesus, the son of Mary. Satan tried to touch him but failed. He touched the placenta instead.”<sup>29</sup>

### **3.6.2 The bridge to heaven**

This hadith played a part in my Iranian friend coming to Christ. His grandmother told him only a lamb could lead people across the bridge. I’ve heard this same story more than once.

The messenger of Allah said, “When the believers safely pass over hell they will be blocked by a bridge separating paradise and hell . . . and when they are cleansed and purified from their sins they will enter paradise.”<sup>30</sup>

### **3.6.3 Assurance of salvation in Islam**

The prophet said, “There is no one who will be admitted to paradise based only on his deeds.” A man said, “Not even you O messenger of Allah?” He said, “Not even me, except that He [Allah] wraps me in mercy.”<sup>31</sup>

### **3.6.4 Jesus – His return**

Like us, Muslims believe Jesus will come back at the end of the age. But the manner of his return will surprise most Christians.

The messenger of Allah said, “By Him in whose hand is my soul; the son of Mary is at the point of descending among you. He will judge justly. He will break the cross and kill the pigs, establish jizya [JIZ-yah, a tax on non-Muslims] and wealth will pour forth until no one will accept it.”<sup>32</sup>

## **4 Using the Hadith to Build Bridges for the Gospel**

One of the best ways to build rapport with someone is to share a common interest. Asking about something important to a person works, whether the individual is a Chicago Cubs fan or likes to ride motorcycles. If it’s important to a friend and I ask about it, I’m building rapport.

This is also true with Muslims. Over the past five years, by asking a few simple questions, I field-tested several hundred hadith with Muslims from at least 30 different nations. With one exception, every Muslim I talked to smiled and wanted to talk about the hadith. Even more important, in nearly every case they felt free

enough to open their hearts and allow deeper discussion. Using the Islamic traditions built instant rapport. Why? Because the hadith are near and dear to the heart of every Muslim I have ever met. In fact, the word hadith is best translated as “narration” or “story” and is related to the Arabic word for conversation – muhaadatha. Everyone likes stories, especially those with which they are already familiar.

The prophet (pbuh) said, “None of you has faith till he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”<sup>33</sup>

The first time I read this hadith I was struck by how close it was to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:12—“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” I thought, “I wonder if this could be used as a point of spiritual contact with Muslim friends?”

The answer is yes! I have seen this over and over again. When these hadith are understood and appreciated, they can lead to natural bridges to conversations about the Gospel.

When I speak with a Muslim friend about the hadith, I like to take along a small notebook with a few of the Islamic traditions I have collected. I have one or two hadith printed on each page with an accompanying Bible passage where I have found a similarity. Each sheet is in a plastic page protector. I pull one out when I sit with my friend and let him read the tradition and accompanying Bible verse. After this I ask a few questions. One or two usually suffice. Here are a few questions I have found useful:

- Have you heard of this tradition before or something like it?
- How does this hadith practically influence your life as a Muslim?
- What does this hadith tell you about the character of God?
- What does it say about the condition of man?
- Does it suggest a possible way to bridge the gap between the two?
- Do you recall a personal story where you saw this hadith illustrated, either as a child or as an adult?

When I’m done I always ask if they have any questions they want to ask me. These questions often produce the most fruitful discussions.

A Bangladeshi Muslim friend sat at the next table in a coffee shop. He noticed my notebook of hadith. He came over and asked if he could look at them. As he turned the pages, he commented, “I’ve heard that one before.” Flip. “Yes, I’ve heard of that one, too!”

Smiling, he continued turning pages. Two other Muslims walked by. He called out to them, “Look, Dr. Ed is studying the hadith!” and asked them to join us. He saw one tradition about God’s judgment and said, ‘ Dr. Ed, I think Easter should be a more significant holiday to Christians than Christmas. You know, with the resurrection of Jesus and all. I read this book about Lazarus. I was so impressed with this one sentence (John 11:25)—“I am the resurrection and the life”—that I memorized the whole thing.’ He quoted the whole verse and ended with “and will never die.”

“Dr. Ed, when I first read that sentence it felt so powerful and awesome!” Then he realized where he was and who was with us. He added in a subdued tone, “But . . . in Islam we have the same thing too.”

Below I share three more instances where I used hadith and a similar Bible verse as segue ways to Biblical truth.

I discussed the following hadith paired with an accompanying Bible passage with a South Asian Muslim:

The messenger of Allah said, “The one Allah wants to do good for He afflicts him.”<sup>34</sup>

Job 5:18—“For He wounds, but He also binds up; He injures, but His hands also heal.”

Yes, he had heard this hadith before. He then told a story about his uncle who was an engineer. His uncle was fired from his job in Pakistan and then went to Canada to work. His uncle said that being fired “was a turning point in his life. It made him to work harder. It made him stronger and more compassionate.”

My friend then turned to me, “Dr. Ed, I have a question for you. If Allah made me a Muslim and you a Christian, which religion is correct?”

The hadith had served as a bridge to share Gospel truth. I shared an illustration with him about God’s kingdom and ended with,

“Jesus the Messiah told us specific ways for how to enter God’s Kingdom. Next time I’d be happy to share some of those with you.”

I visited an African friend and asked if he had heard the following hadith:

I heard the messenger of Allah (pbuh) say, “Allah made mercy into one-hundred parts and He kept ninety-nine parts and sent down on the earth one part, and because of its one part creatures are merciful so that even the mare lifts up its hoofs from its foal so as not to trample it.”<sup>35</sup>

He also read two verses from the Bible, found in Lamentations 3:22–23—“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”

Yes, my friend was familiar with this hadith. He then explained the importance of showing mercy on Judgment Day: ‘Allah will say, “I was hungry and you did not feed me. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was sick and you didn’t take care of me.”’ He shared all this without prompting.

This opened a door to share Jesus’ words from the New Testament. He asked to see it and together we read Matthew 25:31–40 – the parable of separating the sheep from the goats on Judgment Day. My friend laughed with pleasure at the words of Jesus.

The messenger of Allah said, “Truly Allah does not look at your appearance or your wealth, but He looks at your hearts and your deeds.”<sup>36</sup>

Compare that with 1 Samuel 16:7—“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

A friend from Yemen and I discussed this tradition and the Bible verse. He said, “One time I was driving in a storm with other cars. I stopped because the road was blocked by flooding. There was lots of thunder and everyone was afraid, except for one man who looked to be a beggar approaching. This man was very calm and not afraid. He tried to calm us down and give advice. I realized we had been looking at his outward appearance.”

Suddenly, my friend looked as if someone had flipped on his power supply. With tears in his eyes, he began quoting hadith after

hadith—I kept track; nearly 20 in all—and two verses from the Qur’an. This opened a natural opportunity for me to share more Scripture and my personal faith story.

To Muslims, the hadith are familiar stories that play explanatory and practical roles in their daily lives. Making use of these, we have a bridge that makes spiritual conversations relevant and accessible.

## 5 Conclusions

Our brief journey through the hadith has come to an end. But though you’re nearly finished with this article, the real journey has just begun. It begins in earnest when we sit down with Muslim friends and have heart-level conversations based on our newfound understanding of their culture and beliefs. I end with five broad conclusions plus two cautions:

1. The hadith fill in the gaps of understanding left blank by the Qur’an. As Christians, we can abandon the idea that the Qur’an will give us most of the answers we want about Islam and Muslims. As valuable as the Qur’an is to help us understand, it leaves many wide gaps. We get a more complete picture of a Muslim’s heart and mind by becoming as familiar with the hadith as we are with the Qur’an.
2. In my field-testing research I found essentially no gender, geographical or language ability differences. Men or women, Arabic speakers or not, whether from Asia, Africa or the Middle East, well over 90% of all Muslims field-tested were familiar with my randomly-selected hadith.
3. Knowledge of the hadith can give greater understanding and compassion for our Muslim friends and acquaintances. My own were challenged and increased. May it be the same for you.
4. Using the hadith builds near-instant rapport and facilitates deeper sharing. People talk easily about things most near and dear to their hearts and the hadith are precious to every Muslim I have ever met. Each time I mention one to a Muslim, I get a smile. That’s rapport. And rapport opens the door to greater sharing.

5. Bridges for communicating Biblical truth abound in the hadith.
6. During my study of the hadith, I found many with significant similarities to our own Bible. The hadith are jam-packed with topics like the “golden rule,” “control your temper,” “God looks at the heart,” “blessed are the merciful,” “feed the hungry,” and many, many more. As of now, I have 38 single-spaced typewritten pages of these. Not even a left-brained introvert like me could miss the significance and spiritual potential of these nuggets.

Finally I share two cautions. First, with further study you will discover that many hadith portray Islam and their prophet in less than positive terms. Frankly, many are embarrassing. Out of respect for my Muslim friends I have chosen not to include any of those in this article. When you come across these, please, please do not use them as weapons to bludgeon Muslims. They are definitely valuable for increased personal information, but I have found them hurtful to my friends’ feelings and overall non-productive.

Second, in our desire to seek commonality and relate with our Muslim friends we can wind up giving away what is most precious to us – the centrality of the person and work of Christ.

Twenty-five years ago, I was on duty as an ER physician when paramedics brought in a gunshot wound victim. A bullet had pierced a woman’s heart, but she was still alive. A leak in the heart wall was partially sealed by clotted blood, allowing the heart to keep beating. I knew that at most, she had a few minutes to live. I also knew if her blood pressure could be maintained, there might be time for the surgeon to arrive, get her to the operating room, open her chest, plug the leak, and keep her from dying. I realized that only one thing could keep her alive for those precious few needed minutes: giving her lots of oxygen-carrying whole blood in a hurry. My patient was still conscious and able to speak as I was preparing her intravenous access. She said slowly but clearly, “Doctor, you can give me any type of fluid or medicine you want except for blood.” I explained, “Ma’am, you only have a few minutes to live.

The only thing that might keep you alive long enough for the surgeon to arrive is blood.” She refused, and we couldn’t save her.

Every person who has ever lived is dying from a diseased heart. The disease is sin, and that separates us from God. It is a vicious disease that causes terrible bleeding. There is only one treatment—the life-giving blood of Jesus. It would be wonderful if other treatments were sufficient—things like greater compassion, cultural understanding, or a guaranteed land-for-peace proposal in the Middle East. But that would be false. We need Jesus. Whether we are born Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Jew, our disease demands the oxygen-rich whole blood of new life in Christ. Nothing else will do.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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