

RELATING TO OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

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1. Reaching out beyond our own community

Read Matthew 5:43-48

The Pharisees had taken the OT commandment "love your neighbour" and twisted it to mean that we should love only the people of our own community, and that we should hate our enemies. Jesus teaches here that love is not to be limited to our own community.

Q. If we are really honest with ourselves, what feelings do we have to our Muslim neighbours? - fear, suspicion? Do we despise them or respect them? Are we friendly toward them or cool?

What are the main reasons why we find it hard to relate to our Muslim neighbours? Is it prejudice in us or in them? Is it the political situation in the country? Is it something in our society?

2. 'The Golden Rule

Read Matthew 7:12

Q. How would you like your Muslim neighbours to treat you as an individual, and your community?

How should this affect the way you treat them?

Does it make any difference if the Muslim community is the majority and the Christians a minority in your country~ or the Christians are a majority and the Muslims a minority?

3. Showing Love in Action

Read Luke 10:25-37

When Jesus was asked by a lawyer "who is my neighbour?" he answered by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was therefore saying that my neighbour is anyone I meet, anyone I come in contact with, especially if that person is in any kind of need.

Q. What does this say to me about who are my neighbours?

What does this say about what it means to love my neighbours in practice? Am I prepared to love my neighbours like this?

What does the parable say about our prejudices? Jesus deliberately chose as an example people from two communities who had strong feelings against each other.

4. Praying for our Muslim Neighbours

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6

Notice the special relevance of this passage to prayer for the Muslim world: the Muslim heartily agrees that "there is one God" - but the Gospel goes on to say "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus".

Q. What is the connection between praying for rulers and for peace (v. 2) and God's desire that everyone should be saved and come to know the truth (v. 4)?

Read Romans 10:1-2

Q. If this is how Paul prayed for his fellow-countrymen, can we pray in the same way for our neighbours - and particularly for our Muslim neighbours?

- How well does Paul's description of the Jews' devotion to God apply to the devotion of Muslims that you know?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Find out as much as you can about the Muslim Community in your city and country, e.g., How many Muslims are there in your city, and in your country?

What countries do they come from?

What kind of work do they do?

Where do they live?

Where do they worship and meet?

FOR ACTION

How can you develop the natural contacts you already have with your Muslim neighbours, friends or colleagues at work etc.?

Is there any way in which you can go one stage further in your friendship with any Muslims you know?

Are there any ways in which you can work more closely with Muslims - e.g. in some form of community service?

Is there any other person or family whom you don't know and to whom you could reach out in friendship? (see Matt.5:46-47).

Greetings (see Matt 5:47):

What is the commonest form of greeting used by Muslims in your community?

If you are a Christian living in a Muslim community (e.g. in the Middle East or Pakistan), is there any reason why you should not use those greetings - at least with Muslims?

e.g. the Arabic greeting:

issalamu alekum (peace be upon you) and the reply

wa 'alekum issalam (and on you be peace).

- Pray together for Muslims you know and for the Muslim community in your city and country.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES AND OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

A. UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

It is often our prejudices which create the biggest barrier in our relationships with Muslims. We need to try to identify these prejudices and know how to deal with them.

They often have much in common with the prejudices the Jews had towards the Samaritans: they disliked the Samaritans

- a. because of their mixed ancestry
- b. because of their rival temple on Mt. Gerizim
- c. because they recognized the OT law but not the Prophets, and
- d. because there had been considerable political tension between the two communities over many centuries.

Read John 4:9. Is it true to say in our situation “Christians have no dealings with Muslims”?

Read Acts 9: 10-19

Q. What were the questions and doubts which must have been raised in Ananias' mind when he heard that Saul had been converted?

Are they similar to the questions and doubts in our minds when we hear of a non-Christian who is converted?

Read Acts 9:26 - 28

Q. Why were the Christians in Jerusalem so suspicious about Saul after his conversion?

- Does this help us to understand our suspicions about converted Muslims?
- What was the special ministry of Barnabas in this situation?
- What would it mean for us to repent of our prejudices and our lack of love towards converts?
- How can we assure them and make them feel that they are totally accepted in the community of believers?

Read Galatians 1:21 - 24

Q. Do we really believe that Muslims can change their minds about Jesus and come to faith in him?

- If someone as prejudiced and hostile as Saul was could be converted, is it any harder to believe that a Muslim can be converted?

Read Acts 4:23 - 30

Q. How serious were the threats against the apostles (verse 29)? To what extent do we face the same threats today? Is there anything in common between our situation and the situation the Apostles were in?

- What did they ask God to do for them? How did God answer their prayer?
- Are we prepared to ask God to give us this boldness?
- Should we be asking God to reveal himself today in miraculous ways?

B. UNDERSTANDING OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

Read Luke 2:45-46

Notice five details in Luke's description of Jesus at the age of 12 in the Temple:

- He was sitting among the teachers
- He was listening to them
- He was asking questions
- He had understanding (RSV)
- He was giving answers

Q. Can this picture help us to see what we must do if we want to understand Muslims'?

a. sitting among them:

- how much do we understand about the society to which they belong? about their history and culture?
- do we know what it feels like to be in their shoes?
- am I aware of how he reacts to me as a person (because of my colour and nationality; because of the language I speak; because of all the cultural and political factors which affect our relationship)?

b. listening:

- am I really willing to listen before I say what I believe'?

c. asking questions:

- what kind of questions should we ask to help us to understand?

d. understanding:

- what is the difference between knowing about Islam and understanding Islam? between knowing about facts and discernment? between information and insight?
- how do we obtain this kind of insight?

e. answers:

- are my answers answering the questions in his mind - questions I think he ought to be asking?

Read Exodus 22:1; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34

Do these verses have anything to teach Christians in the West about their attitudes and responsibilities to Muslim communities in their midst?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read Acts 10:1 - 48

- Q. - What were the prejudices in Peter's mind which made it difficult for him to meet those Gentiles?
- Do we have any similar prejudices which make it hard for us to have close friendships with Muslims, or to believe that Muslims can come to faith in Christ?
 - How did the Holy Spirit deal with Peter's prejudices? How can he deal with our prejudices?

Read Acts 1:8

- Q. - Why did Jesus mention Samaria by name in this context? (cf Matthew 10:5 - 6)

Read Acts 8:4 - 17

- Q. - What was the reason for this special apostolic delegation sent from Jerusalem (verse 14)?
- What was special and unique about the way in which the Holy Spirit came upon these believers? (verses 15 - 17)
 - Is there any connection between the special circumstances of this visit and the special way in which the Spirit was given on this occasion?

FOR ACTION

What can you personally do to help you to listen to what Muslims in your community are saying today?

- e.g. by reading magazines, books, tracts
- by listening to Muslim radio programmes, or watching TV programmes.