



# BRIDGE BUILDING

Journeying Toward Christ with Muslim Friends

**Samuel Fawzi Khair**

Translated and edited for English-language readers by **Nabeel Jabbour**

I could not put Samuel Fawzi Khair's book down! The life journey of an Arab Christian coming to love Jesus and then his Muslim neighbors is inspiring, challenging, and instructive. This is not theory! It is the example of a man who trusts God and has the boldness to meet Muslims with the authority, humility, courage, wisdom, and love of a true disciple of Jesus.

—**ROLAND DENNER**, International Director, ReachAcross

*Bridge Building* functions as a practical guide to sharing the gospel with Muslims and challenges the unhelpful assumption that Muslim-Christian relations are always contentious. I encourage you to read the book and allow the Holy Spirit to transform you into someone who sees Muslims not as enemies to be defeated or religious adversaries to be converted, but rather, people whom Christ loves and desires to know him personally.

—**TREVOR CASTOR**, PhD, Managing Director and Professor, Zwemer Center for Muslim Studies at Columbia International University

This book is a must read for anyone serious about reaching Muslims. My dear friend Samuel masterfully penned his journey of faith with Muslims in everyday life and addressed the major questions Muslims ask. He also shared his deep love for them, absolutely void of any prejudice or judgment, while upholding the purity and clarity of the gospel.

—**KAMEL SHALHOUB**, The Navigators Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa

Once I began reading Samuel's book, I could not put it down. Reaching other cultures with the gospel has always been a difficult proposition. It becomes particularly uncomfortable when that culture has clashed with Christianity, as Islam has at times. Samuel shows us the way. Whatever people group God has put before you, *Bridge Building* reminds us of the value and necessity of living among and loving our neighbor, rather than expecting them to come to us on our own terms.

—**REV. JOHN CANALES**, Senior Minister, Christ Presbyterian Church (Flower Mound, Texas), Orthodox Presbyterian Church and MTW with the PCA

This book exudes authenticity on every page. It has that ring of truth as shaped in the crucible of experience and deep engagement with the Scriptures—simple, practical, and with a touch of reality that will surprise, challenge, and inspire you.

—**BULUS BOSSAN**, International VP of The Navigators

In the first part of Romans 9 and 10, the Apostle Paul describes his longing for the salvation of his own people. My brother and friend Samuel has that same passion for the people of the Arab world. He has lived out that passion at great cost and writes out of his life experience.

—**MIKE TRENEER**, International President Emeritus, The Navigators

We all love stories, and this book is full of true stories. If you want to find out how God brought one man into deep, lasting, fruitful relationships with his fellow Egyptian Muslims, you will learn so much here. Samuel shows how Jesus really has “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14).

—**JAMES FOX**, British film actor

I am grateful for this English translation by Dr. Nabeel Jabbour of *Bridge Building* by Samuel Fawzi Kahir. It’s full of stories of loving Muslims using God’s Word and is a great model for others. I pray that God will use the book in a wonderful way. I enjoyed reading it.

—**JIM GREEN**, CRU, Executive Director Emeritus, The Jesus Film Project

For the longest time, I thought that sharing the gospel with Muslims was the ultimate Mission Impossible. *Bridge Building* demystified my thinking with passion and clarity so I can see Muslims with Jesus eyes and love them with Jesus heart.

—**CAMILLE COSTA**, Retired Professional Engineer

Samuel is an Egyptian. That might suggest to you that it is easier for him to share the gospel with Muslims than it is for you. But the Egypt that Samuel was raised in often oppressed Christians. Samuel learned to love Muslims because he discovered that God loves them. He noticed that many of them were attracted to Jesus and the gospel. We can learn a lot from this man if we humble ourselves and allow his experience to impact us.

—**MIKE KUHN**, Seminary Professor and Author of *Fresh Vision of the Muslim World* and *Finding Hagar*

Samuel Fawzi Khair's book *Bridge Building* is an inspiring account of a man's journey of faithfully following Jesus and graciously leading others along the same path. Every chapter is another riveting story of Samuel's Spirit-led experience of building strong relational bridges with Muslim friends, loving them well and pointing them to the Kingdom of God. It is practical, engaging and genuine. I highly recommended it without reservation.

– **John Dallmann**, PE, CEO/President of eMi Global, Designing a world of hope.

What a pleasure to read of Samuel's love for Christ and for Muslims in his vibrant autobiography. He has the gift and heart of an evangelist; always studying his experiences to discern insights. His conversational creativity is refreshing. Although I am a critic of the insider movement approach, I value this book. Samuel's approach is suited to his context. Samuel learned the art of discipling Muslims into the invisible 'Kingdom of God' under the Head of Christ, rather than discipling them into the visible 'Body of Christ'. That will be the future task of others.

– **Rev. Benjamin Lee Hegeman**, PhD, **SIM** Missionary scholar in residence, Professor at Wesley Biblical Seminary and Houghton College.

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Translated and edited for English-language readers by Nabeel Jabbour

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## **Dedication**

To my brother and friend Dr. Nabeel Jabbour, the one whom God sent my way to disciple and mentor me. He and his wife Barbara became a model for us to follow, as they were to the many Egyptians they disciplined over the years. Nabeel and his family lived in Egypt for 15 years serving Christ, the church, and the Egyptian people.

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## Foreword

My friend Samuel Fawzi Khair brings to life important lessons through firsthand experiences on how to truly love and reach out to Muslims. You will be telling all of your friends about this book! At times I had to hold back tears during my translation of this book.

Samuel shares his life story and his spiritual journey, from spiritual birth to different stages of spiritual maturing. He writes about his encounters with different Muslim people who crossed his path during the different stages of his life's journey. He provides lessons he learned and mistakes he may have made as he began developing relationships and sharing the gospel message with Muslim friends and co-workers.

One of the things that makes this book unique is that it has been endorsed by Muslim scholars. As Samuel built strong relationships with Muslims and treated them with respect, as people created in the image of God, they returned the favor and related to him and his family not only as friends but at times like family.

I first met Samuel briefly in 1974 when I traveled from Lebanon to Egypt on a mission trip. A year later we started our friendship after my family, and I moved to Egypt. He has been a close friend over the years in Cairo and later in the United States. I started reading Samuel's book in Arabic one evening, and I could not stop until I finished it the next day.

As you read this book, you will see clearly how God's hand has been on Samuel's life since his birth. The many people who personally know him, whether Christians or Muslims in Egypt or those who know him through his TV ministry since he came to the United States, all agree that God's hand is on his life.

Samuel has blazed a trail not only in Egypt but across the Arab world by courageously and genuinely building bridges through loving relationships. I have always believed that the stronger the bridge of relationship that a Christian can build with a Muslim, the heavier the truth it can carry. So many evangelicals want to "dump the whole truck" of our message on Muslims without having built a relationship. The bridge usually collapses and arguing, and debating follows.

Samuel embodies what it is like to build a genuine relationship followed by courageous sharing of the gospel. The strong bridges he builds can carry heavy truth.

Samuel used to work at a German company in Cairo. A man was sent to his department as a last opportunity before this man would be fired. Samuel loved him, saw God's image in him, and genuinely wanted to help him grow in character and social relationships. Not only was this man redeemed, but he took Samuel's job after Samuel left the company. Samuel introduced him to me, and I was able to meet with him for an evangelistic Bible study for several months before I had to leave Egypt.

During my long relationship with Samuel in Egypt, both he and I were in a learning mode. At times we felt like blind people, guided by the Holy Spirit, who was teaching us principles of ministry. At the end of some of the chapters in this book, you will find principles that Samuel and I learned over the years as we trusted God to guide us. Isaiah 42:16 says: "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them. I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them." Both Samuel and I experienced the truth of this Scripture over and over again as we were experimenting and learning.

For years in Egypt, I was discipling Samuel and yet at the same time I was learning from him. He was a model for me in what it means to be in the world and not of the world. At one time Samuel considered getting into politics in Egypt because he knew he could make a difference. Perhaps if circumstances were different and he lived in Egypt during the Arab Springs in 2011-2013, Samuel could have had a leadership role in the events of that crucial time in Egypt's history.

I had the privilege of living some of the stories in this book alongside Samuel. His memories of some details are different from my memories. Our collective memories gave multi-dimensional freshness to the stories. I was honored that Samuel asked me to translate and edit this book for English-language readers. I did not translate it literally but by paragraphs, with a focus on the intended meaning.

If you want to be stimulated and encouraged with love, compassion, and a passion for the lost, please read this book.

Dr. Nabeel T. Jabbour  
Colorado Springs  
December 2020

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to Life in Egypt

My homeland, Egypt, is a fascinating country. It is the land of the Nile, Cairo, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, Memphis, Thebes, Luxor, Karnak, the Valley of the Kings, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, Alexandria, and the Mediterranean Sea. It has one of the world's most ancient histories, tracing its heritage back about seven millennia. Ancient Egypt is considered a cradle of civilization because of its writing, agriculture, organized religion, and central government. Through centuries of foreign invasions, one after the other, Egypt kept its own national identity while assimilating to foreign influences, including Greek, Persian, Roman, Arab, Ottoman Turkish, and Nubian.

Egypt shares borders with Gaza Strip and Israel to the northeast, Sudan to the south, and Libya to the west. To the east, across the Gulf of Aqaba, lies Jordan, and also to the east, across the Red Sea, lies Saudi Arabia. Sinai was occupied by Israel after the Six Day War of 1967 and was taken back by Egypt after the 1973 War and after the Camp David Accords. Most of Egypt is desert, so people live mainly by the Nile, in the Delta, by the Mediterranean Sea in the North, and by the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. The Nile comes through Sudan in the south then splits near Cairo, forming the fertile Delta.



Cairo is the capital of Egypt and the country's largest city. It is located at the southern edge of the Delta. Other cities mentioned in this book are Faiyum, south of Cairo, and Minya and Asyut, which are further south and located by the Nile River. Alexandria, the second-largest city in the country, is coastal and located on the Mediterranean Sea in the north. Tanta is north of Cairo, and Mahalla is also north of Cairo and east of Tanta.

There is a great deal about Egypt in both the Old and the New Testaments. The book of Genesis tells of the patriarch Jacob moving his family to Egypt after being invited by his son Joseph, who held the second-highest position in the land. Jacob's family moved to Egypt to survive the seven years of famine that inflicted the whole region. After Jacob's death, his descendants, the Israelites, thrived and prospered in Egypt in the years after the famine. In Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, he said, "The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country" (Acts 13:17).

We read what happened after that in Exodus 1:6-11: "Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.' So, they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor."

The oppression of God's people was so severe that he intervened miraculously and brought the Israelites back to Canaan.

Some of the Old Testament prophets spoke repeatedly about Egypt. In the midst of writing a judgment against Egypt, Isaiah pronounced a blessing and a promise: "In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the LORD at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the LORD Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the LORD because of their

oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD” (Isaiah 19:19-21).

After Christ’s birth, King Herod, out of fear for his throne, ordered the killing of baby boys in and around Bethlehem. He did not want the promised Messiah to threaten his rule (see Matthew 2). Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus moved to Egypt as refugees and stayed there until Herod’s death. After he died, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee.

Christians in Egypt believe that Mark, author of the Gospel of Mark, brought Christianity to Egypt shortly after Christ ascended to heaven. The Christian presence in Egypt continued throughout the centuries until today. Egyptian Christians read Isaiah 19:19-21 and see its fulfillment in Christ being glorified in a vibrant Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant church in our homeland.

The population of Egypt today is about 100 million. The majority of people are Muslim, who make up about 90% of the population. The majority of Christians are Coptic Orthodox, with a minority of Protestants and Catholics.

As much as I love my home country, Egypt does have some “dirty laundry,” which I will address in this book. That will require some explanation for English-language readers who aren’t familiar with Egypt. Throughout the book, I have inserted (in parentheses) some comments that do not appear in the Arabic version of this book. This is to help English-language readers understand the nuances and complexity they might not otherwise grasp. Below, I have included many of these points to serve as background information to the stories in this book.

- Every Egyptian, upon birth, inherits the religion of his or her parents. Being called Christian or Muslim does not necessarily mean deep, heartfelt belief. Every Egyptian is either a Muslim or Christian by birth. You might have a Muslim named Muhammad who is an atheist, and yet he is a Muslim by birth. Egyptians, whether Muslims or Christians, are eager and quick to defend the faith of their forefathers, even if they do not live according to

its precepts. This may explain the defensiveness and sensitivities that are demonstrated during discussions of religions and even denominations.

- Muslims make up about 90% of Egypt's population. Through the centuries, Christians have learned to survive mostly by accepting their minority status and living, at times, as second-class citizens. In general, Christians have wanted to stay out of trouble with the police and government and have learned to avoid expressing contradictory points of view. There have been notable exceptions to this rule, such as Saad Zaghloul, a Christian revolutionary statesman who joined Muslims in solidarity against the British occupation of Egypt in the early 1900s. More recently, as a result of the Arab Spring, many Christians were liberated from their fears and hesitations and wanted to become involved citizens who helped determine the fate of their country. My family and I left Egypt in 2006, five years before the Arab Spring.
- All schools in Egypt have to include religion as part of their curriculum, with all books approved by the government. During the religion class, "Christians" go to a classroom with a "Christian" teacher, and "Muslims" go to a different classroom with a "Muslim" teacher.
- Christian parents feel extremely hesitant to allow their daughters to marry a believer from a Muslim background, especially if the rest of his family remain in their Muslim faith. Egyptian families are tight knit, so it is uncommon for Christian parents to want their daughters to have Muslim in-laws.
- The grammar of the Arabic language is based on the Qur'an. All Egyptian students, whether "Muslim" or "Christian," have to memorize some texts from the Qur'an as part of their Arabic literature class. The most famous text memorized by all Egyptians is *Al Fatiha*, which is the opening Surah, or section, in the Qur'an. The text of the *Fatiha* will appear in a later chapter of this book.
- There is a historical taboo about sharing the gospel with Muslims. It is considered risky and dangerous. As a result, many believers, even pastors,

avoid sharing the gospel with Muslims in order to stay out of trouble. Instead, they focus on sharing it with nominal Christians.

- Egyptian law is derived from Islamic and French law. Christianity is legal in Egypt for those born into Christian families. However, apostasy from Islam, or leaving Islam, can be punishable by death according to Islamic law. During the years President Hosni Mubarak was in office, a Muslim who put his faith in Christ was in danger of being branded by his family and his community as a traitor and infidel. If that convert talked openly about his faith in Christ, he faced a real risk of being imprisoned and persecuted. The persecution could involve rejection and shunning by the family and the community and unemployment or expulsion from school. It has been legal for a Christian to convert to Islam and become a Muslim; however, Egyptian law does not allow Muslims to convert to Christianity and officially become Christians.
- Muslims in Egypt have some misconceptions about what Christians believe. They believe that Christians believe in three gods and reject the oneness of God. They have a misconception about the Trinity and assume that we believe in Jesus as the physical son of God the Father and Mary. They assume that because Jesus is called the “Son of God” that this means he was God’s physical son, which is blasphemous to them. But the Bible does not talk about Jesus being the physical son of God. The idea that God had a physical relationship with Mary that produced Jesus is completely unfounded and exists nowhere in the Bible. In fact, the Bible categorically and emphatically rejects such thinking. The Qur’an calls this kind of belief *shirk* and blasphemy (Table: Surah 5:37, Nisaa’: Surah 4 verse 48; Sincerity: Surah 112 verses 1–4). The entire Bible clearly teaches the oneness of God (*tawhid*). In the *Tawrat* (Torah) section of the Old Testament, the Bible does not talk about tritheism (three gods) but about triunity in the oneness of his being.
- “Coptic” is the Greek word for “Egyptian.” As there is the Russian Orthodox church and the Greek Orthodox Church, there is also the Coptic or Egyptian Orthodox church.



- The traditional Arabic Muslim greeting in Egypt starts with the statement: “*asalamu alaykum*,” which means “peace to you.” There is both a short and a long response to this greeting. The short response is: “*wa Talykumu salam*,” which means “and peace to you as well.” The long response is: “*wa alykumu salam wa rahmatu laahi wa barkatuh*,” which means, “and peace to you as well and God’s mercy and blessings.” I have used this Muslim greeting because I believe in the soundness and truth of its words, and because it helps me build bridges with many Muslims, as you will see in this book. Some other expressions that are helpful in connecting with Muslims:
  - *Al hamdu lillaah* (Thanks to God).
  - *Subhanalaah* (Praise God).
  - *Masha Allah* (That is what God has willed).
  - *Insha Allah* (If God wills).
  - I have used a statement that most Muslims use at the beginning of their correspondence, speeches, and documents, “*Bismilaah Rahman Rahim*,” which means, “In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate.”
- Muslims refer to the Bible in general, and to the New Testament in particular, with the term *Injil*. When the word *Injil* is used in Arabic translations of the Bible, it means “the gospel,” but Muslims use it as their name for the entire New Testament.
- The Arabic term *Sheikh* in Islam means an imam or a devout Muslim leader. In the Presbyterian church in Egypt, I was a ruling elder, and my title was Sheikh, which I found helpful in communicating with Muslims. It is a title that denotes wisdom that comes with age and experience, in addition to respected status.
- Once a year a General Assembly (GA) took place in Egypt for our Presbyterian denomination. All the teaching elders were expected to attend, along with some of the ruling elders from all over Egypt. Annually, the leadership of our denomination wrote a summary of the committee reports and had them printed into a book. A copy of that book had to be

submitted to the Ministry of Interior. This was common knowledge to all the elders. So when a chairman of a committee wrote a report, he or she kept in mind the fact that undercover agents in the Ministry of Interior were going to read it. Furthermore, a representative of the Ministry of Interior, called Salah, attended the GA during our years in Egypt. As a ruling elder, a “Sheikh,” I tried to be faithful to attend those General Assemblies. Salah once came to our home and asked me to report to the Ministry of Interior for interrogation, which I address later in this book.

- *Fatwa* in Arabic means religious ruling. Similar to how the Pope can “pontificate” and make religious rulings that are not addressed in the Scriptures, Muslim authorities make Fatwas, when needed, to address urgent, critical issues that are not addressed in the Qur’an and the Shari’a, especially when an action or decision needs to be taken. Some Muslim fundamentalist leaders believe that they have the right to make Fatwas because of their “dedication” to God and because of their leadership status. Muslims in general seek their leaders for Fatwas regarding their daily conduct.
- After the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, an emergency law was passed that allowed the police to arrest any potential suspect for six months without taking the prisoner to court. Some police abused this law so that a person could be arrested and released repeatedly.
- The terms *political Islam*, *fundamentalists*, and *Islamists* are all related. The church in Egypt suffered at the hands of both Muslim fundamentalists and especially Muslim fanatics. Muslim fundamentalists are driven by a certain theology and a degree of commitment. Muslim fanatics are driven by an attitude of self-righteousness demonizing all those who disagree with them. Both advocated the formation of state and society according to their understanding of Islamic principles and using Islam as the source of political concepts.
- Al Azhar is famous for its Islamic seminary but has a university as well, where Muslim students study Islamic subjects in addition to their

vocational specializations. Al-Azhar seminary is the oldest university in existence. It has been around for more than one thousand years.

- The five pillars of Islam are prayer, alms, *hajj* or pilgrimage, fasting the month of Ramadan, and the Shahada (the Muslim statement of faith, which states, “There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God”).
- *Hajj*, or *hagg*, is not only the name of the pilgrimage during the month of Ramadan, but also a title. It is used to denote the spirituality of a person who has returned from pilgrimage to Mecca.
- Friday is the Muslim weekly sacred day of worship.

The next chapter will address Egypt’s national security and undercover agents.

## Chapter 2

### Egypt's National Security

In the previous chapter I shared some facts about life, religion, and tradition in Egypt. In this chapter, I will shed some light on the tight control that the Mubarak regime (1981–2011) exerted over its citizens. This will lay the foundation for future chapters, and especially Chapter 30.

National security is a very large umbrella. It can be used to justify almost anything in a country whose leaders want to stay in power at any cost. Later in this book, I will write about Sheikh Bahaa, his arrest, and his imprisonment, as well as the role of the Ministry of Interior's undercover agents. When Arab Americans, and especially those of Egyptian origin, read about Sheikh Bahaa, and later about Muhammad Abdulhay, they will understand the complex dynamics of what happened under the justification of national security. For Americans and other Western readers, it may be confusing and difficult to understand.

You may be familiar with how national security institutions function in the United States, which has several separate government intelligence agencies and organizations. Each organization is independent, and yet they work together when it comes to certain goals and activities. Their responsibilities include collecting and producing foreign and domestic intelligence and conducting espionage. The most famous of these organizations are the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), one for foreign and the other for domestic intelligence.

The United Kingdom has intelligence agencies within some government departments. These agencies collect and produce foreign and domestic intelligence. The collected information serves in military planning, law enforcement, and in determining foreign policy. The most famous agencies include Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) and the Security Service (MI5).

Egypt has a very long history—about 5,000 years. It started out with the Pharaonic period, also known as Ancient Egypt, from 3150 to 332 BC. That was followed by the Greco-Roman period from 332 BC to 629 AD. Next came Medieval Egypt from 641 to 1517 AD. Early modern Egypt was marked by Ottoman control, the French occupation, and Muhammad Ali's dynasty from 1517 to 1914 AD. During that period, the British occupied Egypt from 1882 to 1922. Gaining semi-independence from the British, the kingdom of Egypt emerged from 1922 to 1953, followed by the Republic of Egypt from 1953 to the present.

During my life in Egypt, I witnessed only three Egyptian presidents in office: President Nasser, whom I admired in my youth, President Sadat, and President Mubarak. My family and I left Egypt and came to the United States before the Arab Spring of 2011 and before the short-lived rule of the Muslim Brotherhood and its president, Muhammad Morsi. (The current president is Abudul Fatah Sisi.) The difficulties that I experienced in my ministry in my beloved Egypt took place during the Mubarak regime.

After President Sadat's 1981 assassination, his vice president, Hosni Mubarak, became Egypt's president. Mubarak's presidency lasted 29 years, ending when he was forced to resign in 2011 after the Egyptian uprising, which was part of what is known as the Arab Spring. His presidency was a continuation of President Sadat's policies, including the liberalization of Egypt's economy and a commitment to the 1979 Camp David Accords, which produced a peace treaty with Israel. Egypt, under Mubarak, maintained close relations with Arab countries and the Arab League, as well as with the United States, Russia, India, and much of the Western world. Internally, Mubarak's regime was often criticized for its poor human rights record. Political censorship, police brutality, arbitrary detention, torture, and restrictions on freedom of speech and the press earned Egypt this criticism.

According to online sources, Egypt is a semi-presidential republic, under the Emergency Law that was legislated after the 1967 war with Israel. That law was ended by Sadat shortly before his death, and 18 months later, the law went back into effect following Sadat's assassination in 1981. Under that law, police powers were extended, constitutional rights suspended, and censorship legalized. During

Mubarak's time, under that Emergency Law, some 17,000 people were detained, and the number of political prisoners was close to 30,000. The Emergency Law allowed the government to imprison individuals without taking them to court. The arbitrary detentions and unfair trials resulted in human rights violations by the security services in Egypt. Those actions were described as "systematic" by Amnesty International.

Egyptian police routinely engaged in "beatings, electric shocks, prolonged suspension by the wrists and ankles in contorted positions, death threats, and sexual abuse," according to one report. In 2005, Reporters Without Borders ranked Egypt number 143 of 167 nations on freedom of the press.

The continued enforcement of the Emergency Law was justified by the threat of terrorism under Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda and the Egyptian physician Ayman Zawahiri, who wanted to bring about a coup d'état and make Egypt an Islamic state. Other Islamic fundamentalist threats came from al Gma'at al Islamiya (an Egyptian Sunni Islamist movement, considered a terrorist organization by the U.S.) and the Egyptian blind imam, Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman. The Egyptian people tolerated the Emergency Law, with all its shortcomings, and justified its necessity because of the threat of terrorism. The Ministry of Interior, committed to preserving Mubarak's presidency, gained unrestrained power.

The Ministry of Interior was responsible for overseeing law enforcement in Egypt. It directed the Central Security Forces, which numbered more than 400,000 agents, the national police, which numbered around 500,000, and the Egyptian Homeland Security, which numbered around 200,000.

Mubarak was backed by the army, while the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists had the support of mosques. To keep Muslim fundamentalists from creating havoc, the church in Egypt suffered under government control. Evangelism to Muslims has never been accepted in Egypt, but particularly during that era it was perceived as a threat to national security. The government did not want a sectarian war between the Christian community and Muslim fundamentalists. Some churches were burned down by fanatical Muslims, while others were partially damaged. Jewelry shops and other businesses owned by

Christians were looted and burned to the ground. As many Christians suffered, the government seemed helpless to control the fanatics and protect its citizens.

A branch of the Central Security Forces was responsible for overseeing the Christian community and keeping it in line. As stated earlier, the Synod of the Presbyterian Churches in Egypt was required to send annual reports to the Ministry of Interior, describing all of its activities. An undercover agent from the Ministry of Interior sat in on the sessions of the General Assembly of our Presbyterian church. Although he was supposed to be undercover, all of us who attended the General Assembly knew who he was and why he was there.

Egypt's current president, President Sisi, is very much loved by the Christian community in Egypt. He visited the Coptic Orthodox congregation in the cathedral in Cairo in 2016 and promised that whatever had been damaged or destroyed by Muslim fundamentalists, the government would rebuild. He has kept that promise. However, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was banned after Sisi took over, along with other Muslim fundamentalists, continues to be a threat to the country's national security.

My anchor is the fact that in the midst of our broken world, God is still in control. In the book of Esther, Haman, an enemy of the Jews, was in his full glory and power, about to annihilate the Jews, who were to be the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet God was in control, and we see how the tables were turned when he intervened.

The people of God do not live inside a fortress protected by moats and walls and surrounded by the enemy. The church is advancing into the world, and the gates of hell cannot stand against it. The Kingdom of God is like yeast, which permeates and infiltrates the dough (see Matthew 13:33), no matter how much brokenness is in our world.

## Chapter 3

### The Beginnings

I was born in Cairo, Egypt. During my middle school years, I was involved in Boy Scouts activities. In high school I ran for a position in the students' union, which opened for me the opportunity to participate in a conference in Alexandria, Egypt. This was the first time in my life that I saw the Mediterranean Sea. At age 18, I joined the socialist youth movement in Cairo during President Nasser's time. They indoctrinated us with democracy, socialism, Arab nationalism, and other fancy political slogans. I participated in many of the demonstrations supporting President Nasser. Along with the crowds, I shouted out slogans about Nasser as the leader of the Arab world.

Through the Boy Scouts and political activities, I related well to both Muslims and Christians, and many were my friends. In Egypt, people are born either into Islam or Christianity. Therefore, every Egyptian is either Christian or Muslim. I was Christian.

I remember when I was in fourth year of primary school, a teacher asked me about a verse in the Qur'an, which I did not know. As a punishment for not knowing, he slapped me on the face, insulted me, and kicked me out of class. That incident hurt me and puzzled me because at the time I did not understand the prejudice that existed between Christians and Muslims.

During high school, I had many questions about life, pain, suffering, poverty, and world religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. I wanted to know what was true and false in each of these religions. Because I did not get convincing answers to my questions, I drifted toward atheism. I read extensively books that were available and affordable that talked about denying God's existence, freedom and rebellion against all the chains of authority that come from the family, the school, and the church. As a result of argumentative questions that I asked church people, the chasm between me and them increased.



I loved reading detective novels such as Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie in Arabic. I also loved historical movies such as Spartacus and Hercules. I read translated novels such as *Les Misérables* and some of Tolstoy's books, which broadened my horizons and increased my desire to learn.

I also read parts of the New Testament and loved the person of Jesus Christ. That was the beginning of a journey of searching for God. Who is he and where is he? If God created the universe, who created God? These thoughts bombarded my mind, and I started doubting everything, including the existence of God. I was also influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution. I left the church and abandoned the Bible and gave myself the freedom to question everything.

Despite that "freedom," I had feelings of depression, despair, and anxiety. These, along with the challenges in our family, led me to consider committing suicide. But the question that challenged me was what would happen after death? Is death the end of everything? Where would I go after I died? These questions motivated me to ask more and learn more. I read books by Egyptian authors such as *The Mystery of Death* by Mustafa Mahmoud, *Death and the Genius*, by Abdul Rahman Baddawy, and others. Deep in my soul I was longing for answers, and yet I knew that God had placed eternity in my heart as Ecclesiastes 3:11 states: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

Another question that occupied my mind was the meaning of time. The watch I wore on my wrist was exact and accurate. How did the metal and the plastic assemble and become a watch? This watch did not come into existence by accident. There were engineers and experts who invented this amazingly precise and exact watch.

I reflected on the wonder and exactness of the universe with its stars, solar systems, and galaxies. Then I thought of our planet with its beauty and diversity of colors. I thought of the plants, animals, and the human body, and I cried out in wonder: *Who created all this?* Right then I knew in the depth of my soul that it was God who created all things, and I yearned to know him.

I concluded that I needed to search for God and to learn about him, his creation, man, and eternity, and that decision brought me back to the Bible and to the church. Church for me at that time was merely a group of friends who attended a youth group meeting where we sang beautiful songs and listened to sermons that were beyond my comprehension. What I enjoyed most about my church were the walks I had in the evenings with my church friends by the Nile River, or playing chess and table tennis with them.

In June 1967 I had the shock of my life. We Egyptians were badly defeated in the Six-Day War by Israel. As a result, my admiration for President Nasser was shaken, and my lofty dreams of Arab nationalism and unity were dashed. I hated the word "Israel" even when I read it in the Bible. I went through despair, pain, and agony as I saw my beloved nation go into oblivion in six days. I wondered, *What is the meaning of life, and what am I living for?*

## Chapter 4

### New Birth

I grew up in a Christian family. My father was a Coptic Orthodox Christian, and my mother was a Protestant. (“Coptic” is the Greek word for “Egyptian.” Like the Russian Orthodox Church or Greek Orthodox Church, there is a Coptic or Egyptian Orthodox Church). My four sisters and I grew up in both the Orthodox church and the Protestant church. After 20 years of “church life,” I concluded that I was neither a Christian nor a true believer. At that point I was able to distinguish between nominal Christianity and true faith. How did I come to that realization?

In August 1967, the youth at our church decided to have a three-day camp to clean our church facilities. Because this was a church rather than a secular camp, we dedicated 30 minutes a day for worship, prayer, and a 10-minute sermon that took place just before lunch. We invited a certain speaker to preach on those three days.

What I remember most about those three days was how much we accomplished and the joy of working together as a youth group. I remember also how the church families appreciated our service and our wholeheartedness and how they provided meals for us.

On the second day of that camp, just before lunch, the speaker addressed John 1:12-13: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

I do not recall the details of the speaker’s message, but I remember realizing that faith in Christ is not something we inherit from our parents. For 20 years I thought I was a Christian, only to realize that I was not a true believer. That realization hit me like a lightning bolt.

The speaker talked about three types of Christians:

- People born of natural descent because they live in Christian nations.
- People born into families where the parents are nominal Christians.
- People who knew *about* God but do not know him.

The speaker pointed out how these misconceptions exist everywhere in the world, and yet this is not true faith. What this guest speaker said opened my eyes to new realizations. Spiritual birth has one source, namely God, and it is from above. Our relationship with God, he said, “starts when you receive Christ and believe in him as your personal Savior and surrender your life to him.”

Then he asked us the question: “Do you want to be born of God and become a child of God?” The speaker was addressing all of us, but deep in my soul I sensed that this question was for me personally. I responded by saying quietly, “Yes, I want to be born of God and become his child.” Then the speaker continued by saying, “Do you want to know how to be born of God? It’s easy.” He had us look again at verse 12: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The speaker asked, “Have you asked Jesus to come into your life?” Then he pointed us to Revelation 3:20 and explained:

- ““Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.”” Christ took the first step.
- ““If anyone hears my voice and opens the door.”” The second step is man’s responsibility.
- ““I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”” The third step is the promise of Christ.

On that day I invited Christ into my life, and I was transformed. I became a new creation with new spiritual DNA. Several others at the church camp surrendered their lives to Christ, too.

Are you born of God? Are you in Christ, and are you a new creation?

By the end of the third day of that camp, I was wiped out and exhausted. I got sick with a high fever. Several of my friends from the camp came to visit me at home, and I found myself talking with them about Christ and how he transformed my

life. The focus of my conversations was John 1:12-13 and how we need to know him and not just know about him. Some of them agreed with me and shared how they too surrendered their lives to Christ. Others thought that I was hallucinating because of the high fever.

After I recovered from my sickness, I had an opportunity at our Thursday-night youth group meeting to share my testimony of how Christ transformed my life. For a while, I stayed very busy with these youth group activities. At the time, I thought that was what ministry was about. I did not yet realize that growth and maturing were needed in my life more than just being busy with church activities.

My new life with Christ was not established and rooted in the Word of God. Although shortly after I responded to Christ's knocking at the door my heart, I had started having a "quiet time" by reading the Bible, but I was not consistent. My Bible reading was superficial. The many church activities that kept me busy deprived me of time in the Word of God. Eventually I stopped having my time in the Word. As a result, my joy in Christ vanished and my zeal for God diminished.

One day I fell into a common youthful sin, which led me into a state of depression and doubt, wondering whether my life was truly transformed. I was so ashamed of what I had done, and I thought that I was the only person who has committed such an act, so I kept it to myself. Furthermore, Satan started tormenting me with a thought from the Bible in the Arabic translation that says, "No one born of God will do sin" (1 John 3:9). In the NIV, the verse says: "No one born of God will continue to sin." I descended into a spiral of doubt with these thoughts. Because I had sinned, I thought I was not born of God. I came to the conclusion that what I experienced with God was not genuine, and I was a hypocrite. So I left the church and all church activities, lonely and despairing and tormented by Satan and his lies.

Months later I saw my friend Ezzat, a medical student and a member of our youth group. When he saw me, he asked, "Where have you been all these months? How come you're not coming to our youth group meetings anymore, and why are you so depressed?" Ezzat invited me to his apartment to play chess, which was my favorite board game.

While walking together to his apartment, I wondered if I could tell him about my agony with my secret sin. I thought that perhaps he would be able to help me because he was a medical student. Then I thought that he would be so shocked by my sin that he would refuse to consider me a friend anymore. I decided to keep my secret to myself.

During our chess game, he suddenly asked me, "What is wrong with you, and what is keeping you from coming to youth group?" Right away I told him about my secret sin. He roared with laughter and told me that he had the same problem. I could not believe my ears. He was struggling just like I was? Then he assured me that this was an issue for 95 percent of young men. He opened up a medical school textbook and turned to the page that addressed that topic and showed me the statistics. I asked him if this was a problem for those who are born of God and are true believers. He turned to Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other."

I was very young in the faith and did not know the Scriptures well. Somehow, I had heard that verse in 1 John 3:9, and Satan hit me with it. I asked Ezzat what to do about my sin. He encouraged me to confess my sin and repent, as it says in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

We both prayed together, and we confessed our sin and believed that God had forgiven us. As I came down the stairs from Ezzat's third-floor apartment, I rejoiced in Christ that the burden of guilt was off my back.

Are you struggling with any particular sin? When Christ was crucified, he was accused with every sin that you and I have ever committed in the past or ever will commit in the future. He was punished for our sin. Furthermore, Christ lived his life on earth with perfect obedience to God the Father, and he met God's absolute demands. He earned the 100 percent passing grade with God the Father.

When we surrender our lives to Christ, a huge transaction occurs. Christ takes upon himself our sin, and he gives us his perfect righteousness. So when God the

Father looks at you, if you are “in Christ,” he sees Jesus because you are wrapped from your head to your toes with Christ’s robe of righteousness. When God looks at you, he sees you just as if you have never sinned and as if you have always obeyed.

## Chapter 5

### A Caravan to the Region of Faiyum

Nash'at Sharqawi was one of my friends from youth group who had a call to pastoral ministry. At the end of his first year at seminary, he was asked to spend the summer serving in a Presbyterian church in one of the villages in the south of Egypt as part of his pastoral training.

A week after his departure, he sent a telegram asking a group of us to join him for one week in this village in the Faiyum area. He assured us that the people of the church would provide us with food and lodging for the week, but we had to pay for our transportation. Five of us from the youth group went to the village having no idea what to expect. We were welcomed by the pastor of the church, by Nash'at our friend, and by a delegation of the church made up of illiterate farmers. We were treated like experts or dignitaries who had come from the capital city of Cairo. But when we learned from Nash'at that we were supposed to preach in church the next day, anxiety crept in.





When he told us, we assumed Nash'at was joking and exploded with laughter. But before leaving us, Nah'at told us with a stern voice that we better spend the rest of the evening preparing for the sermon the next day. I suggested that Wagdy Ameen should preach since he was deep in his knowledge of the Old Testament. Wagdy suggested that Ezzat Abdul Raouf should preach because he was an eloquent speaker. Ezzat suggested that Sabry Fahmy should preach because he was the leader of the youth group at that time. Sabry passed the responsibility on to Maher Labib since he was a man of dignity. Maher passed the responsibility back to me. Finally, all five of us agreed to preach a sermon called "Christ's Healing Touches." We were all about 20 years old. The sermon outline that we agreed on, with each of us taking one part, looked like this:

- A cleansing and purifying touch. Before Jesus touched the man with leprosy, the man came to Jesus and said: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy" (Matthew 8:2-3).
- A healing touch. "When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him" (Matthew 8:14-15).
- A calming touch. Jesus said to his disciples: "'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm" (Matthew 8:26).
- A forgiving and healing touch. "'But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the paralyzed man, 'Get up, take your mat and go home.' Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man" (Matthew 9:6-8).
- A touch that opened eyes. "Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you'" (Matthew 9:29).

We got very excited as we prepared, and each one of us chose one of the five points. I chose the last one. The next morning, we went to the small church, where about 20 people were in attendance. The pastor led the singing, then he introduced us in a way that made us feel prideful. But when the time came for our preaching, every one of us struggled with anxiety, and the five short sermons

were finished in about ten minutes. The response of the congregation was very encouraging, and the people shared with us how they loved the sermon, quoting back the titles of our five-part message. That day we realized that those villagers were very focused and had an amazing ability to remember and memorize what they had heard.

The generosity, hospitality, and love of the villagers was amazing. Every morning they brought us a feast for breakfast, followed by a great lunch at a different home every day of the week. Each evening brought another generous meal. All in all, it was a successful short mission trip, which we called a Caravan.

We repeated our visit to that village every summer. Then we got invited to visit other churches in other villages. As a result, we came to know firsthand the big need in Egypt's rural areas for ministry and encouragement. We found that there were many churches in villages that had to close because they did not have pastors.

That experience motivated us to study the Scriptures more deeply so we would be prepared for other mission trips.

## Chapter 6

### Work and Evangelism

My scores on the government exams made it possible for me to continue my education after high school. I would have been able to attend university free of charge, but instead I had to get a job and start making money for my family's needs. Finding a job was a challenge because I did not have a university education, nor any particular skill or experience. Furthermore, I was not bilingual.

My uncle, through his friendship with a leader in the Brethren church, opened a door for me to work at a fabric factory. The work was long and exhausting. The salary was small and contingent on how hard I worked and how much I produced each day. I managed to make a maximum of about eighty dollars each month. (Of course, the value of money at that time was very different.)

After several months of work at the fabric factory, I received a letter from the Egyptian government stating that President Gamal Abdul Nasser appointed me to work in the Ministry of Education at a school in Cairo. I was to submit my paperwork swiftly.

I was very encouraged with the news of my appointment as a teacher and a trainer at a technical school for fabrics. But because I did not get my paperwork submitted on time, I was appointed instead to be responsible for the laboratory at a school for students with eye diseases, including a small percentage who were blind. This was a high-quality school for students in primary, middle school, and high school. I had no clue how I would do my job.

The school was about a 15-minute walk from our apartment. I started on January 5, 1969, and one of the teachers welcomed me and started training me in my responsibilities for the physics and biology laboratory.

I spent 11 wonderful years of my life at that school. I was successful in my job and managed to update and upgrade our lab. As a result of that job, I made several deep friendships with several teachers, especially Mr. Gamal, the Arabic language teacher, who spent extended time with me discussing Islam and Christianity. (In

Egypt, Arabic language teachers were always Muslim. The Arabic language and grammar are rooted in the language of the Qur'an. The grammar in the Qur'an is the standard of Arabic grammar. So of course, Mr. Gamal was a Muslim.)

In addition to my responsibilities at the lab, I took on the additional task of planning school trips, events, and activities. My experience with my church youth group and the mission trips we made equipped me for this additional role. The school appreciated what I was doing, and they raised my salary. Then they trusted me with the responsibility for printing all the school exams. This was a high-security honor that was only entrusted to people with high ethical standards.

Mahmoud was a middle-school student when I first met him. His mother complained to the school administration that her son was unmotivated and kept missing school. The school headmaster asked me to pay special attention to Mahmoud, and with time we became friends.

In 1977, when Mahmoud was a junior in high school, I came to know him in depth. In the summer following his junior year, he worked as a painter. Our apartment was in a very old building, and the walls in our apartment needed repainted. I asked him if he could paint the apartment where my sisters and I lived, and he was eager and willing to do it. I knew that he would do a good job because of our friendship, and I wanted to help him make some extra money. It was a beneficial situation for us both. During those days Mahmoud and I ate and had our tea breaks together, and our friendship went much deeper without any barriers. At that time, he was about 20 years old, and I was about 30.

Every Thursday evening, we had our youth group meetings. On a certain Thursday during that summer, I had the responsibility of leading the youth group service. I asked Mahmoud to finish by 6 p.m. on that day so I would not be late for the meeting. After I changed my clothes and just before both of us left the apartment, Mahmoud apologized to me for reading some literature on the living room table without asking my permission. I assured him that he did not do anything wrong and that I was happy he was reading this Christian literature. I told him that we were brothers, even though we came from two different religions.

He told me that he read the booklet *The Four Spiritual Laws* and he liked it, so I encouraged him to take it. Then he asked me a question. From what he knew from the Qur'an, Christ was not crucified. It only appeared to people that he was crucified, but in reality, he wasn't. I told Mahmoud that I was 100 percent sure that Christ was crucified. Then Mahmoud asked me another question, this one having to do with the first spiritual law in the booklet. How was it possible, he asked, that God could love human beings like us?

I assured my friend that God really did love him. This was the first time Mahmoud had ever heard that. He asked a third question, but I was getting later for the youth group meeting. I told him again to take the booklet and assured him that we would continue the conversation the next day. I didn't want to risk answering his questions in a hurry and offending him.

As we left my apartment and walked together toward my church, which was on the way to his apartment, we continued our conversation. He asked me whether Jesus was a messenger from God, a prophet, or the Son of God. Again, I told him that tomorrow we would resume this conversation.

The next day when we met, he gave me a letter that was addressed to me. I was surprised that he would give me a letter when we were standing next to one another, face to face. He asked me to read what he had written.

The letter started out by asking me to believe that he had read and meditated on the four spiritual laws until midnight. He had understood the following:

- The First Truth: God loves him because God loves the world.
- The Second Truth: That he was a sinner, and that the penalty of sin is death.
- The Third Truth: That Christ died to pay for his sin.
- The Fourth Truth: That he should receive Christ as his personal Savior.

He said in his letter that the booklet encouraged him to pray and ask Jesus to come into his life because Jesus was knocking at the door of his heart. He said that around midnight the night before, he knelt and surrendered his life to Christ

and that he had an amazing feeling of peace and joy that he had never known before.

When I read his letter, it hit me like a thunder bolt. That was 1977, and in those days, we rarely heard of a Muslim putting his faith in Christ (unlike today where many Muslims in the Middle East are believing in Christ).

I read the letter again in disbelief, wondering how a Muslim, in one day, could believe in Christ as a result of reading one small booklet. I knew that Mahmoud was not lying to me. Why would he even want to lie? Then a deep realization of truth penetrated my brain like a bullet. Yes, a Muslim could believe in Christ that quickly, and Mahmoud was the proof.

Then my thoughts went further, and I began wondering whether he would tell his mother. I wondered if his mother would, in turn, tell the headmaster of the school. I did not want to lose my job. So I went to the room in our apartment where Mahmoud was painting and told him not to tell anyone, including his mother, about the experience that he had with Jesus. He promised me he would keep it a secret. At the end of the day, he left our apartment with a big smile on his face, something new for him since he tended to have a melancholy personality.

In the days that followed I found myself repeatedly thinking about what had happened with Mahmoud. I thought of how I was far more concerned about arriving on time to the youth group meeting than really listening to Mahmoud's questions and the yearnings of his heart. Until that time in my life, I thought that ministry meant activities with Christians in the church and the short mission trips we took in the south of Egypt. But now, a huge need appeared before my eyes.

Do Muslims need Christ? Were the truths that God had revealed to Mahmoud from the booklet and the Scriptures only something he needed, or did every Muslim need them? I had never asked myself these questions before. A deep realization of the truth shined before me: Every Muslim needs Christ. My journey of reaching out to Muslims started with that realization. At the time, though, I did not have a clue how to share the gospel with Muslims.

Here we are decades later, and I am writing about what I have learned over the years through my Muslim friends, some who responded positively to the gospel message and some who rejected it. My Bible reading has taught me more about how to reach out to Muslims. So has Nabeel Jabbour, whom God brought into my life in 1975 and has continued with me on the journey as my friend and mentor.

I wondered what to do with Mahmoud. Should I take him with me to church? He did not know our hymns or traditions. Should I introduce him to my Christian friends at youth group? I knew they would be inquisitive and might not trust him. They could even be a stumbling block to him. So I thought the safest thing was to introduce him to an acquaintance named Max who specialized in Muslim ministry. He would take care of him. Max welcomed him and took over.

After he finished painting our apartment, I didn't see Mahmoud until the beginning of the new school year. When he came to visit me, I hugged him, eager to find out how he was doing. I asked him, "Mahmoud, how are you doing?" He looked at me as if I had done something wrong. He told me that his name was no longer Mahmoud but Mark. That was the name that Max and his friends had given him. From the depth of my soul I felt that there was something wrong with this. Why should a Muslim change his or her name because they believe in Christ? I regretted having made the mistake of connecting my friend Mahmoud with those Christian brothers. I knew that they were doing what they thought was right, but I did not agree with it.

I pulled Mahmoud from Max and his group and introduced him to my friend Abu Tarek. He was a Syrian living in Cairo who had become a believer in Christ after growing up as a Muslim. Abu Tarek had known Christ and followed him for years, and he knew how to disciple Muslim-background believers. For months, Mahmoud and Abu Tarek studied the Bible together every week. One day Abu Tarek invited me to his apartment to tell me that he was going to baptize Mahmoud in obedience to what the Scriptures teaches. He told me a confidential fact that I did not know about him. Abu Tarek had graduated from a Bible school in Lebanon, and the Baptist church in Lebanon ordained him as a pastor. He had

kept this confidential because he did not want it to become a barrier in his ministry with Muslims.

Abu Tarek told me about the mineral water area in Helwan, near Cairo, which was like a swimming pool. That was where he would baptize Mahmoud. I asked why he wasn't planning to baptize him in a church, and Abu Tarek said that would be too dangerous for Mahmoud. He told me that I would be the only person who would witness the baptism.

The three of us went to Helwan, and for the first time in my life I witnessed a Muslim-background believer in Christ being baptized by another Muslim-background believer who was a pastor! That was an amazing experience for me.

Mahmoud's life was transformed, even though he went back to his old name. Not only was he transformed, but I was also transformed as I witnessed what God was doing in his life.

I realized that many people yearn for God, but they will never attend a church service. They don't even know what the inside of a church looks like. I began to see that ministry could take place outside of the church. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to deeper insights in the Scriptures, such as John 4:35: "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." I was blind to many truths in the Bible. God was opening my eyes to see the millions upon millions of people who are in need of Christ, whether they come from a Christian, Muslim, or atheist background. They all need Jesus and his enduring peace.

My burning issue became how to speak to Muslims about Jesus when it was almost illegal to do that in Egypt. Furthermore, how could I respond to their tough questions without knowing the Bible in depth? That motivated me to get into the Scriptures and study.

I have a question for you. Do you have friends who do not know the Lord? Do you have friendships with Muslims? If you do, please write down their names and start praying for them.





## Chapter 7

### Crossing Cultures

Every morning on the way to the school where I worked, I saw a group of tall black African students laughing and talking together in front of an academy in our part of the city. President Nasser opened a door for sharp black African students to study at this academy, where teaching was in English, so they could return to their countries and become influential leaders. Egyptian students who were fluent in English were also allowed to enroll in this academy, and some of them were my friends. One day as I was walking to work, I saw some of those black African students and a thought came to my mind: Why don't we minister to these students? Why not organize a special meeting for them at our church, which was in the same area as the academy?

I contacted my friends at the academy to find out if there was any interest in my idea. To my surprise, all of them were very positive; they had just been waiting for someone to take initiative. We were all convinced that we should have a special church meeting in English. We thought of having worship songs and a good speaker. We decided to pray about it, with some of us fasting, as well.

As we began looking for a speaker, we were advised to invite the ambassador of Ghana, a committed Christian and a well-respected African leader. We printed a brochure in English and started passing it out to the black African students, whether they came from a Christian or Muslim background.

On the day of the meeting, our church was packed. The black African students enjoyed the Christian songs and listened intently to the Ghanaian ambassador as he clearly presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. After the sermon, he gave an invitation to those who wanted to respond to Jesus's knocking and open their hearts to him. Many of the students on that day had an encounter with Christ.

Are there people around you who belong to different ethnicities or lead different lifestyles? How can you connect with these people who do not run in the same

circles as you? Ask the Lord to give you ideas of how to cross the culture barriers and reach out to them. Becoming cross cultural has immense value.

Crossing boundaries may meet with some resistance, though, even within your own church.

In our church youth group, we had an annual celebration where we would invite the youth, past and present. The idea was to help those who had not been regularly attending to reconnect and to offer an invitation for all to accept Christ's invitation.

In 1978, my friends and I were planning the annual celebration. Encouraged by what we experienced with the black African students, I asked them why we wouldn't welcome people from all denominations, Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic. There was some resistance to the idea, but finally my friends gave me the responsibility to find a place outside of our church to host the event and to find the right speaker.

Before we had this idea, I had attended a conference in Bani Sweif, a city about 145 kilometers south of Cairo. The speaker was Dr. Sameh Moris, and his message was about the committed servant of God who is willing to give his life to the Great Commission. At that conference, I had recommitted my life to God in light of my new understanding that ministry should not be secluded within the walls of my church.

Right after returning to Cairo, although I was exhausted, I wanted to attend the wedding of a friend at a large Orthodox church in the Heliopolis area of Cairo. I decided to kill two birds with one stone by attending a service right after the wedding where Father Zakaria preached.

Father Zakaria Butros was a very famous Coptic Orthodox priest who preached powerful evangelistic sermons every Thursday at the Orthodox church in Heliopolis. On Thursdays, about 3,000 people crammed into that church and the annex hall with closed-circuit TV. His fame had spread all over Egypt and the Middle East. The American magazine *Christianity Today* had written an article

about him and his ministry. His fame in Egypt extended to Muslims because of his ministry of healing and exorcism.

Before he preached, Father Zakaria Butros read from 2 Chronicles 33 about King Manasseh, who did evil in the eyes of the Lord, followed detestable practices, and erected high places for worshiping idols. Father Zakaria continued reading about how God brought the Assyrians to punish Judah and how Manasseh was taken as a prisoner. In his distress, the king sought the favor of the Lord, so God forgave him and brought him back to Jerusalem. Father Zakaria then preached his powerful sermon about sin, repentance, and God's forgiveness. At the end of the sermon, he announced that those who would like to serve the Lord should stay behind for a few minutes to fill out a form. I was in a hurry to leave since I was exhausted, but I filled out the form quickly and left.

As Father Zakaria and his team went through the forms, they hesitated over my application before deciding to accept me. They hesitated because Father Zakaria did not want to have additional conflicts with the Orthodox Patriarch by having Protestants on his team. I learned this when I came to know Father Zakaria personally while attending some of their discipleship sessions.

Now, as my mind was occupied with the planning for our annual celebration, an idea came to me. Why not invite Father Zakaria to be the speaker at that celebration? He accepted the invitation on the condition that it would not take place at a Protestant church. He did not want to be accused of being "Protestant" in his theology.

The next challenge was finding the right place. I started out by considering the Italian school in our area, but they did not accept. Then I went to the Good Shepherd Catholic school and met with the headmistress. Even though I explained to her fully that Father Zakaria would be presenting an evangelistic message, to my surprise and joy she accepted and even volunteered that the meeting could take place in the large church on campus rather than in the school hall. She even told us we could use their facilities free of charge.

Our youth group printed a brochure, and we used it to invite hundreds of high school students from our area in Cairo. On the day of the meeting, hundreds of students filled that very big church hall. After the singing, Father Zakaria preached a powerful message and gave an invitation to encounter Christ. Hundreds of students responded.

After the meeting, the headmistress of the Catholic school invited Father Zakaria and me to go to her office and have tea with some of the school nuns. There we learned that she and the nuns had fasted and prayed for three days in preparation for this meeting.

That night certain stereotypes and assumptions were broken to pieces in my mind. I used to think that Catholics in Egypt cared only for social work and did not give attention to evangelism. Yet this headmistress and the nuns had been fasting and praying for three days that the gospel would impact the lives of the high schoolers. Another misconception of mine was also demolished. I had thought that the Orthodox care only for traditions and the mass ceremony rather than the gospel, but here was an Orthodox priest preaching the gospel. During that historic evening, God healed me from denominational prejudice as I saw Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants working together to God's glory.

During the meeting, I had been surprised to see some of the Muslim students from the school where I worked. I found out later that Mahmoud had invited them. When I asked him why he invited Muslims to this "church" meeting, he said that it was not fair that he got to know Christ, but his beloved Muslims were left behind with no hope for salvation! I was challenged by Mahmoud. He was only a few months old in the Lord and yet he had a passion to carry the gospel to his Muslim friends. In fact, Mahmoud became so vocal about his faith that he was eventually expelled from the school.

Another time, I saw an opportunity to use a secular holiday as a way to bring Christians and Muslims together. Every March 21 in Egypt is Mother's Day. I wondered why we did not celebrate Mother's Day in our church. Couldn't it be an opportunity for evangelism? I made this suggestion to our pastor and elders, which caused a tense discussion. Some argued that Mother's Day was a social and

cultural event, so why would we turn it into a Christian celebration in the church? Still, after a long discussion, they gave me permission to try out this experiment.

After thinking and praying for some time, I decided to have an event at our church in which we would honor five Christian mothers and five Muslim mothers. (In those days, before the Arab Spring, hardly any Muslims came to events held at a church. After the Arab Spring of 2011-2012, it became quite common to see Muslims attending church services in Egypt.)

I went to the mosque nearest to our church and informed the imam at the mosque of our plan. I asked him if he would recommend a model mother from his mosque that we could honor. He said he would and that he and others from his mosque would attend.

Then I went to the headmistress of a secondary school for girls in our neighborhood and told her about the event. I asked if she would recommend two model mothers, a Muslim and a Christian. She promised she would and said she would be at the celebration. I did the same thing at the private evangelical school managed by our church, and I asked a local political leader to do the same. Our church chose the rest of the mothers, bringing us to a total of ten.

I went to the government office of the Secretary of Public Relations and suggested they send a team of videographers to record the event and broadcast it on national television. I also invited a famous worship leader to lead worship at the event, and we chose Christian songs that were inclusive enough for Muslims to understand and enjoy.

The day of the event, the church was packed, and many Muslims were in attendance. The time of worship was beautiful. Our Muslim guests loved the music and enjoyed listening to our pastor, Ikram Lami', preach from Proverbs 31:10, "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies."

I was astonished by how successful that event was. How had it happened that Muslims came to our church and enjoyed the worship and the sermon? How had

we managed to bring together a group of Muslims and Christians without any of the common friction and conflicts?

I wondered if similar events could save our beloved Egypt from sectarian strife and prejudice. How could the church live out 1 Corinthians 13 by reaching out and loving the Muslims around us?

## Chapter 8

### Understanding the Great Commission

With the passage of time, my understanding of the Great Commission deepened. In Galilee, after his resurrection, Jesus came to his disciples and said to them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Did Jesus really mean that his disciples should carry this Great Commission to every ethnicity around the globe? Did his disciples understand this mission? Did they start fulfilling it?

In Mark 16:15 Jesus said to his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” Did Christ mean that he wanted his disciples to carry his message even to the Gentiles?

What was the last thing Jesus said to his disciples just before he went to heaven? “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It is very clear that the scope of his mission was the whole world. The strategy was to start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

The disciples took the Great Commission very seriously and started spreading Jesus’s message in Jerusalem. In Acts 8 we see that the Christians were persecuted in Jerusalem, so most of them dispersed, except for the apostles who stayed in Jerusalem. Those who were dispersed carried the gospel to the Jews all over the region. In Antioch of Syria a strange phenomenon occurred. Not only did Jews respond to the message, but so did Gentiles. A “strange” church that included both Jews and Gentiles emerged. The leadership in Jerusalem heard about this strange phenomenon and sent Barnabas to deal with this unexpected



challenge. Barnabas quickly realized that the gifts of Paul, who was from Tarsus, were needed. So he left Antioch and went to Tarsus to persuade Paul to join him in the ministry at Antioch.

Shortly afterward, both Barnabas and Paul were commissioned by that small church in Antioch to go on a mission trip. It began in Cyprus and then on to what we know today as Turkey. During this mission trip, Barnabas created room for Paul to become the team leader. John Mark, who was part of this mission, quit while they were still in Cyprus and left the team.

Back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas reported to the church what God was doing on the mission field. Not long afterward, Paul, along with Silas, embarked on a second missionary journey. Another time, Paul sensed a call to what we today know as Greece. When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he was thinking that one day he would visit the church in Rome on his way to start a ministry in Spain, but God had other plans for him.

Was Jesus serious in commissioning his disciples to carry the gospel to the *world*? Did his disciples take him seriously? Yes!

As a church today, in our diversity of denominations, organizations, and mission agencies, are we committed to the Great Commission?

Jesus said to his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). How did the Father send Jesus? The eternal, uncreated Son of God stooped down and became a human being, fully God and fully man. He lived the cross as a lifestyle, which took him all the way to the point of death.

In his discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus said some things to his disciples that he continues saying to us today:

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you” (John 15:16).

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:4-6).

When these passages finally sank deep into my mind, I started to have a glimpse of God’s heart for people. God’s heart and desire is made clear in 1 Timothy 2:4: He wants “all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” We also see his heart in what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” As I paraphrase this text, I imagine Jesus saying: “Come to me, even those among you who have doubts and even those who are atheists, and I will reveal my Father to you.”

I realized that my responsibility before God is to share the gospel not only with Christians, but also with Muslims. Still, I wasn’t sure how to do this, and at times I was gripped by fear. I was afraid of failure, rejection, the undercover agents in Egypt, the laws of my country, the Muslim fundamentalists and political Islam, and prejudice against Christianity, among other things. These fears gripped my heart and paralyzed me.

But one day, I heard an African preach a sermon that assured me of God’s protection as we carry the message to the lost. I meditated on the Great Commission again:

- The command is to *go*.
- Jesus Christ promises he is with me always, to the very end of the age.

As I obey the command, I can hold tight and believe in the promise. All of a sudden, the fears that paralyzed me evaporated, and I was set free. I finally understood the Great Commission and gave my life to it. At the school where I worked, I started sharing the gospel without hesitation with students and teachers, even the Arabic literature teachers who were all Muslim. I spent extended time with them talking about the Lord and the Scriptures. In those discussions I got acquainted with the main issues and stumbling blocks that most Muslims face.

Among church people, I found that the hardest to relate to were the “religious legalists,” who thought they knew everything and did not need the gospel. They

were like the self-righteous Pharisees at the time of Christ. What a contrast to the Muslims, who were searching for God. Once they found him—more accurately, once they were found by him—they wholeheartedly followed him and quickly began to grow.

One time I asked Rashid, a famous Moroccan Christian apologist from a Muslim background, about the secret to his fast growth and maturity in Christ. His answer: “I was thirsty.” That reminded me of what Jesus said: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37-38).

## Chapter 9

### My First Bearded Friend

After one of our Thursday-night youth group meetings, as we were standing in the church courtyard talking and catching up with one another's news, I noticed a man with a beard who looked like a Muslim fundamentalist. He had just come into the courtyard through the main entrance. In those days, the 1970s, very few Muslim men grew beards. To do so indicated fundamentalism.

I was surprised when I saw him, and I went to ask him if he was looking for someone. He responded by saying that he was looking for the church patriarch. He said, "I am looking for the man responsible at the church, whether he is a priest or a pastor, someone big who can answer my questions." I told him that the office of the pastor was on the second floor, and I offered to take him upstairs, but I also told him that I would be happy to help him if I could.

He told me that he wanted something to read about Jesus. What joy came to my heart as we went together to the church sanctuary and I read to him the three chapters in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 that we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Although I had studied these chapters in depth and had memorized them, what a difference it was reading them to a thirsty Muslim. His name was Mamdouh.

Mamdouh was specially struck by these verses in Matthew 5:

- "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (5:5).
- "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment" (5:21-22).
- "You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (5:27-28).
- "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:44).

Mamdouh responded after we finished reading Matthew 5, "Truly this is God's Word! This is the most beautiful thing I have ever read!" I asked him whether this was the first time he had ever read any part of the Bible, and he said that it was. He expressed, though, the impossibility of living the teaching from Matthew 5. I agreed with him but told him that Jesus had lived those teachings day in and day out, and he could live them out in our hearts.

Of course, there was a big surprise on his face, and he asked me to continue reading. I started on Matthew 6, and he was disturbed by some of what we read: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others" (6:5). It was obvious to me at this point that Mamdouh was struggling. On Fridays in Egypt, many Muslims prayed the required ceremonial prayer in the streets, either because the mosques were full or just for convenience. Mamdouh did not like that public prayer could be considered hypocritical.

I continued reading what Christ said: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father [God], who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (6:6). At that, his face turned red with strong emotions, but we continued reading, moving on to 6:16-18: "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father [God], who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Now his face was very sad. Jesus was describing accurately what he and I knew about common and acceptable religious practices, such as public praying in public squares and public fasting for an entire month. We continued reading until we finished chapter 7. After we finished, he asked me for a copy, so I gave him the New Testament and invited him to come back.

From my experience, it is essential that a thirsty Muslim should read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Muslims tend to have a ladder mentality, always trying to climb a ladder to please and appease God. Reading the Sermon on the Mount attracts them to God's absolute standards while at the same time showing them our inability to climb the ladder by trying hard to please God.

The following week, Mamdouh came back to meet with me, and it looked like he had been reading in various places in the Gospels. This time he came with questions and arguments. One of his questions had to do with John 14:12: ““Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.””

He challenged me with the question, “Do you believe in Christ?” I said I did. Then he asked me whether I believed that I could do greater things than Christ did. I told him that each believer has a different gift, and each one uses the gifts that God has given to him. He challenged me again and told me not to run away from answering his question. I do not remember how I managed to finish the time together on that day.

I started going to Mamdouh’s apartment for our time together in the Scriptures. After one of those times, I told him about an important lecture that was going to be delivered by the Orthodox Patriarch that very evening at the Orthodox Cathedral. The topic was going to be on the Trinity, and I asked him whether he would like to go with me. He agreed to go to this open lecture for Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, and even Muslims.

When we arrived at the cathedral, I was surprised by how many Muslims were there. It was because the topic was of great importance to them. Believing in the divinity (deity) of Christ and in the Triune God were the biggest difficulties for Muslims on their journey to Christ, and they still are. The Patriarch, whose name was Pope Shenouda, was an eloquent speaker and had deep knowledge of both the Bible and the Qur’an. He had actually memorized many texts from the Qur’an.

That night Pope Shenouda delivered the most powerful lecture I have ever heard on the subject of the Trinity. He expounded the Scriptures and quoted from memory texts from the Qur’an that agreed with the Bible. I was sitting there feeling proud of what was presented and thinking that Mamdouh’s questions regarding the Trinity would be addressed through that lecture.

As Mamdouh and I were leaving, going down the stairs of the cathedral, Mamdouh shouted in my face, “Does this man [the Patriarch] believe in the Qur’an?” I told him that of course he does not believe in the Qur’an, but he believes in the Bible. Mamdouh then quickly asked, “Since he did not believe in the Qur’an, why did he quote it?” Quietly I thought to myself that personally, I

should not use the Qur'an in my evangelism to Muslims. That was my personal preference as a result of that experience.

Although Mamdouh was confused by the lecture, I know of other Muslims whose issues with the Trinity were resolved after listening to a recording of that same lecture. So should believers use the Qur'an in conversations with Muslims? Believers who come from Arab Muslim backgrounds already know a great deal of the Qur'an, and it is very natural for them to quote it to support what the Scriptures teach. In my case, however, I come from a Christian background, and it is not my personal preference to use the Qur'an in my evangelism.

I did not see Mamdouh for a long time after that. He vanished completely until one day I saw him on a street in Cairo. His beard was shaved, and I asked him about it. He told me that he left the Muslim Brotherhood, which wanted to indoctrinate him and force him to stop thinking and asking questions.

I have not seen Mamdouh since that day, and I wonder at times whether I was too hard on him. Mamdouh was truly a Muslim seeking after God, and for sure God is far more concerned about him than I am. I believe that God brought another person to take him further on his journey toward Christ, and perhaps another and another until Mamdouh had his own encounter with Christ. Mamdouh was searching for God, but it was really God who was searching for Mamdouh. My path might cross Mamdouh's again someday, but even if that does not happen, my hope is that I will see him in heaven.

## Chapter 10

### Two Special Friends

In this chapter, I will introduce you to two special friends of mine whose lives eventually intersected. That story will unfold in the following two chapters.

I have four younger sisters, whom I became responsible for. After graduating from teachers' college, my youngest sister Nabila was appointed by our government to one of the public schools in Giza. This Cairo suburb was a far distance from our apartment in Shobra, another part of Cairo. Because of the distance, at times she had to stay overnight at the school hostel. For a long time, I prayed that somehow, she would find a school in our area, and God answered our prayer after a year. She was transferred to teach at a model school called Gamal Al Deen al Afghani school. This gave me peace of mind.

After her first week as a new teacher in this primary school, my sister Nabila brought home a copy of the New Testament, given to her by the school headmaster, Mr. Omar. I asked her if he was Christian, and she said no, he was actually a Muslim who had been to Mecca for the pilgrimage! A Muslim who does this earns the title *Hajj*, or *Hagg*, which is like an honorary spiritual doctorate. It surprised me that a man who had earned that title was still open minded and loving toward Christians.

Mr. Omar was given a carton full of copies of the New Testament by the Gideons. He distributed them to the Christian teachers at the school and to some of the Christian students. (Remember that whoever is not a Muslim in Egypt is a Christian, although the great majority are nominal Christians.)

Several weeks later, my sister Nabila came home with the news that Mr. Omar allowed the Christian students to use the library as their classroom during religion class. Every primary, middle, and high school student in Egypt takes religion as part of the curriculum. Religion schoolbooks are endorsed by the government. Muslim students, being the majority, stay in the classroom for their session, which



is taught by a Muslim teacher. Christian students at that school leave the classroom to find another place for their instruction, which is taught by a Christian teacher. At Nabila's school, there was no vacant classroom for the Christian students, so they had to have their class outside in the courtyard. The Muslim headmaster considered that to be unjust, and he provided a place in the library for the Christian students to use.

He also began sending his youngest daughter Zuzu to our apartment for private tutoring lessons with Nabila. Although I had not met Mr. Omar, I respected him, loved him, and loved his young daughter Zuzu.

One day, Nabila came home and said that Mr. Omar was coming to visit us the next day, Saturday, January 6, 1979, to congratulate us on our Christmas celebration. Egyptian Christians, whether Orthodox or Protestant, celebrate Christmas on January 7. (Christians in the West follow the Julian calendar, while Egyptian Christians follow the Gregorian calendar.)

At 7 the next evening, Mr. Omar, along with three teachers from his school, arrived at our apartment. One was Christian, and the others were Muslims. Mr. Omar was in his early fifties, a handsome man with a smile. Of course, we wanted to honor them by insisting on offering them tea and Christmas sweets and inviting them to stay as long as possible. Mr. Omar told us that he and the other teachers who came with him planned on visiting every Christian teacher who taught at his school to congratulate them on Christmas.

Their time was limited, but just before their departure, Mr. Omar promised me that he would come back alone in the near future and we would have time to get to know one another. He thanked my sister Nabila for the good job she was doing with his daughter Zuzu, and I communicated my respect and appreciation to him for the way he treated the Christians at his school.

### A Second New Friend

I first met Nabeel and Barbara Jabbour in Alexandria in 1974, one year before they moved from Lebanon to Egypt. They were on a short-term mission trip to confirm God's calling on their lives to move to Egypt. We met at a conference

organized by pastor Labib Kaldas. At that conference, I noticed that at every break, Nabeel spent time with eager people, talking with them about the why, what, and how of studying the Bible, having a quiet time, and sharing the gospel. I did not miss any of those extra sessions during the break times. Nabeel and I started our connection at that time.

A year later, in September 1975, before the Lebanese civil war started, Nabeel and his wife Barbara, along with their three-year-old son, Farid, moved to Cairo to an apartment in Heliopolis. Joining them from Lebanon were Fouad and Nadim.

One of my early memories of Nabeel is going to visit him at his apartment and asking him if he would disciple me and some of my friends from our church youth group. He asked me if I had gotten the permission of my pastor before I came with this request. I told him I hadn't. He insisted on me having the approval of my pastor before he would start this discipleship group. That surprised me, and I did not like it, but it told me something about this man.

We received the approval of our pastor, and the discipleship group at Nabeel's home began. The group included young men who would one day become leaders in our church.

Over the years, Nabeel and I became very good friends. His imprint on my life marks me. When I was considering marriage, Mervat and I spent time with Nabeel and Barbara. Later, we joined a group of engaged couples at their home, where for weeks we studied how to get ready for marriage. Another time, we joined another group of young married couples to study biblical principles of raising children and living as a Christian family.

A few years later, Nabeel and his leadership team, of which I was now a part, planned for three very important weekend conferences that were to take place at the Evangelical Seminary in Cairo. (Presbyterians in Egypt are referred to as the Evangelicals.) Disciples came from Alexandria and Minya to join us for those conferences. The first one was about commitment to Christ; the second, commitment to the Word of God; and the third, commitment to the Great Commission. All of us were greatly shaped by those three conferences.

Nabeel and Barbara were planning to stay in Egypt for the rest of their lives, but God had other plans for them. In September 1990, Nabeel was expelled from Egypt, blacklisted, and given 14 days to leave the country. The main reason for his expulsion was a book exposing Nabeel's ministry among Muslims, written by an Egyptian Christian.

During those two weeks, he and his wife received a job offer to work with an Egyptian church in Toronto, Canada. They assumed that this was God's plan for their lives. They were advised, though, to go to Colorado Springs in the United States for six months on their way to Canada. During those six months they were advised to stay in Colorado Springs and have a global ministry rather than a ministry to only Egyptians.

They, along with their two sons, struggled after their departure from Egypt. They missed their Egyptian friends and the grassroots ministry they used to have. Barbara, originally from England, was willing to leave her country and go to Lebanon and then to Egypt, but she did not feel a call to go to the United States. One morning during her time in the Word, God used Jeremiah 29:4-7 to call her to a ministry of prayer for the rest of her life. Since then, this has been her primary calling. I remember how for years she prayed for our daughter Sarah, who was having difficulty with her schoolwork, especially mathematics. Barbara, along with one of her prayer partners, prayed for Sarah for years, and now our daughter has a PhD in mathematics! Barbara has also prayed for the ministry in Egypt for many years.

Nabeel and his family came to Egypt in 1975, not to start an organization, but to plant a vision and to nourish a movement. I was his "Timothy." During the two weeks before his departure, we had many meetings as a leadership team, and I was asked to lead the team in his absence.

For nine years, Nabeel continued to coach the ministry in Egypt from the United States. He repeatedly traveled to Cyprus, where he and I would meet together to discuss the important issues of our ministry in Egypt. At times, the whole leadership team would fly to Cyprus to have extended time in Bible study with

Nabeel, getting answers from the Scriptures to our burning issues. In 2000, Nabeel handed the baton to those who are continuing with the vision.

## Chapter 11

### A Headmaster's Curiosity

During Mr. Omar's Christmas visit to our apartment, I had told him that I was eager to get to know him better. He assured me that he would visit me again. Weeks after that, on a Tuesday evening, I was having Bible study with a discipleship group at our apartment. The doorbell rang, and when I opened the door, I was surprised to find Mr. Omar.

He could see it was an inconvenient time for the visit and apologized for coming without notice. I invited him in to join us in whatever time was left in our Bible study session, and I introduced him to the group. When we finished our Bible study, he told us how much he enjoyed the time with us and wished he had come earlier to be with us from the beginning. I invited him to come back and join us the following week.

The following week he came right on time and joined our group of seven young men. During the Bible study he participated in some of our discussion. In those days, we wrote the verses that we were memorizing on small cards and kept them in leather verse packs. Mr. Omar volunteered to write for each one of us the verse that we were currently memorizing with his beautiful Arabic calligraphy. That day we discovered that before he became the headmaster of the school, he taught the Arabic literature course, and he was an excellent calligrapher. He joined us for a few sessions, and he continued to amaze us with his humility and open-mindedness.

In one of those sessions, one of the men asked Mr. Omar whether he had ever considered becoming a Christian because he enjoyed studying the Bible so much. At this, Mr. Omar became angry and told him that he did not want to commit high treason by leaving his religion and culture and becoming a Christian. The young man and I apologized profusely, but the atmosphere had definitely become tense. I managed to quickly finish the session.

Afterward, I asked Mr. Omar to stay for a couple of minutes because I wanted to talk with him alone. I apologized to him again and told him I thought it best for him not to join our group anymore, but to meet with me alone on Friday mornings. He agreed, and we began meeting regularly on Fridays at 10 just before he went to the mosque for prayer.

On the following Friday, I prepared to talk with him about the oneness of God. When I asked him what he thought about that subject, he amazed me by the depth of his understanding and by how much he agreed with me. I found out on that day that Mr. Omar had been on a long journey toward Christ, and God had been using various people in his life to bring him to that point. Some people sow with tears, and others reap with joy.

During the next Friday session, I asked him about his views regarding Jesus Christ. He told me about his Qur'anic beliefs, that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, that he healed the blind and those with leprosy, that he raised people from the dead, and that he will come back to earth as the Sign of the Hour to announce the beginning of the judgment process. He told me he did not believe that Jesus was the son of God, but that he was a great prophet.

Following that session, I decided I should invite my friend Nabeel Jabbour to join us. Nabeel loved Muslims, and the Great Commission was very much on his heart. Nabeel had disciplesd me over the years, and by inviting him to join me and Mr. Omar on those Fridays, he could help me in my ministry and God would use us both. I asked Mr. Omar's permission to invite my Lebanese friend Nabeel, and he welcomed the suggestion.

On the next Friday, Nabeel suggested that we start our time together in prayer. He asked God to bless our time as we read and searched the Scriptures. Then Nabeel asked Mr. Omar about prayer in Islam. The headmaster explained about *Salat* and *Du'a*. *Salat* is the five-times-a-day ceremonial prayer offered up at dawn, noon, midafternoon, late afternoon, and in the evening. The *Du'a* is spontaneous prayer that devout Muslims pray during the day.

Next, we began reading Acts 10 together. Nabeel chose that chapter as a starting point because of the similarity between Mr. Omar and Cornelius. We read the whole chapter but focused on Cornelius in the first ten verses.

- Cornelius was a Centurion, the captain of 100 Roman soldiers who were occupying the Jewish country in Palestine.
- He was a Gentile and was considered unclean by the Jewish community.
- He and his family were devout and God fearing.
- He gave generously to the poor.
- He prayed to God regularly.

In spite of these beautiful qualities that Cornelius had, he still needed to listen to a message for deeper understanding. Cornelius pleased God, and God answered his prayer by sending him an angel with clear commands. The command was to send for Peter, the Jew, who was staying at a specific address in the town of Joppa. Immediately Cornelius obeyed by sending two servants and a devout soldier to invite Peter to come to Cornelius's home in Caesarea.

After learning all we could about Cornelius, Nabeel asked us to identify the similarities between Cornelius and Mr. Omar. The headmaster measured up well, because all the positive qualities that Cornelius had, Mr. Omar had too. In addition, Mr. Omar twice had traveled to Mecca for the pilgrimage. At the end of that session, Mr. Omar was elated as he saw the beauty of the Scriptures and discovered a Gentile leader like himself in the Bible.

In our next session, Nabeel suggested that we read Acts 10 again, this time focused on Peter the Jew, who was a believer in the Messiah. We talked about the Jews vs. Gentiles issue while focusing on Peter.

- Peter was visiting the home of a Jewish believer in Christ named Simon in the city of Caesarea. Simon was a tanner, and the smell at that house must have been unbearable. At noon, Peter went up to the flat roof of the house to breathe some clean air and pray. He became hungry as the smell of food cooking downstairs reached him, and he fell into a trance and had a vision.

- Peter was a Jew who was indoctrinated by the rabbis of his day to believe that Gentiles were inferior, unclean people and that God did not care for them the way he cared for the Jews.
- In his vision, Peter saw heaven open and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of animals, including pigs.
- Peter heard a voice telling him to eat this food, including pork.
- Peter was shocked and replied that he had never eaten unclean food. The voice answered, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (verse 15). This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken back to heaven.
- After the vision, Peter wondered what God was saying to him. Just then, the two servants and the soldier sent by Cornelius arrived and knocked at the tanner’s door, asking for Peter.
- While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, “Three men are looking for you. Get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”
- Peter went downstairs, met the three men Cornelius had sent, and invited them into the house.
- For Peter, the leader of the Jewish community who had put his faith in the Messiah, to visit the home of a Gentile was a risky proposition. What if those Gentiles put their faith in the Messiah? What would he do? Should they convert to Judaism first and be circumcised before believing in Christ? Or could they enter the Kingdom of God directly, without becoming Jews? Would the other leaders in Jerusalem agree with that?
- To be on the safe side, Peter took six Jewish believers with him to Cornelius’s house. They would serve as witnesses. If seven people witnessed an event, according to the Old Testament, it had credibility. (The number of the witnesses is not mentioned in Acts 10 but appears later in 11:12.)



It was not only Cornelius who needed to be transformed, but also Peter, the messenger. Nabeel and I shared with Mr. Omar how we had been, like Peter, prejudiced against Muslims, but God was transforming our lives.

## Chapter 12

### A Long Journey Toward Christ

Mr. Omar, the headmaster, was on a journey toward Christ, and our study of Acts 10 would be a key step in that journey.

In our next session, we focused on the *message* Peter preached at the home of Cornelius. Peter's message was not a typical Greek logical syllogism of presenting the gospel: God is holy, man is sinful, there is a penalty for sin, Christ paid the penalty, if we believe in Christ, then we will be saved. Instead, Peter basically described Jesus and his ministry. We examined every phrase Peter used, cross referencing with the four Gospel accounts of Christ's life. We looked at:

- how God sent a message to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.
- the beginning of Jesus's ministry in Galilee.
- how God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power.
- how Jesus went around healing and casting out demons.
- how the Jews, along with the Romans, killed Jesus by hanging him on a cross.
- how God raised Jesus from the dead, and people later saw him and ate with him.

We must have spent several weeks looking at Acts 10 and making cross references in the Gospel accounts. In one of the sessions, we read the full story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection in two of the Gospels.

Following our study of Acts 10, we continued our sessions with Mr. Omar by going slowly through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.

On one of those Friday sessions, Mr. Omar showed up depressed. We asked him what was wrong, and with shame on his face, he told us that he'd had a big fight with his wife the previous day and that he had beaten her. He told us how all his daughters were angry with him and how the atmosphere at home was so thick with tension you could cut it with a knife. No one at home wanted to talk to him.

Nabeel asked Mr. Omar whether his family knew he was reading the Bible with us, and his response was “of course.” He told us how from the first time we studied together from Acts 10, he went home and called his wife and six daughters together to read the text with them and explain what it meant. Nabeel and I were in awe. We did not have a clue that he was having evangelistic Bible study with his family even before he knew the Lord.

On that particular Friday we were studying Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus told his disciples they were the light of the world. Nabeel asked Mr. Omar how his wife and daughters would think of Jesus and the Bible if the headmaster had treated his wife so badly by beating her.

Mr. Omar left our apartment that day quietly and with a contrite, repentant attitude. The following Friday, he came rejoicing. He kept repeating the phrase “a miracle happened,” and we thought that he’d had an encounter with Christ. Of course, we were very eager to know what happened. He told us how he had gone home after our time together last week and called his wife and daughters together.

He told us, “You know how it is very hard for an Arab man to apologize to his wife, especially in front of the children. In spite of that, I apologized to my wife and asked her if she would be willing to forgive me. She forgave me right away, and the atmosphere in our home changed instantly. Then I told my wife and daughters that the reason I apologized was because of what I had read in Matthew 5. I opened the New Testament to Matthew 5 and, as a family, we looked at that chapter in a new light as we saw how it was transforming my life. That was the first time in all our married life that I apologized to my wife in the presence of our daughters.”

That day, Nabeel and I learned valuable lessons.

- Rather than focusing on an individual extracted from his family, we should relate to the individual as someone vitally connected to their family. Our ministry to the individual should not be undercover, but everything should

be in the open. With this in place, the individual can study the Bible with us without shame and without violating his or her conscience.

- People can do evangelistic Bible study with those around them even though they are not yet born again.
- Cleaning the channels of relationships by being humble and asking for forgiveness prepares people to desire to read the Bible and to love Jesus.

Mr. Omar, Nabeel, and I continued in our sessions together week after week, until one day my sister Nabila told me that there was a possibility Mr. Omar might not come that day. She told me she had heard him say the day before that he might go to his hometown to facilitate the reconciliation of a young Muslim couple who were determined to get divorced.

Nabeel, as usual, drove a long way from his apartment and arrived for our time together that morning. I told him the devil was at work and most likely he would prevent Mr. Omar from making our session that day. Then Nabeel asked me, “Which is more important, to spend the ninety minutes talking with Mr. Omar about Jesus, or to spend the ninety minutes talking to Jesus about Mr. Omar?” Of course, my answer was that prayer was more important. So we prayed for him, his wife and daughters, and the mission of reconciliation that he went to perform. In our prayer we tried to envision what it was like to convince that young couple to stay married rather than get divorced.

The next Friday, Nabeel and I were very eager to find out what had happened. When Mr. Omar arrived, he apologized profusely. He felt bad because he did not tell us in advance that he would miss our session. We assured him that we had spent that time praying for him. He told us how he had been up until 2 a.m. going back and forth between the two extended families of the young man and woman, until finally the young couple decided to reconcile and not get divorced. Nabeel took us back to Matthew 5 and read verse 9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” We told Mr. Omar how Jesus saw him as a peacemaker.

When he arrived that day, Mr. Omar had expected us to be disappointed in him for missing the session. Instead, he found out that we were praying for him and rejoicing that he was functioning as a peacemaker and that Jesus thought of him so highly.

We met with Mr. Omar in Bible study for two and a half years, except for during the summers. We started in Acts 10, looking up cross references in the four Gospels, then we went slowly through Matthew 5, 6, and 7. After the Sermon on the Mount, we went through the Gospel of John very slowly.

When we reached John 3 and the story of Nicodemus, we thought that God might use that particular chapter deeply in Mr. Omar's life, but that did not happen. We continued reading the Gospel of John until we reached the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead in chapter 11, where we covered the following points:

- Jesus considered Lazarus, Mary, and Martha his close friends. It seems that he and his disciples must have visited them repeatedly.
- When Lazarus got sick, Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus. They knew that Jesus could heal their brother if he arrived soon enough, and they were confident enough in his love for them that they believed he would leave everything and come before it was too late.
- When Jesus heard the news about Lazarus being sick, he did not immediately go to heal him, but instead he waited for two days. Why the delay?
- Jesus knew that Mary and Martha believed that he could heal, but it was beyond their faith to believe that he could raise people from the dead.
- Because Jesus could trust Mary and Martha, he chose to use the difficult experience with their brother Lazarus as an opportunity to reveal himself as the resurrection and the life.
- By the time Jesus arrived, there was weeping and wailing. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, and it was too late for Jesus to heal him. Lazarus's body must have started decomposing.
- Death, the consequence of the Fall, is an ugly reality. Jesus grieved and wept over the death of his good friend Lazarus.

- Of course, Mary and Martha were very disappointed that Jesus did not come earlier. They did not know he had a bigger purpose—to use their situation as an opportunity for a greater revelation of who he was.
- The tomb was a cave, and a large stone had been laid across the entrance. Jesus ordered that the stone be rolled away. Martha was shocked by that request, but Jesus said to her, “‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’” (verse 40).
- They rolled away the stone, and Jesus looked up and said, “‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’ Then Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go’” (11:41-44).

As the three of us were sharing insights from this chapter, I remembered a sermon that I heard our pastor preach on John 11. The pastor talked about the stone laid across the entrance of the cave and asked the congregation to consider what keeps us from being raised spiritually from the dead and coming out of the cave? Was there a stone quenching our faith, and if so, what could that stone be?

I shared with Mr. Omar and Nabeel the outline of the pastor’s sermon. We considered what stone might be preventing us from experiencing God’s love in a special way. When we Mr. Omar about his stone, he told us that in his case it was *fear*.

The following week, after Nabeel had prayed, Mr. Omar said he wanted to pray. We had been meeting with him for many months, and he had never prayed out loud with us. But on that day, he prayed, “Thank you, Lord Jesus, for raising me from the dead as you have raised Lazarus. Thank you that you entered my heart.”

Nabeel and I could not believe our ears. We asked Mr. Omar what had happened. With obvious joy he told us: “Last week, after our regular session, I went home and turned to John 11 and read that chapter a second and a third time. Then I

knelt down, and I prayed and asked Jesus to remove the big stone of fear from my life and asked him to raise me from the dead. I asked Jesus to forgive me for my sin, and I responded to Jesus's knocking. I opened my heart and asked him to be my Savior and Lord."

Nabeel and I had waited for this day for a very long time—two and a half years, to be exact. We congratulated him and shared some truths with him to help in his new relationship with Christ. Among the truths we shared with him were these:

- According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, since our friend was "in Christ," he was a new creation with a new spiritual DNA. If we had known Bruce McNicol's butterfly analogy at the time, we would have told him that his new DNA made him a saint. (In his book *The Cure*, McNicol writes, "If we brought a caterpillar to a biologist and asked him to analyze it and describe its DNA, he would tell us, 'I know this looks like a caterpillar to you. But scientifically, according to every test, including DNA, this is fully and completely a butterfly.'") The caterpillar is a butterfly in essence; it will one day display the behavior and attributes of a butterfly. Mr. Omar's spiritual DNA made him a saint because he was "in Christ."
- We looked at Revelation 3:20, where Jesus stands at the door and knocks. If a person hears his voice and opens the door, Jesus will come in. We talked about the assurance he could have because he had opened his heart to Christ, and that Christ would never leave him.
- Then we looked at John 1:12, a promise that those who receive Jesus have the right to become God's sons and daughters. Muslims believe that human beings are servants of God. Mr. Omar was overwhelmed with joy when the Holy Spirit witnessed to his spirit that he was no more a slave or a servant, but he had become God's child.

A couple of weeks later, Mr. Omar took us to his school to show us the classrooms where he had written in beautiful calligraphy the Islamic phrase, "In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate," in the shape of a cross. He also introduced us to one of the nominal Christian teachers at his school. To our amazement, he told the teacher how he loved him as his own son, but the teacher needed to

surrender his life to Christ and become a real Christian by choice, not simply by birth. The teacher looked at him in amazement. He did not expect a Muslim headmaster to tell him that he needed to surrender his life to Christ!

During one of our times together, Mr. Omar shared with us how God had used various people in his life on his journey to Christ. When he was young, his parents had an Orthodox neighbor whom they loved and trusted. Then, much later, when he became headmaster of the school, a Protestant pastor came to his home and asked him if he could use his apartment once a week to have a Sunday-school type class for the children in the building. None of the nominal Christian families in the building were willing to open their apartment, so the pastor had asked a Muslim, and, amazingly, he was willing to do it. Mr. Omar wanted his daughters to listen to the Bible stories, so he was willing to make his home a “Sunday school.” That activity continued week after week until the pastor tried to witness to Mr. Omar and asked him to convert to Christianity. Mr. Omar became angry and threatened to report the pastor to the secret police if he continued to proselytize. The classes were no longer held in his home. But then God used my sister Nabila as a Christ-like example in the way she cared for Zuzu, his daughter, and loved Mr. Omar’s other daughters and his wife.

Mr. Omar had no doubts about his identity. He knew that he was a child of God. He knew Christ was his Lord and Savior. But he did not see himself as a “Christian.” He saw himself as a cultural Muslim, born into Islam, who was fully surrendered to Christ. A year after he surrendered to Christ, Mr. Omar died of cancer. That was many years ago, but Nabeel and I long to see him again in heaven.

Mr. Omar came to know Christ after two and a half years of Bible study. He remained relationally connected with his family and his Muslim friends. In contrast, Mahmoud, from Chapter 6, came to know Christ in one day and began calling himself a Christian. God uses a diversity of approaches to bring people to Christ.



## Chapter 13

### A New Job

In one of my visits with Nabeel, I asked him what he thought about me changing jobs. There was a possibility for me to be employed at a German steel company, Fero Metalic, in Cairo. Two of my friends from church worked there, and because the CEO loved and highly respected them, they were able to pave the way for others. I did not have the needed experience, nor was I bilingual, so it was a miracle that I was even considered for this position, the director of storage. I would be responsible for tracking all the steel that went in and out of the company.

The reason I wanted to talk with Nabeel was that I wanted to make sure this opportunity was from the Lord and was not merely my own desire to make more money. At that time, I was very busy in the ministry at our church. My current job at the school took only four hours a day, so the rest of my day was filled with church responsibilities and activities. The believers I mentored and discipled were serving in the Sunday school, the middle-school youth group, and the high-school youth group. I was training a man in leading the university group, and I myself was leading the young adults' group. Although I was not an elder at that time, whenever the pastor met with the elders, they wanted me to attend. I knew most of the church congregation and was familiar with the majority of the church activities.

If I moved to the German company, this would have to change. I would work from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., including the overtime expected, and I would have a 90-minute commute each way. I would be gone from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., leaving little time for other things.

The German company had thousands of people working in it, and perhaps 95 percent of them were Muslims. I shared my concerns with Nabeel. It would be difficult to leave the church leaders I was training, even though I knew they were ready to carry the responsibility on their own. I wondered, if I accepted this new job, what my ministry would be.

Nabeel asked me a question that brought a major shift in my thinking. He asked, “Could evangelism at the company be your new ministry?” This was an unexpected question. I thought that Nabeel would warn me against the love of money and about the danger of leaving my church activities. I thought he would tell me that leaving my current job at the school would be a mistake, because I would never find another job that only took four hours a day. I thought he would warn me against being immersed in an environment that was 95 percent Muslim.

Nabeel then asked me another question I was not expecting. He said: “Samuel, are you planning to get married one of those days?” I told him that I would love to get married. He asked, “Can you ever get married with the salary you are making now?” My response to him was “never.” Then he encouraged me to consider this as an amazing opportunity and to pray about it. It did not take long before I decided to accept the new job, knowing that it was nothing short of a miracle that it was even being offered to me.

When I submitted my resignation at the school, the Muslim headmaster was very sad to see me go, but he wished me luck in my new job. I said my farewells to my Muslim colleagues, and I could sense their deep love. I knew that I was going to miss them. We had spent much time together during our workday breaks. I knew that the days of drinking tea, socializing, and reading newspapers during work would soon vanish.

To get to my new job, I rode a company bus with about 50 other people. The first time I boarded the bus, I greeted the other passengers by saying “good morning.” No one responded to my greeting. Then I began to notice that at every bus stop, people would get on the bus and greet others with the Muslim greeting, “*asalamu alykum*” (peace to you). All the Muslim passengers would respond back: “*wa alykumu salam wa rahmatu laahi wa barkatuh*” (and peace to you as well and God’s mercy and blessings). After two days of observing this phenomenon, I decided to use the Muslim greetings from then on.

I walked to the bus stop with a determined new mindset. I told myself that I was going to serve the Lord at this company starting at 6 a.m. on the bus. The company and its bus were my new place for ministry. At the bus stop there was a

friend of mine from my church, who had also been hired at the company. When the bus arrived, half full of people, my friend got on first and said good morning, but no one responded to his greeting. No one wanted him to sit next to them, either, so he walked to the back of the bus and sat alone. When I got on the bus, I greeted the people with a confident *“asalamu alaykum.”* Everyone responded in unison, *“wa alykumu salam wa rahmatu laahi wa barkatuh.”* People smiled at me and made space for me to sit with them.

At every bus stop that followed, when people got on the bus and greeted us with *“asalamu alaykum,”* I joined with all the Muslims in replying in the expected way. In just a few minutes on that day, my friend from church and I communicated a great deal about ourselves.

My first week of work was exhausting. I had to stand and walk all over the company all day long, directing huge cranes. What a contrast to my work at the school, where I had plenty of time to drink tea, read the newspaper, and socialize with my colleagues. Now I got up early and returned home at 6 p.m., wiped out. My consolation was the big paycheck I was getting at the end of the month, which was four times the salary I had earned at the school.

Physical exhaustion was not the only issue with this new job. My spiritual disciplines were also being affected, especially my time in the Word of God. I used to have what we call a “quiet time,” where I would read the Bible and pray every morning before going to the school where I worked. With my new job, I was already getting up very early in the morning just to get to work, and if I tried to read the Bible in the evenings, I found myself falling asleep. As Nabeel and I talked about this during one of our regular times together on Fridays, he suggested that I have my quiet time on the bus, and I liked his suggestion.

The next morning on the bus, while sitting next to a Muslim colleague whom I did not know, I opened my New Testament and started to quietly read in the Gospel of Mark. I was a few minutes into it when the man sitting next to me started peeking at what I was reading. In annoyance, I said silently to God, “Lord, can’t I have a few minutes on my own?” Then I quickly asked the Lord to forgive me, as I considered the possibility that this man might be eager to learn about Jesus. I

turned to him and told him that I was reading the *Injil*, the Qur'anic name for the New Testament. I explained that it was a section that covers the miracles of Christ, and I asked him if he would like to join me in reading. He said yes! So that morning I had my quiet time with a Muslim. My quiet time problem was solved. Every day on the way to work, I tried to read my Bible. At times I did it alone; at other times, it started out as a quiet time and ended up as evangelism.

I told Nabeel how my quiet time problem was resolved, but since I started my new job, I did not have a chance to review the Bible verses I was memorizing. We talked about this together, and I decided to dedicate the 10 a.m. break to reviewing my verses. Nabeel asked me how I could do this when I was always with other people, but I assured him that it would not be a problem. I even thought that I could ask my Muslim friends to help me by checking my accuracy and making sure I wasn't making any mistakes in my review. Nabeel was surprised by this thought and wondered if it was a wise idea. What if Muslims got offended by this request? I assured him it would not be a problem. I told him it would be a quick way of finding out who was openminded and who was not.

The next day during our 10 a.m. break, I got out my verse pack and asked the Muslim colleague next to me if he would help me. I explained in great detail about the verses and why it was important for me to review them accurately. I asked him if he would point out the mistakes I was making as I recited the verses to him. He took the responsibility very seriously. Every time I made a mistake, he corrected me and told me to repeat the verse five times. I had never reviewed my verses as thoroughly as I did that day.

Another time I handed the verse pack to a different Muslim colleague sitting next to me and started telling him about the verses from the Bible. As soon as he realized that he was holding Bible verses in his hands, he dropped the verse pack down to the floor and said, "Forgive me, Lord, I got defiled." I was shocked by his reaction, but from that day on I started observing him and praying for him.

My place of work had indeed become my place of ministry.

## Chapter 14

### Becoming All Things to All People

Ramadan, the month of fasting, fell that year in the middle of August. Muslims follow the lunar calendar, and as a result, their months are shorter than ours. Ramadan, then, slowly revolves around the calendar. When this month of fasting comes in the winter, it is relatively easy. Muslims fast from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, and in the winter, the days are shorter and not so hot. In the summer, though, fasting is much more challenging, especially when it comes to thirst.

On the first day of Ramadan, like all the Christians in the company, I went into a snack room at 10, noon, and 3, where we ate and drank freely. We did close the door behind us so we weren't so obvious to our Muslim colleagues who were fasting. Still, they stood outside the closed door and resented us.

Even on the first day of Ramadan, I did not feel good about what I was doing. I decided that from the next day on, I was going to fast the month of Ramadan with my Muslim co-workers. Traditionally, Muslims who fast Ramadan wake up before sunrise to eat and drink, fast all day long, and then break their fast at sunset. I did not want to get up at 4:30 in the morning to stuff myself. I also did not see a reason to wait until 8 p.m. to eat when I got home from work at 6. I am not a Muslim. I wanted to be *like* Muslims to win them to Christ, but I didn't need to follow their same schedule. I decided to eat just before I went to work at 6 a.m. and as soon as I arrived back home at 6 p.m.

On my first day of fasting, Abdul Samad, a man who worked under my supervision, came to me with a glass of tea—Egyptians almost always drink their tea in glasses rather than cups—as he did every day. I told him to take it away because we were in the month of Ramadan. He was surprised and told me that Ramadan did not apply to me. He encouraged me again to drink the tea, but I refused. Soon word got out that Samuel Fawzi, the Christian, was fasting the month of Ramadan because he loved Muslims.

Another day during a break, one of my Muslim friends asked me in front of all the others whether I was fasting just like them, from sunrise to sunset. I said that I was not, but that I fasted from the moment I left my apartment until I arrived back home in the evening. Another friend wondered if that was an Orthodox fast. I told him that when the Orthodox fast, they abstain from certain foods, but they do not abstain from fluids. Another man wondered if that was a Protestant fast. I told them that Protestants are not required to fast.

They asked me why, then, was I fasting. This gave me the opportunity to explain the incarnation of Christ. Because Jesus loved us, he came down to our planet to reveal to us what God was like. He did not throw us his message from heaven like a basketball, hoping that we would catch it. He became one of us. He visited our planet and became fully human while remaining fully God.

One particular day of Ramadan was extremely hot. I was standing outside in the sun, busy with one of the tasks my job required. My clothes were soaked with sweat. I must have become dehydrated because, suddenly, I almost fainted. A Muslim engineer named Muhsin was looking out from the window of his air-conditioned office. He saw me and ran out to bring me into his office. A group of others came into the room to see what had happened. The engineer quickly got a cold 7 Up from the fridge, opened it, and gave it to me to drink. He said, "Samuel, we know that you love us. We want you to break the fast and drink right now."

Why did I fast alongside them in Ramadan? For the same reason I greeted people with "*asalamu alaykum*" and started my letters to Muslims with the opening Qur'anic statement: "*Bismilaah Al-Rahman ar-rahim*" (In the name of God the merciful and compassionate).<sup>1</sup> I had learned from the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

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<sup>1</sup> Here are some additional phrases that help me connect and build bridges with Muslims:

- *Asalamu alaykum* (Peace to you).
- *Wa alaykumu salam* (And peace to you as well).

“Though I am free and belong to now one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Jesus became like us, and Paul followed his example.

Paul was a free man (see John 8:36) who was not obligated to anyone but Christ. Yet Paul was willing to become *like* a Jew to win the Jews. He did not go back to Judaism, but he became *like* a Jew to win the Jews. In every city he went to, Paul started out in the synagogue with the Jews, announcing to them the good news that the Messiah had come, and he was Jesus of Nazareth. The only place where this did not hold true was in Philippi, because there was no synagogue there. The Jews met by the riverside, instead.

Does that mean that Paul refused to eat pork, even though he knew that the dietary laws from Leviticus 7 were no longer applicable to him? I personally believe that although he was a free man, Paul did not eat pork so that he would not be a stumbling block to the Jews (see 1 Corinthians 8:13). His motivation to become like a Jew was not a desire to please people and avoid conflict. His motive was to build bridges rather than erect walls and barriers. As he taught the Jews in

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- *Al hamdu lillaah* (Thanks to God).
  - *Subhanalaah* (Praise God).
  - *Bismilaah Rahman Rahim* (In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate).
  - *Masha Allah* (That is what God has willed).
  - *Insha Allah* (If God wills).

the synagogues, he started with the Old Testament but steadily climaxed his teaching with the good news about Christ.

We see this illustrated in Acts 13, when Paul entered the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. We see in verses 16-19 how Paul summarized several centuries of history. Then he summarized the period of the Judges, up to the arrival of King David (verses 20-22). Then, in verse 23, he talked about Jesus, his Jewish roots, and how John the Baptist was unworthy to untie Jesus's sandals. Then without being timid or politically correct, he pointed out the sin of their leaders in Jerusalem and how they facilitated the crucifixion of the Son of God. Finally, he talked about the resurrection, clearly and boldly, and concluded his sermon with the fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies (Acts 13:32-33).

Paul became *like* a Jew to win the Jews. How can I become *like* a Muslim to win the Muslim? To start with, I need to love him, respect him, and encourage him to worship God. I need to remind myself that he is created in the image of God. I need to listen to him and learn about his ideas, his faith, and his doctrines. Although I was a free man and could eat and drink freely at work, during Ramadan I made myself *like* a Muslim to win the Muslims. I began my letters *like* a Muslim. I greeted my Muslim friends *like* a Muslim. And because I fasted with them during Ramadan, I got to explain to them the meaning of the incarnation of Christ.

In Acts 17 we see that when Paul was in Athens, he not only reached out to the Jews in the synagogue there, but also to the God-fearing Greeks in the marketplace (verses 16-17). Then at the Areopagus, he reasoned and debated with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (verses 19-21).

We Protestants are used to having evangelistic and revival meetings in our churches. We invite the unchurched to come listen to a well-known preacher, and he closes the deal from the pulpit by giving an invitation. Paul shows us a different way—how to go to people in the places where they work, study, and play, rather than only bringing them to our churches.



In Athens, Paul became *like* a Jew to win the Jews when he went to the synagogue. At the Areopagus, he became *like* a Greek to win the Epicureans and the Stoic philosophers. As the opportunity opened for Paul to present the gospel at the meeting in Areopagus:

- He started out by connecting with his audience and finding common ground: “As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. ... This is what I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). Paul started with something familiar to them, an altar to an unknown god.
- Then he talked about God as the Creator “who made the world and everything in it ... and he who gives everyone life and breath” (Acts 17:24-25).
- Then he presented God as the Creator of the nations and the sovereign God of history: “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26).
- Next, Paul explained the purpose of history and presented God as knowable and personal: “God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out to him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:27).
- Then he quoted the Cretan philosopher Epimenides, who said, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” He also quoted the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus, who said, “We are his offspring” (Acts 17:28). Paul was knowledgeable with the writings of his audience, and he used them as starting points for the gospel. In a similar way, we can use Qur’anic verses that talk about Jesus as a starting point, and then take our Muslim friends to the Gospels to learn more about Christ.
- Paul gave an end-view of history when he said God “will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.” So far, all that Paul had said about Jesus was that he was the man who was appointed by God, the Creator and Judge (Acts 17:31).

- Paul went further by pointing out that the appointed man who will judge the world was verified by his resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:31).

Paul's message at the Areopagus received a mixed response. After hearing about the resurrection of the dead, some sneered, while others wanted to hear more. And some, it seems, put their faith in Christ.

In our evangelism, some of us sow with tears and others reap with joy. Success in evangelism means taking our friends a few steps closer to Christ and trusting that the Holy Spirit will do the major work of bringing people into repentance as they encounter Christ.

Why did Paul not present a clearer message by presenting the "whole truth" about God at the Areopagus? Paul presented as much truth as they were able to comprehend. He likely presented more truth in his later discussions with them.

Jesus did this as well. He *gradually* revealed his identity to his disciples. He did not start out by telling every disciple right away that he was God in the flesh. He shed as much light as they were able to take in, and he gave them time to discover who he was. It's like when you go into a dark cave or a dark room. Your eyes will adjust, and you will be able to see, but it happens gradually.

## Chapter 15

### Microbus Evangelism

In my new place of ministry at the German company, I learned valuable lessons that helped me in my walk with God and in my ministry. For instance, it took ten minutes every morning to walk from my apartment to the bus stop. So I decided that instead of reviewing my verses on my work break, I would use that early-morning walk to go over them. What a blessing to renew my mind every morning with the Word of God.

For months I commuted to work on the company's large bus. Then I was upgraded, and I started going to work on a microbus that seated 14. Most of the other passengers were engineers.

At first, it was difficult to read my Bible on the bus. It was very noisy, with people talking and the radio blaring either Qur'anic chants or music that did not appeal to me. Reading the Bible in that environment felt awkward, and at times I even felt embarrassed. But at other times, I was able to block out the noise and enjoy deep intimacy with God in his Word.

Very soon, however, my quiet times on the bus became an opportunity for evangelism. One time, a Muslim engineer sat next to me. His name was Abdul Nabi, which literally means "the servant of the Prophet." He asked me what I was reading, and I told him that I was reading the Bible. He asked me if I could get him a copy of the *Injil*, and I promised him that I would bring it with me the next day.

When he got on the bus the next morning, he came and sat next to me and asked me right away if I brought him a copy of the New Testament. I had, and I gave it to him. When we arrived at work, a nominal Christian engineer named John, who was with us on the microbus, asked me sternly why I had given Abdul Nabi a New Testament. With anger, John told me that Abdul Nabi would burn the New Testament or tear it to pieces and throw it away. I assured John that Abdul Nabi had asked me for the New Testament and that he seemed eager to read it.

Besides, I said, we should not deprive anyone, including our Muslim friends, from getting into the Word of God.

John challenged me by quoting Jesus in Matthew 7:6: “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” I asked John how this verse applied to giving Abdul Nabi a copy of the New Testament. I pointed out that Matthew 7 began with Jesus addressing the sin of judging one another: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:1-2). John warned me that I would bear the consequences of what I was doing, and he walked away.

Another time, I was reading 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love, on the microbus. I meditated on that chapter, which starts out with these words:

“If I speak in the tongues or languages of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

I read the chapter several times, meditating on the fact that love is more important than knowing a variety of languages or praising God in tongues. It is greater than prophesying, like the prophets of old did, and greater than faith that can move mountains.

Then I asked myself whether I truly loved the Muslim engineer who was sitting next to me on the bus. How could I say I truly loved him if I ignored his deep need for a vital relationship with God? So I turned to him—his name was Samy—and asked him if he would like to read a short chapter in the Bible. I handed it to him, and he politely took it from me. He read it without saying a word, and I did not ask any questions.

Several weeks later, at the end of a long work day, Samy came and sat down beside me on the bus. He rarely rode the bus because he worked longer hours than the rest of us. He looked depressed, so I asked him what was wrong. He began to tell me how he was discouraged, bored, and fed up with life. I tried to encourage him by telling him that he would feel better after a good night's sleep. Then we were quiet for a while. Suddenly Samy asked me to show him the beautiful words in the Bible that he had read several weeks earlier. He said he needed to read them again. I remembered that he was referring to 1 Corinthians 13, so I turned to that chapter and gave him my Bible to read.

As he read, I silently prayed for him. It became darker, and I saw him holding the Bible closer to his eyes so that he could continue to read. When I got up to get off at my bus stop, he handed me my Bible and asked if I could get him a copy. I did the next day. I do not know how far he went in his reading of the New Testament, but I do know these truths about God's Word:

- "The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).
- "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

On another trip home from work, Hajj Tal'at, the director of accounting at our company, got on the microbus and sat next to the driver. (The title *Hajj*, or *Hagg*, in Egyptian Arabic, is given to those who have been to Mecca for the pilgrimage. It communicates a status of piety and religiosity, like an honorary spiritual doctorate degree). When the bus started moving, Hajj Tal'at, in a loud voice, asked us to quote *al Fatiha*, which is Surah 1 in the Qur'an. *Al Fatiha* is memorized by every Muslim around the world, even those who do not know the Arabic language. Muslims know it by heart in the way most Christians everywhere know The Lord's Prayer.

I joined the Muslims on the bus in quoting the opening Surah out loud:

*(1) In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful. (2) Praise be to God, the lord of the universe. (3) The most gracious, the most merciful. (4) Master of the Day of Judgment. (5) You alone we worship, and [from] you alone we ask for help. (6) Guide us [to] the straight path [way]. (7) The path of those on whom you have bestowed your grace, not of those who earned [your] wrath, nor of those who have gone astray (Al Fatiha, Surah 1).*

When we finished, Hajj Tal'at looked at me in surprise and said, "Have you been quoting *al Fatiha* with us, and when did you memorize it?" I told him that I had memorized it as a child in school and that I loved the words. He started quizzing me, one sentence at a time, in a loud voice that everyone on the bus could hear.

From verses 1 and 2, I told him how I loved the words about God being "gracious and compassionate," and how we need to praise God and thank him for his mercies. Then I quoted to him from the Bible: "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" (Lamentations 3:22-23). When he wanted to know if the words I had said were from the Bible, I told him that they were and even passed my Bible to him turned to that page. He read the verses quietly and then returned my Bible.

Another man on the bus loudly suggested that we stop discussing religion so that people would not get offended. Hajj Tal'at assured the man that I would not get offended. He said he knew that I was a person who was very close to God, and I thanked him.

The discussion continued until we reached the critical last two verses in the opening Surah. Hajj Tal'at asked me about the "straight path." I told him I believed that God would guide all true seekers among Muslims to the straight path. Then I asked him if he knew what that straight path, or way, was. He told me that it was the religion of Islam. I responded by sharing what Christ had said about himself—that *he* was the way, the truth, and the life. I noted the text in the Qur'an, "the path of those whom you have bestowed your grace," pointing out

that the word “bestowed” is past tense. God bestowed on Christians his grace, as he sent Christ to earth.

Hajj Tal’at screamed at me, saying God bestowed his grace on Muslims and insisting that those “who earned his wrath” were Christians, while Jews were the ones who “have gone astray.” As tempers were flaring, I closed the discussion and invited Hajj Tal’at to my office the next day to continue the conversation.

Over the next few months, my relationship with Hajj Tal’at deepened, and his prejudice against Christians started to diminish as a result of our friendship.

## Chapter 16

### Loving the Unlovable Employee

One morning at work I received a written message from one of the directors informing me that I was getting a new assistant. This man, Ali, was on the brink of being fired, and working with me was his last probation period.

Ali was about 25 years old. He was a Muslim from a well-to-do family in Cairo. I gave him some responsibilities, including overseeing the work done by one of the cranes and keeping an accurate record of what went in and out of our storage facility. By the end of the day, I noticed that Ali was feeling depressed and discouraged and was complaining about the workload and the heat. He was used to working inside in the air-conditioned office.

The next day I asked him why he had left his previous position at the administration building. He told me that they did not like him so they had assigned him the difficult task of working as my assistant so that he would quit. I assured him that he could succeed and told him not to give up. I promised to help him understand the responsibilities and do a good job, as long as he could learn to tolerate the outdoor heat and hard physical work. He felt encouraged and went straight to the cafeteria to buy me a glass of tea.

The next day, I noticed that Ali was still depressed, so I talked with him during our break. I asked him if he liked to read books, and he told me that he loved to read. I told him about a book called *The Power of Positive Thinking*. It was a very good book, I told him, but he needed to know that it contained verses from the Bible. He assured me that he was openminded and that he liked to read a variety of books. The next day I gave him a copy of that book in Arabic and started praying for him, particularly that he would learn to improve his social skills.

A week later, I asked if he had started reading the book, and he said he had finished it the previous night. He said he loved it. While he had read a number of diverse books in the past, he had never read one as constructive as that one. Then, with sorrow on his face, he added that as a Muslim, that book would not



work for him. I asked for an illustration of why it was not applicable to him. In chapter one, he said, the author encouraged readers to memorize the verse from the Bible, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13), and to repeat it several times each morning. Ali told me that the book was applicable to Christians, but not to Muslims. I suggested that in that verse, and others like it, he replace the word “Christ” with “God.”<sup>2</sup> Ali jumped up with excitement. He told me he planned to start reading the book again that night and would try what I suggested.

Within a week or two I started noticing an obvious change in Ali’s attitude toward work and the way he related to other people. With time, he became like a younger brother to me. I took him under my wing and started training him in all the aspects of my job.

One day during our break, Ali saw me reading the New Testament and wanted to read with me. He was delighted to recognize some of the verses that he had seen in *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and he asked for his own copy of the New Testament. I got one for him, and for weeks we spent our breaks discussing his questions over what he had read in the Bible.

I introduced him to Nabeel Jabbour, whose apartment was close to Ali’s. Nabeel and Ali started meeting on a regular basis and spent months together in the Scriptures. Nabeel loved Ali and considered him one of the most devout Muslims he had ever known. Ali prayed the five prayers every day and went to the mosque for the sunrise prayer rather than just praying at home. Since childhood he had fasted every day of Ramadan, along with fasting on Fridays throughout the year.

One day Ali politely asked Nabeel if he might ask him a difficult, and possibly rude, question. Nabeel assured him that all questions were welcome. His question had to do with the Trinity, and he thought that Nabeel would be embarrassed by that topic. Nabeel assured him that it was a very good question and suggested that

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<sup>2</sup> This is not a norm that I follow by changing words in the Bible.

they listen to a recorded lecture by the Orthodox Patriarch Shenoudah on the topic of the Trinity and the oneness of God. Ali liked the idea.

The next Friday, he arrived with a pad of paper, ready to write down his questions and take notes. When there was a pause in the recording after the first half of the lecture, Ali started asking questions. Nabeel encouraged him to wait until the end of the lecture. When it was all over, Nabeel asked Ali about his questions. He answered, "I have no questions. You Christians are the victims of being misunderstood."

Ali continued to meet with Nabeel in weekly Bible study, getting closer and closer to the Kingdom. Then Nabeel had to leave the country abruptly as he was asked to leave. I continued to train Ali at work, but the day came when I had to leave Ali too. When I left my job, Ali became my replacement, taking over my responsibilities at the company.

These are the things God taught me through Ali:

1. Care for the people around you, with their needs, as human beings created in the image of God. Do not look at them as projects or as people who need to be evangelized but see them as people with needs. Try to meet their needs with humility and genuine love. Ali needed to learn to have a positive attitude about work and how to relate to others socially. That was my starting point with him.
2. I wanted to help him develop professionally so that he could be successful at his job. The leaders in our company gave up on him and were ready to be done with him, so they assigned him to a job that would force him to resign. He proved them wrong and ended up taking my place after I left.
3. I belonged to a team of brothers with complementary gifting. On our team we had three relational people, three scholarly people, and Nabeel, who specialized in evangelistic Bible study and was available to meet with people when they were ready for a weekly commitment. Through my many contacts, I introduced several of my friends to Nabeel, who began regularly studying the Bible with them.

4. As far as I know, Ali has not surrendered his life to Christ yet. God used me in his life, then he used Nabeel. God can bring others who will help Ali continue on his journey to Christ.
5. Books like *The Power of Positive Thinking* and *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (translated into Arabic, if necessary) can be useful tools. Although they are “self-help” books and do not present the gospel, they can still be helpful in building bridges, as they demonstrate that we care for people and their wellbeing.

## Chapter 17

### Earning the Right to Speak

I will never forget the day when one of the engineers at my company, Ahmad, entered my office and asked me a question about a Christian doctrine. I took the Bible out of my desk drawer and opened it up. Ahmad quickly interrupted me and asked me what the book was. When I told him it was the Bible, he dismissed and insulted it. I felt angry, but with God's help, the Holy Spirit controlled me.

I told Ahmad that I knew he was an engineer who had graduated from Al Azhar University and that he knew a great deal about Islam. (Al Azhar is famous for its Islamic seminary, but it has a university, as well, where Muslim students study Islamic subjects in addition to their specializations). I asked him if he would be willing to teach me what he knew about his religion. A big smile appeared on his face, and he forgot about the question that brought him to my office in the first place. He invited me to his office the next day during the lunch break. I knew from his subtle smile that he wanted to convert me to Islam.

The next day, I took a pen and notebook with me as I headed to Ahmad's office. After he invited me to a glass of tea, I asked him to help me better understand his religion. Not surprisingly, he started out by telling me about the five pillars of Islam: prayer, alms, pilgrimage, fasting, and the *Shahada* (the Muslim statement of faith: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God"). I wrote down these pillars in my notebook and asked him to go on. He talked about the prayer at five set times during the day. I told him that as a Christian I prayed throughout the day and asked why Muslims have set times for prayer. He assured me that the set times were very important, but he did not give me the reason why.

The next day I went to his office, and we again started off with tea before he proceeded to talk about the oneness of God. He quoted the very short Surah 112: "*Say: He is God, the one and only. God the eternal absolute. He has not fathered anyone nor was He fathered, and there is nothing comparable to Him.*" I wrote

down notes in my notebook, but I knew why he quoted that Surah. He was indirectly attacking the Trinity, but I respectfully kept listening to him.

A week later we had another session, and he talked about the spirits, how some were good, others were evil, and still others were neutral. I kept taking notes. I rarely spoke but mainly listened. While listening, I prayed for him and for myself, that somehow God would use these sessions to his glory.

We started meeting weekly and had been doing so for a couple months when one day Ahmad suddenly made a suggestion. He offered me a copy of a book written by Dr. Ahmad Shalaby, a professor in comparative religion at Cairo University. He suggested we read it together and discuss it. I was open to his suggestion, but he warned me that this scholar was critical of Christian doctrines and the Bible. I told him that it would be OK.

We read chapter one together, and I did not make any comments. In the next session we read chapter 2. The author claimed that in Matthew 8, Matthew stated that Jesus healed more people and raised more people from the dead than the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I made my first objection. Ahmad asked me why, so I quickly went to my office, got my Bible, and read to him from Matthew 8. The 33 verses of that chapter contain the following stories:

- Jesus healed a man with leprosy (verses 1-4).
- In the town of Capernaum, the humble centurion came to Jesus and asked him to heal his servant but felt unworthy of having Jesus come to his house. He believed that Jesus could heal him by declaring him healed. Jesus healed the servant (5-13).
- Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (14-17).
- A scribe wanted to follow Jesus, and Jesus warned him about the cost of discipleship (18-22).
- Jesus calmed the storm (23-27).
- Jesus cast demons out of a man and into a herd of pigs (28-34).

After I read the whole chapter to Ahmad, I asked him about the number of those who were healed by Jesus's miracles. I asked him if it were true that these

miracles outnumbered the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Ahmad's shy response indicated that he was embarrassed by the book. I tried to comfort Ahmad. It may have been that the author did not read Matthew 8 but just copied the statement from another book.

Ahmad suggested that we continue reading. Whenever there was a misrepresentation or false statement, I went to the Bible and showed him what the text really said. After a moment of silence, Ahmad asked me if I could get him a copy of the New Testament.

The next day I got him a copy of the Bible, and we spent time reading together various Scriptures. It was an opportunity for him to identify the lies that he had believed over the years.

After some time, I introduced him to Nabeel Jabbour, and the three of us met together for several months. As we had done with Mr. Omar, the headmaster, we read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, then a good part of the Gospel of John.

Our journey with him was disrupted when Ahmad accepted a job offer with a petroleum company in the Suez Canal. On his last day at our company, we hugged one another and said goodbye. I never saw him again, but when he left, he had the Bible with him.

The principles I learned from Ahmad include the following:

1. In Egypt, we can buy sugar cubes in a box containing 100 cubes and they weigh one kilogram. The journey to Christ reminds me of a box of sugar cubes. I might meet a person who is 80 sugar cubes into his journey because God has already used other people to bring him to this state of readiness. In his grace, God might use me to lead this person to Christ. Other people I meet could be 60, 40, or 25 cubes in. Ahmad was close to sugar cube number 2 or 3, meaning he was at the very beginning, and it would be a long journey to Christ. When I started meeting with him, it took humility, respect, listening, learning. It included a willingness on my part to

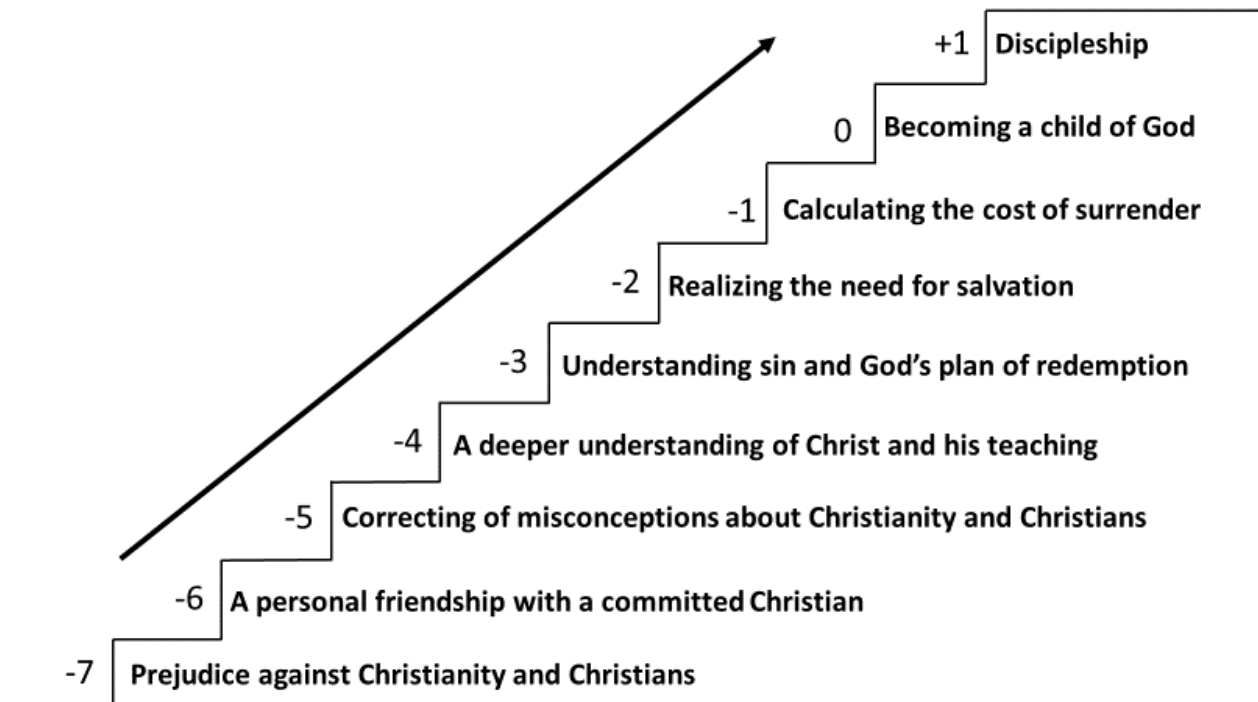
read Dr. Shalaby's book. That was not wasted time. I was slowly earning the right to speak.

2. I needed to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to know the right time to challenge Dr. Shalaby's statements. Rather than being pushy, eager, and driven, I needed to wait, resting in the fact that the Holy Spirit would give me the opportunity to speak when the time was right.
3. It takes lots of tea drinking to build a friendship!
4. Having Bibles and copies of the New Testament at home enabled me to respond to a friend's request for one within a day.
5. I was seeing the benefit of having a plan of what Scriptures to read with a friend once he was ready for that.
6. Rather than operating solo, I wanted to be a team player. At the right time I introduced Ahmad to Nabeel, and for months the three of us studied the Bible together. Nabeel had the advantage of seeing my blind spots, and I could see his. Praying for Ahmad and working together more than doubled our efforts.
7. When he reached about 70 sugar cubes, Ahmad moved to another city. This was not a tragedy. Both Nabeel and I prayed for him and trusted that God would bring someone else into his life who would take him the rest of the way on his journey.

### **An Evangelism Scale**

Nabeel introduced me to a scale developed by James F. Engel that describes the stages a person moves through as he moves closer to Christ. This scale was created with secular Americans in mind. Nabeel and I adapted Engel's scale to fit our Muslim friends:

## Steps in the Scale



When I met Ahmad, he was at **-7**, but by listening to him, drinking tea with him, and building a friendship, he moved to **-6**. As we read some of Dr. Shalaby's book together and I showed Ahmad what the Bible actually said, he moved to **-5**. As I introduced Ahmad to Nabeel and he started having weekly time in Bible study, Ahmad moved to **-4** or **-3**. When Ahmad moved to another job, I trusted that God would bring other people into his life who could continue the journey with him to **-2**, then **-1**, and finally to the point where he surrendered his life to Christ.



## Chapter 18

### A Condolence Visit Brings a Surprise Opportunity

One of the men who worked in my department was Abdul Samad, a reliable and hard-working employee. One day I noticed that he had missed work, and I soon learned that the reason for his absence was because his mother had died. The next day I decided to visit him at his apartment. I asked one of his friends at work, Sheikh Muhammad, to go with me.

At their small apartment, Sheikh Muhammad, Abdul Samad, his 20-year-old son Sabri, and I sat together quietly for a few minutes. Then I asked if Sheikh Muhammad would be willing to recite some verses from the Qur'an for us. That was a surprise for everyone—a Christian asking for the reading of the Qur'an during a condolence visit! Sheikh Muhammad sat up straight and recited for us a text from the Qur'an. I sat there respectfully listening until he finished. I thanked him, and then the two of us greeted Abdul Samad and his son, offering the traditional words of comfort and condolence, and left.

Months later, Abdul Samad surprised me at work by asking if I could visit his home with him that day. When I asked him why, he said that his son Sabri wanted to talk with me. At the time, I did not realize that the real reason for the invitation was a birthday celebration for Sabri. I only found that out after arriving at the apartment to find that it was filled with extended family members who came for the occasion.

After we ate birthday cake, Sabri came and sat down next to me. I asked him why he had included me in his family's celebration. He told me he would never forget how I came to their apartment for the condolence visit, even though I was a Christian, and how I asked Sheikh Muhammad to recite from the Qur'an. Sabri said that he respected me very much, and since that time, he had been eager to spend more time with me. In a silent prayer, I thanked God for leading me on the day of that visit to ask for the reading of the Qur'an.

After the guests left, Sabri came back and sat with me again. I asked him what he was doing these days and what his plans were for the future. I learned that he had finished his studies at a technical school and was waiting for a job appointment by the government. When I asked about his free time, he said he loved to read books. I encouraged him, expressing my admiration for the way he used his time wisely, and told him I wished I had more time to read.

Then I asked him if he remembered what he had read, and he informed me that he usually wrote a summary, in a page or two, of every book he read. So I asked him if he was willing to read me his summaries, and he was not only willing, but eager. We decided he would come to my apartment once a week to share his summaries from some of the books that he loved.

On that first visit, Sabri came with his notebook and, after the tea and cookies, started to read me some of his notes on the books that were important to him. The second time he came, there was a mention of Christ in one of the book summaries he read. I stopped him and asked what he thought of Christ. He told me that he highly respected Christ because the Qur'an talks about him extensively. I asked Sabri if he would like to read the *Injil*, and he said of course he did, but he did not know how to get a copy. I brought one out from the other room and gave it to him. As he left my apartment, he promised me he would read it.

Sabri visited me repeatedly for several weeks to read together about the life of Christ. I introduced him to my friend Victor, who gave him a job at his company. Victor continued the journey with Sabri, studying the life of Christ with him, until Victor was killed suddenly in an accident at work.

I lost contact with Sabri and do not know what happened in his journey toward Christ. What I do have is confidence "that he who began the good work [in Sabri] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

## Chapter 19

### Explaining the Oneness of God

Sheikh Morsi, a Muslim fundamentalist, was an expert in operating a big machine for cutting steel at the company where I worked. One day, he surprised me by asking me if there were any verses in the *Injil* that addressed adultery. I quoted what Jesus said in Matthew 5:28: “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” He quickly got out a paper and pen from his pocket and asked me to repeat what I had said, writing it down word by word. That was the first time Sheikh Morsi had ever talked to me, and I wondered why he had asked me that question.

On Sunday morning, the first day of the work week, I went to Sheikh Morsi and greeted him with the Muslim greeting. I asked him why he wanted to know what the New Testament said about adultery. He told me that he had preached at the mosque on Friday on the topic of adultery and had wanted to know what Jesus said about the subject. He thanked me again for giving him the verse and said he had memorized it. To show me, he quoted it back to me. I smiled and told him I was available to discuss any of his questions.

I left him feeling amazed that a Muslim fundamentalist would use a verse from the New Testament in his Friday sermon. During the lunch break, I found him again and told him how I respected him for quoting the New Testament in his sermon. I said I wished I had been at the mosque to hear him talk. From that day on, I felt a deep love for that man, and I made it my practice to pass by him at work and greet him with the Muslim greeting.

Months later Sheikh Morsi came to ask me if it were true that I was fasting the month of Ramadan, although I was a Christian. I told him I was. So he invited me to his apartment later that week to break the fast together. As I boarded a different bus on that day to go home with Sheikh Morsi, people were surprised to see us sitting together.

The bus arrived at his residential area, an extremely poor and densely populated part of Cairo. We got off the bus and headed toward his apartment, walking through very crowded streets. His apartment was on the second floor. The living room was very small and had one sofa, a chair, and a small table. Of course, I did not get to meet his wife because she remained in the kitchen the whole time.

I noticed that on the bookshelf, he had the Qur'an and the Bible. That Bible was a gift I had given him a week earlier. I asked him whether he was reading it. He told me that he was, and he had several questions.

Before we ate, he excused himself because he needed to pray the ceremonial prayer before eating. He brought out his little prayer rug, spread it on the floor, and started praying the ceremonial prayer, performing the required postures of standing, bending, and kneeling with his head to the floor. At one point as he knelt, bowed and prostrated, his head almost touched my feet because the room was so small. Spontaneously, I stood up and moved a foot away, closed my eyes, and began quietly praying for him and his family, for their needs, and that God would open his eyes to know Jesus. When I opened my eyes, I found him sitting on the floor, having finished his prayer, looking at me. He asked me what I was doing, so I told him I was praying for him and his family. Amazed, he told me that this was the first time he had ever seen a Christian praying.

I expected a simple meal, but his wife must have spent hours in the kitchen cooking a fancy meal to honor me. After Sheikh Morsi and I ate the delicious food, he started asking me questions about the contents of the Bible. I shared with him some details about the 39 books in the Old Testament and the 27 books in the New Testament.

After the month of Ramadan was over, I invited Sheikh Morsi to visit me at our apartment. After eating together, he asked me what I believed about God. I did not respond to his question, but instead opened the Bible to Mark 12:28-29 and asked him to read: "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'""

Sheikh Morsi stopped reading and asked me what was meant by “the Lord is one,” and asked if I believed that God is one. I replied in the affirmative, which made him shake his head. He thought Christians were all polytheists. He said I was the only Christian he knew who believed that God is one. I asked him to read Mark 12:28-29 again, and he did. I assured him that all Christians from all denominations believe that God is one. Still having a hard time believing this, he asked if there were other Bible verses that talk about the oneness of God. I turned to Matthew 4:10: “Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”””

Then we read John 17:3: ““Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”” Sheikh Morsi then asked me about Jesus, if he was the messenger of God. I said, “Yes, Jesus is the Messenger and the Message, but let us wait on that subject until a later time, because now we want to talk about the oneness of God.” (I have learned over the years to stay on one subject until we finish it. Otherwise, we get distracted by many tangents.)

As I continued my conversation with Sheikh Morsi, I tried to explain the historical background of the Jewish audience that Jesus was facing. The strict Jews at that time were exhausted with the demands of the law and its Pharisaic applications. They wanted to narrow down the 613 precepts, 365 of which were prohibitions, along with 248 commands to do something. Throughout the centuries the Jews had looked for ways to either summarize the laws or to find out what was most important. David tried to do that with Psalm 15. Isaiah summarized the law in six lines in Isaiah 33:15, and Micah got it down to three in Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

So it followed that one of the teachers of the law would ask Jesus which commandment was most important. He answered in Mark 12:29-31: ““The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your

neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

Sheikh Morsi stopped me with a question. What did it mean to love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? I said that worshiping God means loving him. He stopped me right away and said that worship is a duty and a command that needs to be obeyed through a certain performance, namely the ceremonial prayer.

I responded by saying God does not need anything from us. He wants us to love him because he is worthy of all our love and all our worship. How do I love him? By talking with him repeatedly throughout the day. When I wake up, I thank and praise him. I thank him for his gifts and his mercies. I talk with him before I go to work and surrender the day to him. I talk with him when I face the difficulties and challenges of my day. I thank him when I arrive home safely. I talk with him before I go to sleep. Loving him with all my heart means I am living my life on his wavelength.

Loving God also means loving to listen to him by reading his Word, the Bible. I read the Bible every day so that I may know him better and discover the depth of his love. In John 14:21, Jesus said: “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Because I love him, I want to obey his commands.

Loving him motivates me to love people, both friends and foes. In 1 John 4:20 we read: “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” Worship is not a set of ceremonial postures, of kneeling, standing, and reciting memorized texts, but a loving relationship with the one who loves me unconditionally.

In my interactions with Sheikh Morsi I learned:

1. Focus on the oneness of God. This is a foundational concept in Christian doctrine and an excellent starting point in our interaction with Muslims. (For more on how to do this, see Appendix A.)
2. Worshiping God is loving him. This is a different perspective for many Muslims, who think worshiping God means slaving for him in obedience to his directives. It is like the older son in the story of the Prodigal Son, who told his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders” (Luke 15:29).

## Chapter 20

### Refocusing My Priorities

In December 1989 I traveled from Cairo to Sydney, Australia, to visit my three sisters, Mary, Munira, and Nabila, who had all immigrated to Australia at different times over the years. By then, they were all married and had been living in Australia for years. Aside from the pictures they had sent of them and their children, I had not seen them in nearly two decades.

All three of my sisters and their families, along with some Egyptian friends who lived in Sydney, were waiting for me at the airport. It was such a beautiful reunion. We laughed and cried as we finally saw each other after 18 years apart.

During my visit, my three sisters and their families kept asking me whether my family and I would be willing to immigrate to Sydney. They assured me there would be opportunities for work and ministry there. Because of their insistence and enthusiasm, I promised that I would pray about it. I needed to have clear guidance from the Lord, since he is the Lord of my life.

On one of my last few days in Australia, Munira and her husband Mamdouh took me and Pastor Ikram for a day trip to the Blue Mountains. Pastor Ikram, Mamdouh's cousin, was an Egyptian pastor visiting Australia at the same time as me, and we were both staying with my sister and her family. After returning from the mountains, my sister and her husband went to bed early because they had to get up early to go to work the next morning. Pastor Ikram and I were not ready for bed and decided to watch a movie instead. All we could find on Mamdouh's bookshelf in the living room was the movie "The Ten Commandments," so we decided to watch it.

The movie was in English and had no subtitles, so Pastor Ikram offered to translate for me. I assured him that I knew the story of Moses from the Bible, but he insisted on translating.



Early on in the movie there was a scene in which Moses was in Pharaoh's palace, enjoying prestige, luxuries, and glory. In the next scene, he was in the mud, suffering with the Hebrews. Right then, Hebrews 11:24-25 came to my mind: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin."

Pastor Ikram continued to translate, but my mind was in a completely different place. I was thinking deeply about Moses, and at the same time about the amazing opportunity I had to immigrate with my family to Australia. The movie ended, and Pastor Ikram and I said goodnight and went to bed.

Alone in my bedroom, I pondered what had just happened. We had not wanted to watch that particular movie, but it had been the only one available. I do not believe in chance; I believe in God's interventions in our lives. I knelt next to my bed and prayed with tears and renewed commitment: "I am going back to Egypt, to my church, to my country, to my people, and to my ministry. I will resign from my job and give whatever is left of my life to serve my Lord full time." God is my Lord and King, and I wanted to live for him wholeheartedly for the rest of my life.

On the last night before my departure from Australia, all the families of my three sisters, along with friends, were gathered together for a farewell evening. I told them that I believed God wanted me to live in Egypt and give the rest of my life to serving him in the Arab world.

After returning home to Egypt, I continued to work at my job for a few months, waiting for the right time to submit my resignation. On Sunday, May 13, 1990, I submitted my resignation to my Muslim supervisor, though he refused to accept it. For two weeks he tried to persuade me to change my mind about leaving such a good job and good salary. He was concerned for my family and how we would live without my income. I thanked him for his paternal heart and his loving concern. What I did not say was that I would be working full time for the King of kings and Lord of lords, who said to his disciples, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Matthew 4:19). Jesus also taught his disciples: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life,

which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval” (John 6:27).

Still, what my work supervisor was worried about was a concern for me as well. How would my family live without my monthly salary? At that point, my wife and I had two children—our daughter Manar was 5 years old, and our son David was 2—and our daughter Sarah was born a month later. I continually reminded myself of the promise that God gave me in 1986 from Matthew 6:26: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

How God would fulfill his promise in this adventure of living by faith was not clear to me. But I found out that my company had a policy of giving those who resign a one-month salary as a departure bonus. Then my sister Munira and her husband Mamdouh decided to start supporting us with \$200 a month to do full-time ministry. And the rest is history!

## Chapter 21

### On the Road to Alexandria

Hamdy Sa'd was a pastor with a shepherd's heart. He left Egypt and went to Sydney, Australia, to serve the Lord there in an Arabic-speaking church. Although his ministry was in Australia, his heart was still with his church people in Alexandria, Egypt. On one of his trips to Egypt, he called and asked me to go to Alexandria to meet with him and some of the leaders of his former church there. They were interested in starting two discipleship groups, with the approval of the new pastor of the Alexandria church, Pastor George Shaker.

I became part of these groups, leaving Cairo by train every Saturday at 2 p.m. and arriving in Alexandria at 4 p.m. I started leading the first discipleship group at 5. It ended at 7 and was followed by a second discipleship session from 7:30 to 9:30 in the same location. After leading the two groups, I took the 10:15 train back to Cairo and arrived at home after midnight. Whenever a church wanted me to help them, I was more than eager to say yes. I loved that discipleship ministry and seeing Christians equipped to serve the Lord and walk with him.

One Saturday as I took my seat on the train to Alexandria, I found myself looking forward with anticipation to the evangelism opportunity I might have with the person who would sit next to me. It turned out that a heavy man sat next to me, filling his seat and part of mine as well. I closed my eyes and started praying for him quietly. When I opened my eyes, I found him in a deep sleep. So I got out a book from my briefcase and started reading.

An hour later, halfway to Alexandria, the man woke up. Right away I put my book back in the brief case and instead started reading a tract that contained the Sermon on the Mount. The man next to me started looking at my tract, and I allowed him to do it. Then he got out his prayer beads from his pocket and looked like he was meditating or praying, which was a golden opportunity for me to ask him a question.

I asked him what he said in his prayer when he praised God. He sat up straight and told me the phrases he used and how many times he repeated each phrase. The phrase “Thank you, O God” he said 11 times, “I praise you, O Lord” 11 times, and “God is great” 11 times. Then he said to me, “Obviously you are a Christian.” I said, “Yes, I am a Christian and a believer in God. Thank you for giving me this helpful answer. I often see Muslims praying with the prayer beads, especially during the month of Ramadan, and I did not know what they said. Thank you for answering my question.”

He then asked me about the meaning of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. I briefly told him that Catholic means universal, Orthodox means the original doctrinal position, and Protestant means the one who protests. I kept my answer short because I did not want to get off on a tangent.

Then he told me that he liked Patriarch Shenouda of the Orthodox church. He respected him for his educated mind and his love of poetry, and he told me that when he appeared on TV, he really listened to him. I told him that I loved Patriarch Shenouda, too, and that sometimes I went to the Orthodox Cathedral to listen to his teaching.

Then I asked him what he knew about Christ, and he answered that Christ is mentioned many times in the Qur’an. I asked him if he knew how many times, but he didn’t know. I told him it was 93 times—25 where he is referred to as Jesus, and the rest where he is called Christ. (Incidentally, Muhammad is mentioned in the Qur’an only four times).

He next asked me if I had read the Qur’an, and I told him I had read most of it, especially the long Suras. I asked him if he had read the *Injil*, but he said he did not know how to get a copy. He asked if he could borrow my Sermon on the Mount tract, which I gave to him. He got out some money to pay for it, but I insisted that it was a gift, which he accepted.

We were nearing Alexandria, and I wanted to use every minute available. I read with him the following paragraphs from the tract.

- First, about giving to the needy (Matthew 6:1-4):

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

- Then Christ’s teaching on prayer (Matthew 6:5-8):

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

- Then what Jesus said about fasting (Matthew 6:16-18):

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

- Then, just before our arrival in Alexandria, what Jesus said about loving our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48):

“You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute

you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’”

After we got off the train in Alexandria, he held my hand tightly and with deep gratitude. He thanked me for the time together. When we parted, it felt as if we had been friends for many years.

My friend Fawzi from the church in Alexandria was waiting for me at the train station. When he saw the big smile on my face, he asked me the reason for my joy. I told him, “It all starts with a question.” That first question, my asking about how he prayed, resulted in an amazing time of sharing about my friend, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What questions could you ask that would open doors with people? Perhaps questions about a person’s beliefs and their understanding of eternal life? In Genesis 16:7-8, we see how the Lord found Hagar and asked her two key questions: “The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, ‘Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?’”

Those are two good questions to ask anyone you are getting to know: “Where have you come from?” (How has been your journey in life, from where do you come and has it been difficult?) and “Where are you going?” (What are your plans and dreams for the futures?)

## Chapter 22

### New Year's Eve with Sheikh Ramadan

I first met Sheikh Ramadan at the office where my wife Mervat worked. I had heard a great deal from my wife about the conversations that took place in her office. She had often talked about the engineer Ramadan, the dignified Nabila, and the always smiling Khayriya. Magda, the director of the department, was a woman who wore *al Niqab*, which covered her face and hair, and showed only her eyes. The other Muslim women in the office wore *al hijab*, which covered their hair and necks but showed their faces.

When I entered my wife's office, I heard a heated discussion about paradise according to Islamic doctrine. My wife said to the group, "I would rather go to hell than to the paradise that you describe." That was the electrified moment in which I walked into the office.

My wife introduced me as the man who loves Muslims. Over the years they had heard many things about me from my wife, and they were eager to meet me. I greeted them with the Islamic greeting, "*Asalamu alaykum*," and right away they responded to my greeting, offering me a chair next to Ramadan, who had a beard and a beautiful smile. Ramadan got me a glass of tea, a sign of hospitality.

He summarized for me what they had been talking about, including the harsh statement that my wife had made. I agreed with him that some arguments could lead to strife and hatred. He explained that because their work was not so demanding, they had time to discuss important topics together. He said he was eager to ask me questions about Christianity, especially because my wife had whet the appetites of her coworkers to learn more about the gospel.

I thanked him for his gracious remarks and told him how I respected him. My wife had shared with me how devout he was with his daily ceremonial prayers, as well as how he treated the women in his office politely and with respect. I learned that he was studying Islamic doctrines at the mosque every evening, and he said that

his studies in Islam had created within him a desire to understand more about Christianity and Christ. I asked him if he would be willing to meet with me in our church office, and he agreed.

Before we met, I prayed for him. When he arrived, his first question was whether or not Christians drink alcohol. I opened my Bible to Ephesians 5 and asked him to read verse 18: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

He read that verse twice and, surprised, asked me whether that was the only verse in the Bible that addresses alcohol. I assured him that there were several more texts on the subject, and we turned to Proverbs 23:29-33: "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. ... In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind will imagine confusing things."

After moments of silence, he told me how, with those two passages, I had destroyed what he had learned about Christians over the years, that we consumed alcohol like water. He told me how for years he had considered Christians as people cursed by God, for according to Islam, people who consume alcohol or sell it are cursed by God. Then he asked me if I personally drank alcohol, and I told him that I did not. He asked me, then, what did we do in our church on New Year's Eve?

I asked him what he had heard we did. He said that Muslims believe Christians spend New Year's Eve dancing and drinking alcohol in their churches, and that when midnight comes, every man is free to kiss any woman he wanted. He contrasted that with Muslims, who meet in mosques to pray and ask God for protection from the evil that Christians produce through our recklessness and ungodliness.

I asked him to reason with me. How could I, a Middle Eastern man, allow any other man, on New Year's Eve, to kiss my wife, my daughters, or my sisters? I asked him whether he thought my wife would allow me to kiss another woman!



He apologized and asked me what we *did* do on New Year's Eve. Instead of giving him an answer, I invited him to come to church with us on New Year's Eve, which was only six weeks away. I wondered whether people in our church would accept him, with his beard and Islamic clothing. I told him to come and see how he would be received at our church and to witness what we do for himself.

By the time December 31 came, I had forgotten about my invitation to Ramadan. At church that night, I got busy reconnecting with friends and enjoying the fellowship within the body of Christ. Just before the church service began, my friend Adel approached me, along with Ramadan, who had asked for me. I welcomed him and purposely sat with him in the last pew so he would have a full view of all that was taking place during our service.

The service started with the Sunday school children entering the worship hall by singing Christmas carols. Ramadan joined with the hundreds of other people in the church who were clapping for the children.

Next was a stage play of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus performed by the middle-school youth group. Following that, a choir of university students sang spiritual songs for a whole hour. In between the songs, the young people read from the Scriptures, reminding us of God's love and faithfulness.

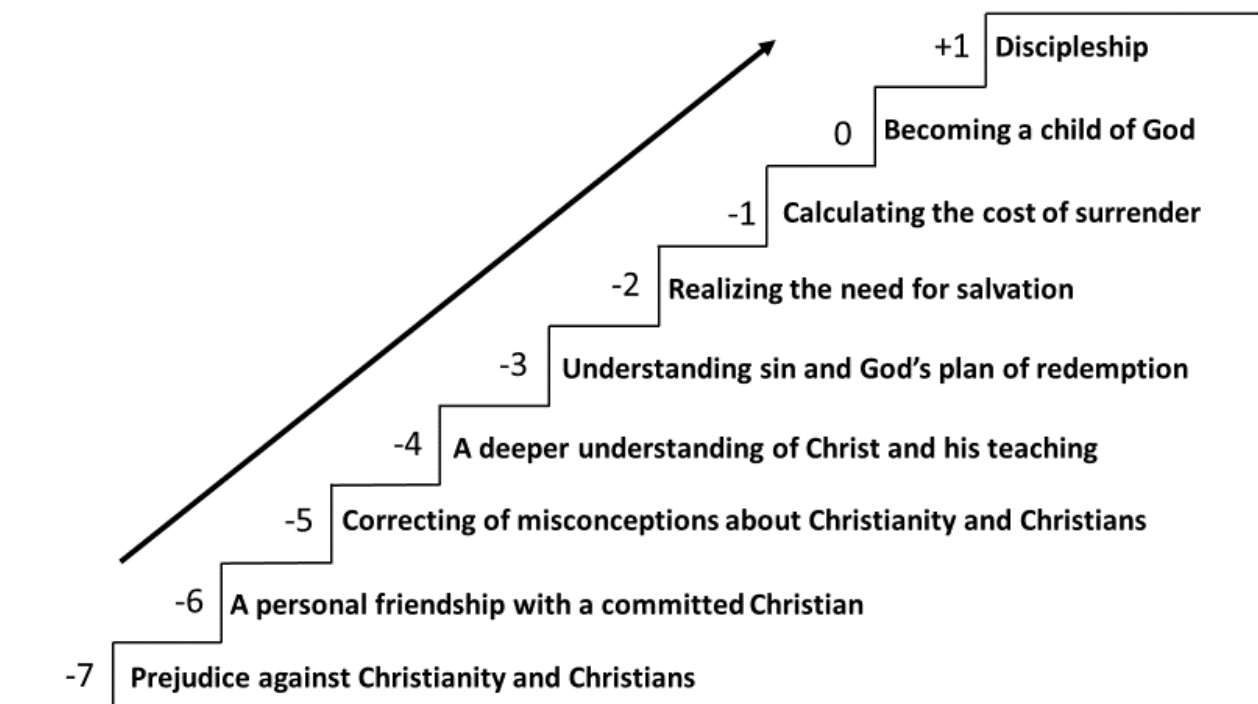
At 11 p.m., our pastor, Hany Aziz, read Psalm 23. He described how God had been our Shepherd throughout the past year, leading us by green pastures and beside quiet water and refreshing our souls. The pastor described how God guided us along the right paths, and even when we went through the darkest valleys, he did not abandon us. He concluded his sermon by inviting prayers from those who wanted to thank the Lord for his grace over our lives during the past year. People started to pray short prayers of thanksgiving. After a moment of silence, the choir sang the Egyptian song based on Psalm 65:11, "You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance."

When that song finished, the clock moved us from the end of one year into another. Right then our pastor instructed us to ask God for his blessings over the new year. He asked us to pray for people in leadership positions in our country,

that God would give them wisdom and that there would be peace. At the conclusion of that time of spontaneous prayer, we all prayed the Lord's prayer.

As we walked out of the church, I asked Ramadan what he thought. He lifted both arms up and with a loud voice said that for the rest of his life, he was going to tell other Muslims what he had witnessed on that New Year's Eve at our church. He hugged me tightly and wished me a blessed new year. Then my church friends came up and warmly greeted him, wishing him a blessed new year.

Remember the scale we introduced in Chapter 17? My new friend Ramadan was at -6 when I first met him. That New Year's Eve service moved him to -5!



## Chapter 23

### A Syrian Muslim and a Jewish Woman

In May 1996 I made my first trip to the United States. Before my departure from the Cairo airport, a friend advised me to make sure there would be no mistakes in the customs declaration card I needed to fill out before arriving at JFK in New York. Any mistakes on the card could cause me problems, he said.

I was going to the U.S. because I had been invited by a friend to participate in an evangelistic outreach at the Olympic games, which took place that year in Atlanta. After my time in Atlanta, I was to visit Nabeel in Colorado Springs, then travel to visit different Egyptian friends who lived in various places in the United States. I also wanted to encourage them to return to Egypt for a conference we were planning at our church for former members who had scattered around the world.

The first segment of the flight was from Cairo to Athens. I had a long wait in Athens and spent much of the time thinking about how I would fill out the customs card. When I finally boarded the 747 headed to JFK, I began looking for someone who seemed like they spoke both English and Arabic so they could help me with the card. Unlike the flight from Cairo to Athens, which was filled with many Egyptians, I could not spot any Egyptians on this flight.

The flight from Athens to New York was ten hours, and I was in an aisle seat. I started out reading our famous Egyptian newspaper, *Al Ahrām*, and planned after that to get into a Christian book that I was eager to read. While reading the Arabic newspaper, I noticed that the man sitting next to me in the middle seat was looking at what I was reading. I assumed he was just looking at the pictures until I asked him if he knew Arabic. To my joy, he told me that he was originally from Syria and now lived in the United States.

I told him that he was an answer to prayer because I needed help filling out the customs card correctly. He was eager to help, and we continued getting acquainted. He worked for a Greek company headquartered in Athens, and he

had been there attending a meeting. I told him that I used to work for a German company in Cairo, but I had resigned and that my new work was to teach the Bible.

As we continued talking, I asked him this question: “I do hope that you live a hundred years, but when the time comes for death, do you know where you will go?” He said, “Honestly, I do not know. Only God knows.” Then he said, “This is the first time anybody asked me that question. Let me ask you the same question. May you live for a hundred years, and when the time for death comes, where will you go?”

Without hesitation I told him that I would go to heaven. He asked, “Is it because you are a Christian and I am a Muslim?” I clarified with him that I did not consider myself a “Christian,” and he wanted to know more. I told him that I belonged to the religion of Christianity for 20 years but now, as a believer in Christ, I belonged to the Kingdom of God rather than to the religious institution of Christianity. (I like the way Tim Keller explains this distinction: “Religion tells you to go and change; the gospel changes you.”)

My new friend sitting next to me told me he didn’t understand and wanted more explanation. I went more deeply into my story, telling him that I was born into a “Christian” family, and for 20 years I had attended church service without being a true follower of Christ. Then, as I studied the Scriptures in depth, I discovered that Christ did not come into our world to establish the institution of Christianity; he came to establish the Kingdom of God. My Syrian friend became more eager to learn.

I told him that the word “Christian” appears only three times in the 27 books of the New Testament:

- The first time is in Acts 11:26: “So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

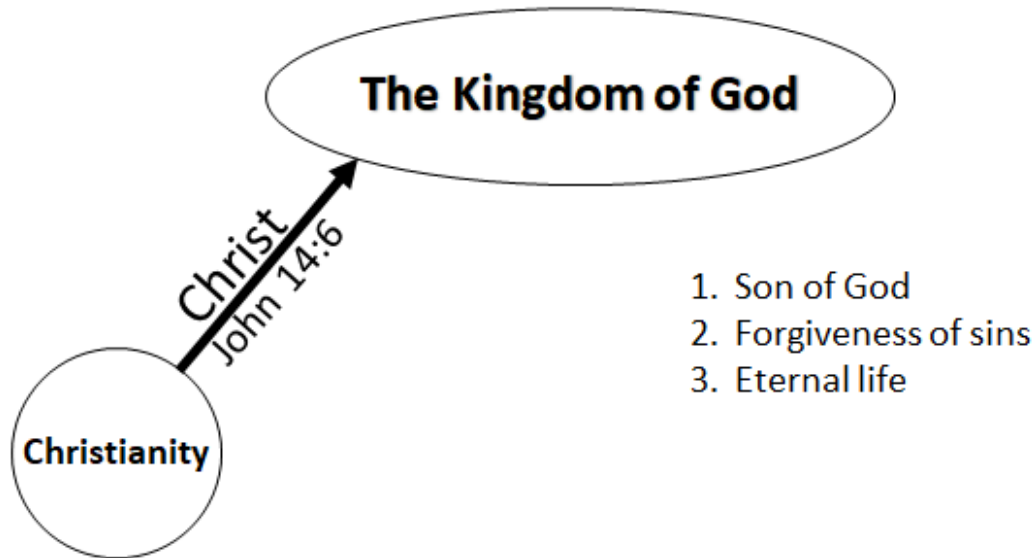
- The second time comes in Acts 26:28: “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’”
- The third and final time is in 1 Peter 4:16: “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

The man on the plane wondered, “If Christ was not preaching a message about the religion of Christianity, then what was his message?” I turned to Matthew 4:17 and read to him: “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’” I shared with him that this was the first time Jesus spoke about his message as the Kingdom of heaven or the Kingdom of God. The New Testament mentions the phrase “Kingdom of God” about 75 times.

He asked me about the meaning of the Kingdom of God. I told him it includes several dimensions, the most important of which is God’s right to reign over people who enter his Kingdom. His Kingdom is open to all on one condition—to believe in Christ as the only way to God. He wondered whether Jesus had actually said that. I turned in my Bible to John 14:6 and read Jesus’s words to him: “‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

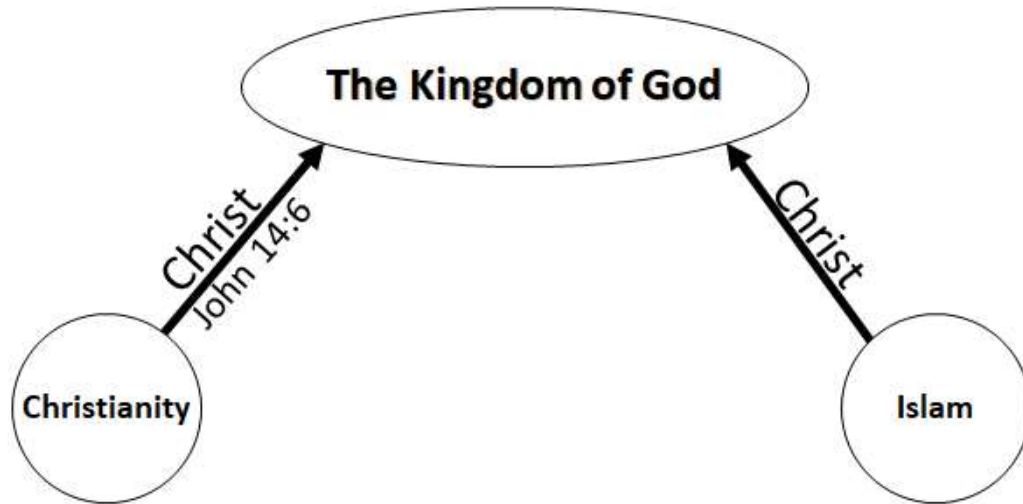
My new friend challenged me—why Jesus, rather than Moses or Muhammad? He reasoned that God created Jesus like he created Adam, after all. I pointed out to him that Adam was *created* while Jesus was *born* of a virgin. I showed him Jesus’s words in John 3:13: “‘No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven.’” I continued by explaining that Christ is the Word and his Spirit as the Qur’an says. He is 100 percent God and 100 percent man, so he is the only one who can hold the hand of a human and reconcile him to God.

The man asked me whether I had entered the Kingdom of God, and I told him I had. He wanted to know how that happened. I used the airplane paper napkin to draw this diagram about the Kingdom of God that I had learned from a Navigator leader named Jim Petersen.



In my early life I belonged to the religion of Christianity, but that religious institution did not automatically open the door for me to enter the Kingdom of God. I came out of the religious institution of Christianity and entered the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. My sins were forgiven, God adopted me as his child, and I was given the promise of eternal life. I told him this was the reason I was sure I would go to heaven after I die.

He was in the religion of Islam, but I told him he did not need to move to the religion of Christianity to enter the Kingdom of God. Through faith in Christ, he could move directly from Islam to the Kingdom of God. If he surrendered his life to Christ and trusted that Christ was the Son of God and asked him to forgive him, Christ would move him right away into the Kingdom of God and forgive his sins. I added this second diagram to the napkin.



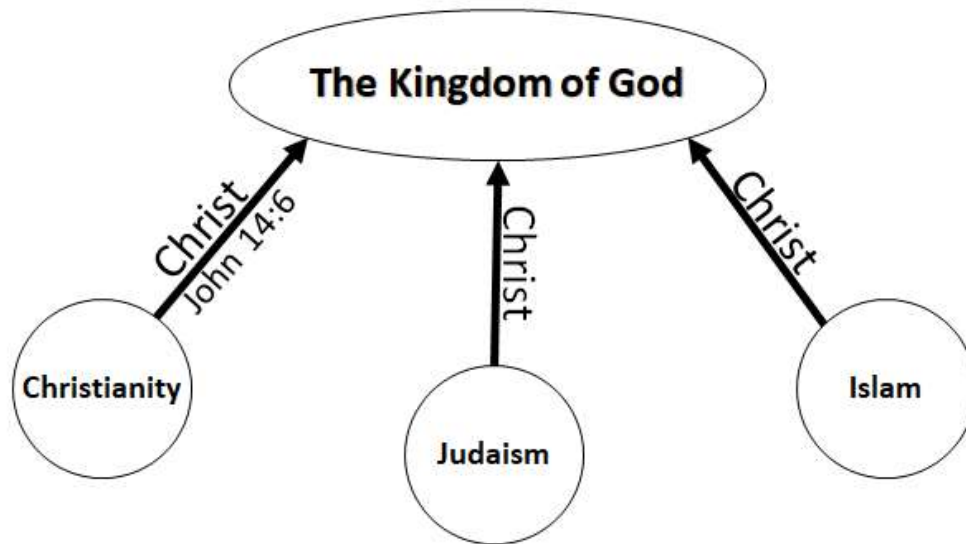
The man was open minded. He really listened and told me that it was the first time he had ever heard anything like this.

We stopped talking as the Greek flight attendant brought us our meal. After eating, I closed my eyes and prayed for the man sitting next to me and then went to sleep. When I woke up, I found out we still had four hours before we landed in New York. I wondered how to best use the time left on the flight, as the Muslim man next to me was reading the Egyptian newspaper that I had given him.

An idea came to mind, and I asked him if he could please share the diagram from the napkin with the woman sitting next to him in the window seat. Right away, he told me of course not, because Americans do not like to talk about religion. My real desire was to see how much he had understood of what I shared with him.

So I asked him if he would be willing to translate for me to the woman. In a kind way, he started talking with her in English and told me that she was Jewish. He continued talking with her for about ten minutes, until she said in a loud voice to me, "Don't you know what the Christians did to the Jews in Spain?" I was embarrassed as he translated this to me because her voice was so loud, and I did not have a clue what Christians did to the Jews in Spain. I knew what Hitler did to the Jews in Germany, but I knew nothing about Spain.

I regained my composure and acknowledged that we Christians had done some very bad things in our church history. She interrupted me and asked, “Why, then, are you trying to convert me to Christianity?” Through our translator, I told her I was not trying to convert her to Christianity. Then I asked him to draw the diagram on a new paper napkin and write in English what I wrote on the first napkin in Arabic. I asked him to add a third circle that included Judaism:



When she saw the finished diagram and understood that it was not about conversion from Judaism to Christianity, she said, “Now I understand what you are saying, and I will think about it.” The Jewish American woman was old, close to 90. I prayed for her and wondered if she would have another opportunity to consider her eternal destiny.

The flight attendant brought us the customs cards, and my Muslim friend insisted on filling out my card first. As we exited the plane at JFK, I thanked him deeply and waved to the Jewish woman as she walked away.

That day I realized that I could use that diagram with everyone. It takes the pressure off when they know I am not trying to convert them to another religion, but I am instead inviting them to the Kingdom of God.



## Chapter 24

### Hamada's Questions about a Corrupt Bible

Hamada, an Egyptian Muslim, read a popular Muslim book that claimed that the real, uncorrupted Old and New Testaments contained prophecies about Muhammad. The author took biblical texts out of context and fabricated his interpretations. He claimed that Christians had intentionally corrupted their Bible by changing some texts so that people would remain ignorant of the Bible's prophecies about Muhammad. Hamada loved the text the author had quoted from John 16:7-16:

“Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. ... In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

When Hamada read this passage in the book, he was attracted to its beauty. He longed to read the New Testament but did not know where to get a copy.

One of Hamada's jobs was driving a taxi. One day he was driving a man to a book exhibit where Christian ministries sold Bibles and other Christian literature. When Hamada learned that the man was selling books at the exhibit, including Bibles, he followed the man inside after they arrived. He purchased a copy of the New

Testament and asked if it was the real New Testament or the “corrupted” one. The man at the booth assured him that there were no corrupted New Testaments. Hamada had questions, so the man at the booth had him write down his name and address and assured him that someone would contact him.

That same day I went to the book exhibit. When I went to the booth Hamada had visited, they gave me that piece of paper because they knew of my love for Muslims and my desire to share the gospel with them. I kept the paper in my pocket for several days. I didn’t do anything with it because the address was far away, and no phone number was included. After a while, I asked Amgad, a young man from my church, if he would be willing to find Hamada.

It took a great deal of effort for Amgad to track down Hamada. When he came to his door, Hamada was surprised, even after Amgad showed him the piece of paper with his name and address on it. Amgad asked Hamada if he would come meet with me, Sheikh Samuel, so that I could answer his questions. (The word “Sheikh” in Arabic is used for both the imam at the mosque and for a church elder. Because I was an elder at our church, I sometimes used that title for myself with Muslims so they would understand my role.)

The following Friday, Amgad brought Hamada to our apartment. He was in his 40s and had a humble smile on his face. After we drank tea together, Hamada asked his question about whether or not the Bible was corrupted. He shared the Muslim belief that certain verses had been removed from the Bible, verses that talked about Moses and Jesus prophesying that Muhammad was the true prophet.<sup>3</sup>

I reached for the Bible, handed it to Hamada, and asked him if he would be kind enough to show me which sections had been inserted and resulted in the corruption of the Bible. I assured him that if he could show me these corrupt sections, I would reject the Bible and become an atheist.

Embarrassed, Hamada apologized and said he did not know anything more than what he had heard from imams and read in Muslim books. Instead of pressing

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<sup>3</sup> Nabeel Jabbour’s book *Unshackled and Growing*, Chapter 3, summarizes the sections relevant to Muslims from Lee Strobel’s book, *The Case for Christ*.

him with questions I knew he would not be able to answer, I suggested to Hamada that we get together every Friday and read the New Testament. We could search for any texts that were corrupted, and he could ask me any questions he had. That began the first of many Friday meetings together.

We started by reading the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. He had heard that there were differences in the genealogies of Jesus in the books of Matthew and Luke, so I explained that Matthew traced Christ's ancestors back to Abraham, while Luke started with Christ and went all the way back to Adam.

At the beginning and end of every session together, we would both stand up, lift our hands in a posture that Muslims use in prayer, and thank God for his blessings and ask him to show us the truth.

We read about the miracles of Christ—how he healed lepers, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead to life. We read Matthew 11:28, which Hamada loved: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” He also loved Matthew 12:19-20, which describes Jesus this way: “He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” With time, Hamada began to understand the gospel and that all people are sinful. They all need forgiveness through Christ. He was also impacted by Scripture's description of Jesus's authority over demons.

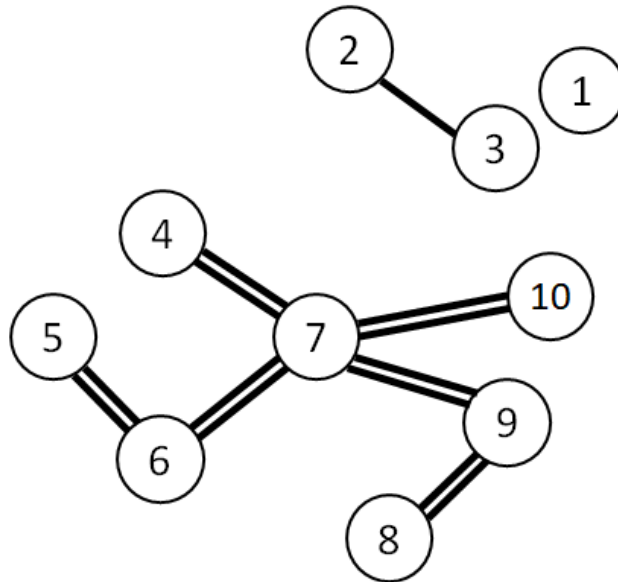
I do not remember the exact date when it happened, but one day after our time together I heard Hamada praying: “Thank you, Lord, for showing me the truth and thank you for opening my eyes. Lord Jesus, you are the truth. Will you please forgive me for my sin? I surrender all to you. Please enter my life and become my Lord and my King. Amen.”

After praying, he had a big smile on his face and told me he had peace in his heart, a peace he had never experienced before. I congratulated him for becoming a child of God, and we read John 1:12 together: “To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” I told him that God, the Holy Spirit, now dwelt in his heart.

## Chapter 25

### A Family Made New

Now that Hamada was in the Kingdom of God, I showed him a diagram that I had often seen Nabeel use.



I pointed out to Hamada that each of the ten circles represented ten people, and I asked him which of these ten people was marginal and ineffective, and which was the most influential person.

Hamada looked at the diagram carefully and identified #1 as the most ineffective and #7 as the most influential. I asked him which number he would like to be, as a follower of Christ, and right away he told me he would like to be #7.

I told him that I longed to see him as a #7-type follower of Christ, highly connected with his family, coworkers, and neighbors. As opposed to a #1, who was isolated and marginalized. I pointed out how #7 was connected to others with double lines, channels that needed to be unclogged and cleared out so that the gospel would flow through them to others.

While Hamada agreed that he wanted to be a #7 follower of Christ, he expressed his fear that his faith in Christ would isolate him from other Muslims who might hate him, reject him, and attack him. They might even attempt to kill him because converting to Christianity from Islam was considered high treason.

We talked about how he could share his faith. I asked him whether he saw himself as a convert to the religion of Christianity or whether he now belonged to the Kingdom of God. He said he saw himself as a person who was born into Islam but now believed in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He asked if he should change his name to a Christian name, and I told him that his faith in Christ had nothing to do with the name his parents had given him at birth. This conversation resolved some of his fears.

Wanting to know whether he had an assurance of salvation, I asked him where he would go after his death. Right away he said that he would go straight to heaven. Then I asked him where his wife would go, and he told me that she would go straight to hell.

He told me that his wife Maha was a difficult woman. She was a strict Muslim who wore the hijab, the Islamic head covering. Hamada said she was prejudiced against Christians and it would be impossible for her to want to know the truth and believe in Christ.

I told Hamada that it probably would be very hard for his wife to believe in Christ, but was anything impossible for God? God is all powerful. He agreed with me that God is all powerful, and we stood together to pray that God would open Maha's eyes to the truth.

Hamada and I continued to meet together every Friday. We read the New Testament and always prayed for his wife. Each time after our prayer, I asked him what number he was on the diagram, and he always answered that he was #7. I also encouraged him to keep the channel connecting him with his wife clean and unclogged.

One time I gave him a video of the *Jesus* film in Arabic, and I told him it was based on the Gospel of Luke. He took it home and called his wife and children together

to watch the video with him. Once it started, his wife asked him who was the man in the movie, and he told her that it was *Isa al Masih*, the Qur'anic name for Jesus. She screamed at him, commanding him to stop the video, saying that those Christians were making images of the prophets, and that was idolatry. He stopped the movie but left it in the machine.

Several days later, when Hamada returned home from work, he found his wife and children watching the *Jesus* film together. She said that the children were bored and wanted to watch the video, so she sat with them. He did not say anything but was happy about the development.

Some time later, Maha saw her husband reading a certain book and asked him what he was reading. He told her it was the *Injil*. She screamed at him, demanding to know whether he was converting to Christianity. He told her that every Muslim should read the *Tawrat*, the Qur'anic name for the books of Moses, the *Zabour*, the Qur'anic name for the Psalms (together, the *Tawrat* and *Zabour* in the Qur'an stand for the Old Testament), and the *Injil*, the New Testament. The Qur'an gave this command, and that was what he was doing. He left the Bible open to the Gospel of Mark and placed it on the table in the living room. When he returned home that evening, he found the Bible opened to 1 Corinthians and concluded that his wife was curious.

A year later Hamada encouraged me to visit his apartment and help him in his evangelism with his wife. I welcomed the idea and started praying for that visit.

Hamada welcomed me to his home, and when his wife brought us tea, I asked her if she would be willing to sit with us. She sat down with a suspicious look, and I assured her that I had no ulterior motives to try to convert her to Christianity. With defiance, she asked me what, then, were my real intentions. I told her that my desire was for her to become a true believer in God. She agreed with me that everyone should become a true believer in God.

Then I explained to her in detail why Jesus was the only way to God. I read to her what Jesus had said about himself in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Next I turned to the

Sermon on the Mount, reading to her from Matthew 5. A few moments later I noticed that she was angry and did not want to listen, so I stopped reading and left.

Several months later, I was in a taxi on my way to speak at a three-day Christian conference. The conference was not far from Hamada's apartment. I asked the taxi driver to take a detour to the apartment and wait for me, as I urgently needed to take care of something.

I went up to Hamada's apartment and told him and his wife about the conference where I would be speaking. I asked if they would be willing to come for a few hours on that first day. I assured them that their children would enjoy the activities and stories. Hamada was eager to come, but Maha rejected the offer. I told Hamada that I would wait for him in the taxi, as he needed to change his clothes. I sat in the taxi praying for them. A few minutes later, to my surprise, Hamada, his wife, and their children all came down to go to the conference.

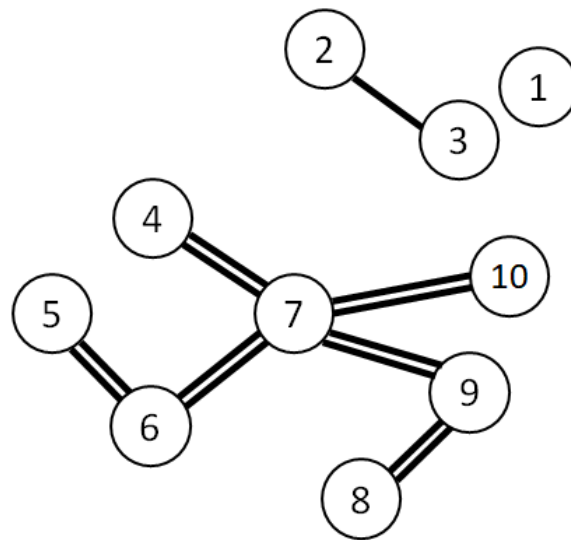
As soon as we arrived, they were welcomed by the people at the conference, and the children were invited to join in the Sunday school activities. I started speaking on the topic of the Kingdom of God and how people can enter it directly, without converting to the religious institution of Christianity. I said that "world religions" cannot save anyone or offer them a way into the Kingdom of God. I clearly taught how Christ alone is the way to the Kingdom of God.

I did not stay for the rest of the conference, but I asked the leaders to take good care of my Muslim friends. Later I learned that Hamada and his family went to all three days of the conference. The children liked the Sunday school, and Maha enjoyed learning new songs and finding out more about Christ and salvation. On the last day of the conference, Maha confessed her sin and surrendered her life to Christ.

## Chapter 26

### How the Gospel Spreads

When I heard the great news about Hamada's wife Maha, I went to their apartment to visit them. I drew the same diagram for Maha that I had drawn for her husband a long time ago.



I asked her the same questions that I asked Hamada. She, too, desired to be a #7 follower of Christ, so I encouraged her to use the channels of her relationships to share the love of Christ. She said that would be impossible because Muslims would not be willing to listen. I asked her whether anything was impossible for God and told her to pray for her extended family, her friends, and her neighbors. I encouraged her to keep her channels of relationships clean, and she took that responsibility seriously, especially after we looked at Jesus's command to his disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

One of Maha's relatives was returning from Kuwait, and the extended family was gathering to celebrate. Maha wanted to use that opportunity to allow Jesus to shine, so she asked everyone to watch the *Jesus* film. She started the video, but shortly afterward, one of the men asked her to stop the movie, which she did. He



asked her whether that was Jesus, “peace be upon him” (a phrase that Muslims say about Jesus out of respect for him), and Maha said it was. He told everyone that since none of them were Christians, the video was not relevant to them. Maha responded by asking him if it was better to watch this video or videos of women belly dancing. His face turned red. Maha told all of them it was their choice, and she assured them that *Isa* (Jesus) loved every one of them. One of the men shouted out at her and warned her about the danger of going astray.

Maha walked her children to school every morning. Once the children went into the school, the mothers lingered outside to socialize with one another. One day Maha noticed that one of the young mothers, Sou’ad, seemed depressed and distraught. Sou’ad had become a good friend, so Maha invited her over for tea. In appearance, Sou’ad was a strict Muslim. She wore the *al-niqab* head covering that showed only her eyes. But she carried a deep secret. During their time together, Sou’ad confided with tears that she had had an affair with a neighbor. She told Maha of her tormenting guilt, her sense of shame, and the fear of the tortures of hell that awaited her.

With the compassion of a mother, Maha listened to Sou’ad and told her that Jesus can forgive all sins. Sou’ad abruptly stopped weeping and asked Maha if she was a Christian. Maha told her that she was a true believer in God and had learned that Christ loves all people and was able to forgive all sins. Then Maha read John 8:2-11 out loud to Sou’ad:

“At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go

away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"

When Maha finished reading, she said to Sou'ad, "You can see how Jesus Christ forgave the woman who was caught in adultery." In a weak voice, Sou'ad muttered a quote from the Qur'an about how Christ came as a mercy to the world. After a period of silence, Sou'ad said quietly, "I wonder which of the two is the true religion, ours or theirs?" She asked Maha to help her understand which was true, Islam or Christianity.

Sou'ad's visits to Maha's apartment continued. Reading together from the Gospels brought more and more questions to the surface. Finally, Maha told Sou'ad that she did not know how to answer some of her questions, and that they should go see Sheikh Samuel.

I had heard about Sou'ad from Hamada, but when the two women showed up at our church office to meet with me, I was surprised to see Sou'ad wearing *al-niqab*, which showed only her eyes.

Sou'ad's questions were simple and honest, and we talked through some of them. Her burning desire was to know who had the truth, "us or you"? I responded to that question by asking, "Who is us and who is you?" I told her that we are all the children of the same parents, Adam and Eve. I told her that she would get the answer to her questions from the Word of God. I encouraged Maha to read with Sou'ad a children's picture-book Bible so she would have a complete overview of Scripture.

Their journey continued, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gradually Sou'ad's eyes were opened. After months of reading and studying with Maha, Sou'ad was invited to a conference along with Maha and Hamada. After listening to several messages, she put her faith in Christ and experienced total forgiveness and cleansing. She finally had peace with God and with herself.

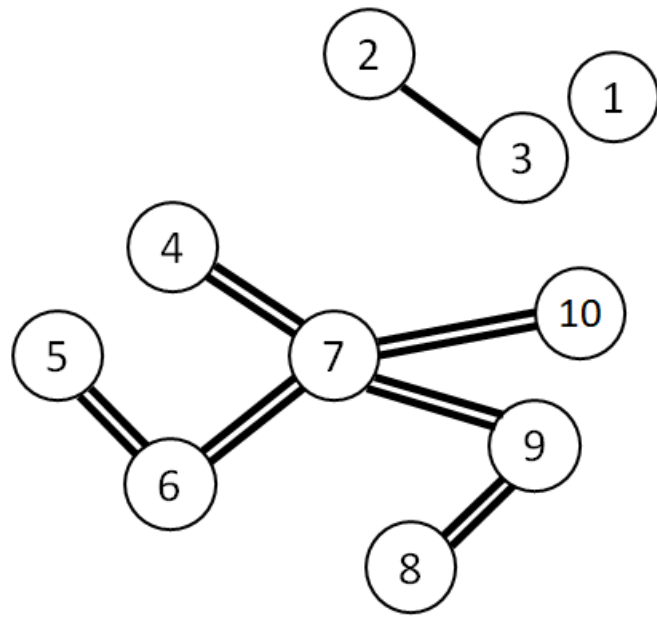
So Hamada was used by the Holy Spirit to bring his wife, Maha, to Christ. Then God used Maha to bring Sou'ad to Christ.

Jesus described the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13:33 with these words: “The kingdom of heaven is like a yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds [37 kilograms] of flour until it worked through the dough.” (In this verse, the yeast refers to the Kingdom of God, rather than the evil that yeast usually symbolizes in the Bible.)

For many years we assumed that when Muslims put their faith in Christ, they were to be immediately scooped up from the Muslim “pot of dough” and placed in the Protestant pot of dough. This assumption was perceived to be the only available option for Muslims, Orthodox, and Catholics who entered into relationship with Christ. The yeast of the Kingdom of God was not allowed to stay in the dough long enough to be worked into the Muslim pot.

In this example, we saw how the yeasting of the Kingdom started with Hamada. He was not scooped out from the Muslim pot but was allowed to stay culturally and relationally connected with his family and friends as a #7. The yeast continued to work through the dough until Maha came to know Christ. Maha continued wearing the *hijab* head covering. Her friends and family perceived her as a Muslim who loved God, not as an antagonistic Christian. Because Maha remained in the Muslim pot of dough as a believer, Sou'ad trusted her enough to share her deepest, darkest secret, which changed Sou'ad's life.

I want to leave you with this question: Are you a #7 follower of Christ, or are you #1 or #2? Are you connected with your neighbors, coworkers, and friends? Is the gospel flowing through the channels of relationships in your life, or are the channels clogged? What would it take for you to clean out your relationships so that the gospel flows unhindered through these channels?



## Chapter 27

### Confronting Fear

Nabeel served full time with a ministry that wanted to advance the gospel of Jesus and his Kingdom into the nations through spiritual generations of laborers living and discipling among the lost. What was visible to the Ministry of Interior and its undercover agents was Nabeel's ministry of discipleship among church people and his work with young couples in their marriages and parenting.

During the 14 days Nabeel was given to prepare for his departure, the inner circle of our ministry team met with him frequently to plan for the future. The vision planted by Nabeel in Egypt was better rooted during those two intensive weeks. Our mission would be geared toward evangelism, disciple making, and couples' ministry. A few months after Nabeel's departure, I was commissioned by the leadership team to lead that ministry.

I had been in that role for a few months when my friend Abu Samra informed me that a representative of the Ministry of Interior had called him in for interrogation. They had asked him only one question about his own ministry; the rest of the time, they wanted to know everything he knew about me and my ministry.

I wondered why the secret police were concerned with my ministry. I had never attacked Islam or criticized the Qur'an. It wasn't like our ministry negatively affected the national stability and security of our beloved Egypt. On the contrary, as we disciplined people, we taught them to love Egypt and love Muslims with sincerity and a pure heart, and to have no prejudice. My deep conviction was that as we grew more and more in Christlikeness, we became better citizens, loving our country and our people—regardless of social class or religious background—just like Jesus did.

In a moment of panic and possibly doubt, I wondered if I should resign from the ministry to avoid rocking the boat with the secret police. Then I reminded myself

that I was not doing anything illegal, and I should obey God and his calling on my life, no matter the cost.

Since Nabeel was not allowed back in Egypt, he frequently traveled from the U.S. to Cyprus, where we met to talk about our walk with God and our ministry in Egypt. In one of those reunions in Cyprus, I shared with him all the blessings and accomplishments that, by God's grace, we were witnessing in our ministry. But there was one major drawback—namely, the fear and reluctance among believers to share the gospel with Muslims. Nabeel wanted to know how I was different from the others. Why wasn't I afraid? Then he added that if I did have fears, he wanted to understand them.

For about three hours one evening in Cyprus, Nabeel very patiently tried to get to the core of my own fears, which I acknowledged were there. He wanted to get to the core of my fear, so we worked through a process that was something like peeling an onion one layer at a time. I could share stories with him of things that I had feared, but God had liberated me and I feared them no longer. But as our conversation went on, we finally reached the "onion core" of my fear. I had a deep-seated fear of the secret police coming to my home in the middle of the night and taking me immediately to prison.

What I was really afraid of was that they would take me in such a hurry that I wouldn't be able to take with me my daily medication, my reading glasses, my Bible, and some other essential items. As I said it, it sounded a little silly. Nabeel laughed with me and said, "Why don't you pack a little bag with these essentials, updating the medications every six months, and have that bag ready to take with you if they come to take you to prison."

I liked Nabeel's suggestion, so as soon as I returned to Egypt, my wife helped me find the right sized bag and I packed it with those essentials. It stayed next to the front door for 14 years and, thank God, I never needed to use it. But my core fear was addressed and alleviated.

Fear was often our companion in ministry in Egypt, so much so that we spent a whole year doing Bible study on fear. That year of study culminated in a

conference in which all participants were encouraged to identify and face the core of their fears and to deal with it. One young man discovered that his core fear was about being interrogated by the secret police. He went through several practice sessions, role playing with a friend who asked him tough questions, as if he were being interrogated. We discovered that Bible study on that topic, along with identifying core fears, released people from the bondage of fear.

(Later, during the Arab Spring of 2011, many Christians in Egypt were liberated from their fear of sharing the gospel with their Muslim friends. Christians played a big role during the demonstrations at Tahrir Square, openly praying and leading praise and worship with words that Muslims could understand. Christians became involved in deciding the fate of the country, instead of following their tradition of standing on the sideline and watching events unfold, trying to avoid political trouble.)

In August 2004, I returned from a trip to Jordan, where I had spoken at a conference for Muslim-background believers. I wanted to sleep for an hour in the afternoon to rest from the trip. My son David came in and woke me up, saying there were two men at the door whom he did not recognize. They wanted to talk with me. I quickly dressed and entered the living room. I greeted one of the two men by name, saying, "Welcome to my home, Mr. Salah."

The two men stood up, and the one I had addressed asked me how I knew his name. I ignored his question for a moment, asking the two of them to have a seat and sending my son to get cold drinks for our guests. I then told Mr. Salah that I had seen him several times at the yearly General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian church in Egypt. (He had attended as the representative of the Ministry of Interior's intelligence agencies. The pastors and elders who attended knew who he was and why he was there.) Mr. Salah wondered how I knew about his presence in the General Assemblies, so I told him I had attended the meetings as a church elder. I said I was confident that he must have seen, during those meetings, the love of the Christians for our country and how we pray for Egypt.

He asked for my personal ID number and our phone numbers and told me to report to the office of a top-secret police officer at the odd time of 10 p.m. the

next day. I asked him whether he had an official letter from the office of the intelligence officer. That made him angry, but I insisted that unless I had an official letter, I would not go. To my surprise, right there in my home he wrote an official letter, signed it, and handed it to me.

As soon as the men left, my family gathered around me in obvious panic, asking me what I was going to do. I mustered calmness that I did not feel in an effort to assure my wife and children that everything would be okay. I asked them to pray for me for wisdom.

I spent some time alone wondering why they would want to interrogate me. I came to the conclusion that perhaps they were trying to intimidate me so that I would slow down my evangelism to Muslims. I spent time in prayer asking the Lord to help me in three areas:

1. That I would not be intimidated or broken by the tactic I anticipated they would use—leaving me alone in a room for many hours while I waited to be interrogated.
2. That I would not lie in any of my responses.
3. That I would not endanger any of my ministry partners with anything I said.

The next evening, I shaved, dressed in a suit and tie as if I were going to a wedding, and took the metro to the Ministry of Interior. I went to the reception desk and presented my personal ID card along with the requested documents. As I sat in the waiting room, I pulled out one of the discipleship books that I had brought in my briefcase and began reading. Ten minutes later, the man who had come to our apartment called my name and asked me to follow him. He was in civilian clothes, but police officers saluted him as we passed. We went up to the third floor and knocked on a door.

When I entered, I saw two men in civilian clothes. I greeted them with the Islamic greeting, as was my habit. They responded and asked me to sit down. From there our conversation went like this:

“What would you like to drink?”



“I have just come from home, and I had tea before I came.”

“No, I insist, you should drink something.”

“Thank you. I would then appreciate having another glass of tea, please.”

“Has anyone bothered you in your part of the city?”

“No, my neighbors are all good people. I respect them, and they respect us.”

“How about the Muslim fundamentalists in your area, like the man who owns the small supermarket near your apartment?”

“He is very friendly, and all our neighbors are good people.”

“What ministry do you have in the churches these days?”

“I train people in discipleship.” I took out the three books we used, and I gave them to one of the men.

“Why do you travel a great deal within Egypt and to other countries?”

“Some churches ask me to help them start discipleship groups, and I am willing and eager to help them.”

“There are many people who go to your apartment. Why?”

“As a servant of the Lord, our home is wide open for people to come. We welcome everyone.”

“There are Muslims who are visiting you as well. Why?”

“I am not prejudiced, and I welcome everyone who comes to our apartment.” I saw that one of the two men was writing down everything I said.

“Who are the Muslims who have visited you?”

“I do not get the full names of Muslims when they visit me. I know only the first names, such as Muhammad, Ahmad, Hasan, etc.”

The man smiled and asked me, “Who is your main Muslim visitor?”

“Dr Yahya al Sa’id.” He was a relative of a famous politician as well as a well-known Muslim convert to Christianity. He had come to know Christ through a famous Egyptian pastor, and he used to come to our apartment to study the Bible with me. Some pastors in Egypt were suspicious of his motives, and his family had rejected him. He left Cairo to move to Australia where he had died shortly afterward.

“He is a liar and an infidel.”

“You know him better than I do.”

“Who are the Christians who help you in your ministry?”

“The man who helped me the most was my friend Victor Shukry. I am very sad that he died in an accident in his workshop.”

With anger, he asked me: “Who else helps you in your ministry?”

“Dr. Hany Maher, who moved to the United States.”

Then, with a falsely caring tone that did nothing to hide an insinuated threat, he said, “We are worried about your son David. The Muslim fundamentalists might kidnap him.”

I pretended not to understand what he was saying. I answered, “My son is young, and he is not involved in my ministry.”

They thanked me, we shook hands, and I left the office.

It was about 11:30 when I walked to the metro station to go back home. As I reflected over the experience, I felt deeply grateful to God that he answered my prayer. I had not lied nor revealed any information that could harm anyone else. As for the hidden threat made toward David, I prayed and reminded myself that David was not only our son, but also God’s son, and he would protect him.

When I arrived home, my family was anxiously waiting for me. I shared everything with them except the part about David. The only person I told about that was Nabeel. I wrote a long letter to him and had a friend hand-carry it to America,

where he mailed it to Nabeel in Colorado. I asked him to keep the implied threat confidential and not to let my wife and children know. Only after moving to the U.S. two years later did I share with my family the threatening words spoken against David.

Why did the secret police interrogate me? I thought of three possibilities:

1. Perhaps they wanted to intimidate me and make me a captive to fear.
2. Maybe they hoped that under pressure, I would lie, and as a result I would live with guilt.
3. Maybe they even wanted to recruit me, promising to protect me if I was willing to reveal the secrets of other servants of the Lord.

What is Satan's strategy? He wants us to become his captives by being gripped with fear. He wants to gain a foothold in our lives by getting us to lie and lose our peace with God. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (see John 8:44). Furthermore, Satan wants to bring division in the body of Christ.

Several weeks later I was at a meeting in a fancy hotel in Cairo that brought together leaders of both Christianity and Islam. I was sitting next to my friend, Pastor Rif'at Fikry. Suddenly, the man who had interrogated me entered the hall. We both stood up and shook hands with him. I asked Pastor Rif'at if he knew who the man was. He told me that he was the top officer in the Ministry of Interior, responsible for keeping an eye on the Christian community in Egypt.

I am grateful to God for the way the interrogation went. There was no torture or bad treatment. On the contrary, they treated me with respect, in spite of trying to intimidate me with a covert threat.

## Chapter 28

### A Muslim Fundamentalist's Search for God

Sheikh Bahaa was a mechanical engineer in Cairo. As a university student he joined an Islamic fundamentalist organization because he yearned for God. With time, he became the leader of that organization. Through his connections with Muslim fundamentalists in Saudi Arabia, he got a job through a Saudi agent in Saudi Arabia. Bahaa was overwhelmed with joy about the opportunity to visit the holy land of Saudi Arabia, perform the pilgrimage, and visit the tomb of the Prophet.

After a year of hard work in Saudi Arabia, he had to come back to Cairo after discovering that the Saudi sponsor was corrupt. Bahaa returned to Egypt disillusioned. He wondered how a committed Muslim fundamentalist could be such a crook. He was also shocked by how some men who went on the pilgrimage used the opportunity to inappropriately touch women during the crowded events.

Bahaa returned to Egypt with the conviction that Islam is beautiful, but some Muslims had corrupted the pure religion. In 1994 he published a book called *The Religion of Islam*. With time, he became one of the leading members of an Islamic fundamentalist organization. As he climbed the ranks of that organization, he found out that some of the donated funds designated for helping the poor were being stolen by some of its members. Bahaa resigned from the organization. Done with organized religion, he practiced his devotion to God privately every evening in his office.

My path crossed Bahaa's when he attended a meeting for leaders in Christianity and Islam where my pastor was speaking. Bahaa was impressed by the lecture and afterward went to talk to Pastor Ikram, who was a bit put off by Bahaa's long beard, white robe, white hat, and sandals. He was obviously a Muslim fundamentalist. Pastor Ikram gave him his business card and told him to make an

appointment at our church. The next day Bahaa called and made the appointment. Pastor Ikram called me and said, "One of your loved ones is coming to my office, and you are the best one to answer his questions."

When I arrived at the church, Bahaa was already waiting in the waiting area. I recognized him from his Islamic attire and greeted him with the Islamic greeting. I noticed that he was holding a draft of a book that he was planning to publish with the title, *Muslims are the Source of Terrorism*. I asked if I could borrow it and read it, and he passed it on to me.

There were many people in the reception area, so I suggested that we meet at my apartment to discuss his questions. On the way, he told me that he loved Pastor Ikram's lecture, but when he tried to ask him his questions privately, the pastor had seemed more reserved and reluctant to answer. I looked at Bahaa's face, and I loved him. I saw his genuineness. I told him how much I admired his search for God, and I was ready to address his questions. I assured him that God never ignores someone who is truly searching for him.

As I had done with others, I started by reading the Sermon on the Mount with Bahaa. He told me it was the first time he had ever seen a New Testament. When we reached Matthew 5:8—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"—I noticed that he was touched deeply and his eyes were teary. I asked him, "How do we get to have pure hearts?" He said it would happen when we are liberated from hatred, bitterness, and lust. I added, "May the Lord help us to live with pure hearts."

Then we read the next verse, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." He said that the world needed the kind of peacemakers Christ was talking about, and I agreed with him.

After two hours together, I gave Bahaa a copy of the New Testament. I walked him to the metro station, and we agreed on when to meet next.

In our second session, we read John 1:1-13:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

I explained what this passage said about Jesus, and we discussed several of Bahaa’s questions. His burning issue had to do with Jesus being the Son of God, because Surah 112:3 in the Qur’an states that *“He neither begets nor is born.”*

I know that our belief in the Triune God is a mystery, beyond our limited understanding. So I used some illustrations to make it easier for him to understand.

He asked me why Christians pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I told him that exact expression does not exist in the Bible, but more than 5,000 times the Bible states or implies that God is one. I suggested that we pray together and ask the Triune God to reveal himself to us and open our hearts and minds.

During our third session together, we read passages that showed Christ’s compassion and his miracles. Bahaa told me that he loved the person of Christ because he had compassion on the weak and the sick. He even loved the sinners, which was contrary to what he knew about God in Islam, where God hated sinners and adulterers.

Before leaving my apartment, I told Bahaa that I would be going to Jordan for a one-week trip and asked him if he would remember me in his prayers. He said he would, then he told me he wanted to make the most out of the week I was gone. What could he be reading while I was absent? I suggested that he continue reading the Gospel of Luke. Then I remembered Nabeel Jabbour's book, *Fi Khuta Sayid (In the Footsteps of the Master)*, which was an Arabic summary of Nabeel's book *Unshackled and Growing: Muslim and Christians on the Journey to Freedom*.<sup>4</sup> The book explains the gospel and how to grow in Christ in an atmosphere of grace. Bahaa took a copy of the book, and we agreed to meet two weeks later.

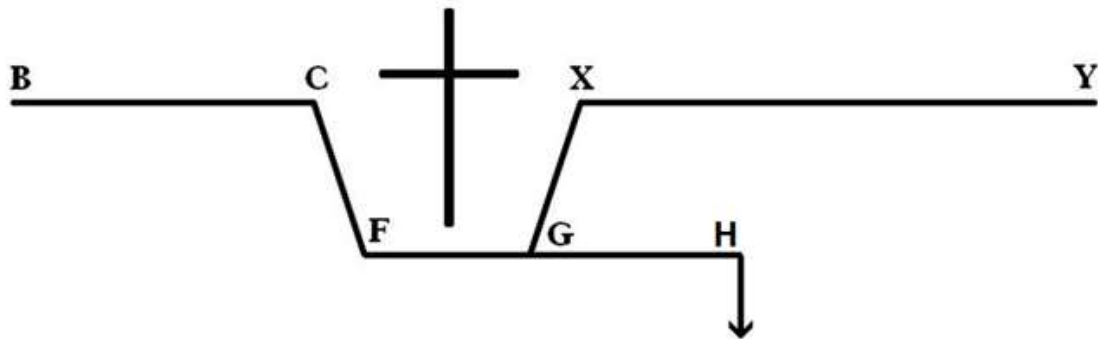
The day I returned from Jordan, Bahaa called and said he had had a burning question all week and needed to discuss it with me. We decided to meet the next day.

During my quiet time that day, I meditated on Hebrews 11. The thought came to my mind that this would be a very important chapter on Bahaa's journey to Christ.

I started our time together by suggesting we read Hebrews 11, but Bahaa interrupted me, saying, "I do not want to read in the Bible today." I was shocked by that statement and asked him what the problem was. He opened the book I had given him and told me he wanted to talk about this diagram:

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<sup>4</sup> *Unshackled and Growing* is available in English and can also be downloaded for free in Kindle version on Nabeel's website, [nabeeljabbour.com](http://nabeeljabbour.com).



We talked together about what the diagram represents:

Adam and Eve were created at point **B**, after God created the universe. They were allowed to eat fruit from any tree in the garden, including the Tree of Life at the center of the garden, so that they would move forward in the direction of **Y**. Instead, they chose to disobey God and eat from the only forbidden tree; as a result, the Fall occurred (**CF**).

Line **FGH** describes life as we see it, with no harmony—neither with God, nor with oneself, nor with fellowman, nor with the environment. At the point of death (**H**), people will have to face their creator and the reality of hell.

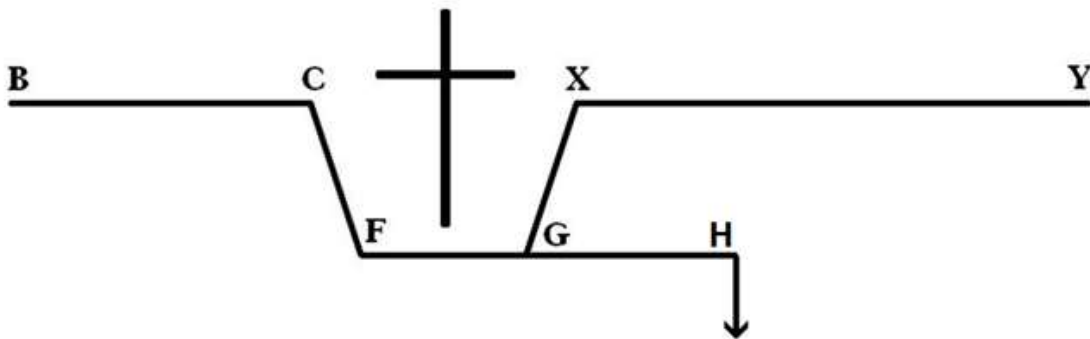
The cross is the only solution. Christ took our sin upon himself and gave us his righteousness—a 100 percent passing grade as we stand before God. As a result of the cross and the resurrection, we now have a way out of our predicament. Whoever believes in Christ and surrenders their life to him will be transformed into a child of God (represented by line **GX**). In the case of Muslims, it means getting off the treadmill of trying to please and appease God, and instead finding complete forgiveness and having a new spiritual DNA.

**XY** is the journey forward in Christlikeness, a journey filled with grace as a child of God, completely loved by God, our heavenly Father. On line **XY**, we have a new identity: “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).



The diagram appealed to Bahaa because of his engineering background, and he seemed to have a very good understanding of what it represented. What he wanted to know was this: If he wanted to get off of line **FGH**, which would end up in hell, what could he do to move from **G** to **X**?

At that point, I remembered what I had read in Hebrews 11 that morning, and I opened my Bible there. I showed him the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Bahaa liked the definition, but it didn’t answer his question. I told Bahaa that Christ did all that was needed because he was crucified in his place. Christ paid the penalty of Bahaa’s sin, and all he needed to do was to confess his sin, put his faith in Christ as his Lord and Savior, and ask Christ to come into his life. Once he invited Christ into his life, Christ would, naturally and miraculously, move him from **G** to **X**.



Again Bahaa asked me what he needed to do, so I again told him that Jesus did it all. All he needed to do was recognize his need and accept that gift from the one who died for him. He told me that for the past week he had been obsessed with what he needed to do to move from **G** to **X**, and now he realized all he needed to do was to accept the gift by faith.

I suggested we pray together, and he repeated after me: “Lord, I am a sinner, and I need your forgiveness and mercy. Thank you for forgiving all my sins, and thank you for Christ’s death on the cross in my place.” Bahaa started weeping as he

prayed. I encouraged him to ask Jesus into his heart. In a loud voice he said, "Lord Jesus, come into my heart and give me a new heart. Amen." He wept again, even louder this time.

I waited until he had dried his tears, then I asked him where he would put himself on the diagram now. Without hesitation and with great joy, he pointed to **X**. I showed him John 5:24, where Jesus says: "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Just then, my wife called and asked why I was late picking up her and the children. I looked at my watch, and to my amazement, I realized Bahaa and I had been meeting for three hours. We did not even feel the passing of time! I told my wife to take a taxi because I had a very important guest with me, someone who I would love for her to meet.

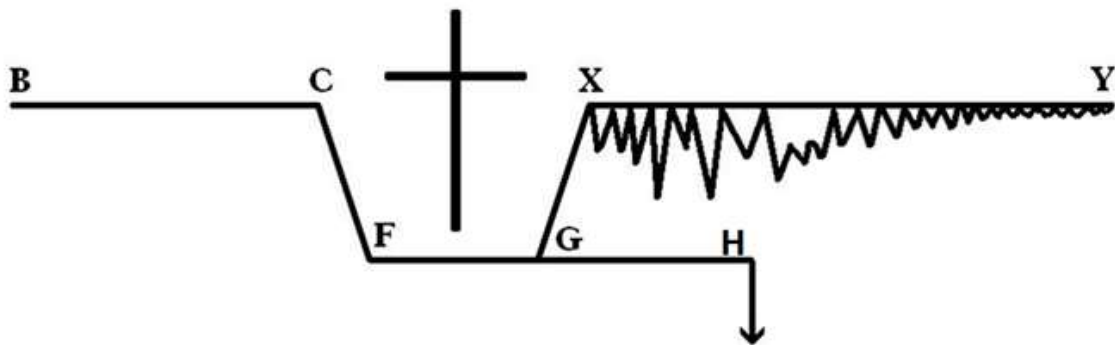
After witnessing the miracle of new birth taking place with such simplicity and the power of the Holy Spirit, I read two more verses with Bahaa. First, I read John 1:12: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." I asked him about his understanding of his identity according to that passage. With deep, profound joy, he told me that he had become a child of God.

I hugged him and told him that he was my brother. He had arrived at point **X** and was on the journey toward **Y**. I then turned to Romans 8:29: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."

My wife and children arrived home. I could see the surprise on my wife's face as she walked in to find this man with his long beard, white robe, and white hat wiping away his tears. This was the first time my family had met Bahaa. I shared with my wife what had happened in the past few minutes and, with great joy, she shook his hand and congratulated him on becoming a new creation.

The diagram that Bahaa and I used describes what is known as "declared righteousness," which means the way God sees us. **XY** describes how God sees

me all the time, as a saint who still sins. The diagram below shows how we often forget who we are in Christ and live like grasshoppers (see Numbers 13:33). Do I see myself the way God sees me, or do I think I'm really a forgiven sinner who is trying hard to become a saint? The first describes growth, in an atmosphere of grace and with a new covenant identity, and the second describes a life with an old covenant identity leading to legalism.



## Chapter 29

### Bahaa's Vision for the Great Commission

A week after Bahaa trusted Christ, he came to my apartment and showed me his written strategy to obey the Great Commission and reach all of Egypt! I looked at Bahaa with both admiration and fear. If he challenged the present state of affairs in Egypt, he could be arrested, or worse.

He responded to my concern with strong conviction: "Do you expect me to be a believer in Christ and not warn my extended family and loved ones about their need to believe in him too? In the past, when I was lost, I led many people astray. Now I need to share the gospel with them!" I told him that I fully agreed with him, but I was afraid that what he had written could lead to his arrest and even torture. He said that people needed to know the truth, no matter the cost.

A few days later, I introduced Bahaa to a Muslim fundamentalist named Muhammad who had been reading the Gospels with me for weeks without any genuine desire to know God. I thought that perhaps Bahaa would challenge him to become open and teachable. The following Tuesday, I took Bahaa with me to attend one of my discipleship meetings and had him share his testimony with the group. After the meeting I dropped him off to catch the bus that would take him to his apartment.

The next morning Bahaa called me, and I could tell he was very disturbed. He said, "Your friends (meaning the secret police) broke into my office!" I asked him to come to my apartment right away so that we could discuss what to do. I prayed and asked God for his mercy and grace.

Hours passed as I waited for Bahaa to show up, but he never came. I decided to call his home phone, and his wife answered the phone, weeping. This was my first time to ever talk to her. She told me that Bahaa was arrested and taken away before he could come to his appointment with me. She did not know where he had been taken.

Three days later, I went to Bahaa's apartment to check on his wife and children and look after their needs. I then took his wife and their eldest son Muhammad to the police headquarters to try to find out where Bahaa was being held. They took with them his daily medications with the hope of being able to give it to him. Sadly, the police said they knew nothing about him or his whereabouts.

The next day I contacted a lawyer, who connected me with another famous lawyer who specialized in human rights cases. That lawyer was finally able to find out where Bahaa was imprisoned and was able to get him his medication and other essentials.

Bahaa was imprisoned, without a trial, in the famous Turra prison. This was a prison for political prisoners and Muslim fundamentalist leaders. At Turra, Bahaa was severely beaten by fellow inmates. Chunks of his beard were ruthlessly plucked out by Muslim fundamentalist prisoners who had learned of Bahaa's faith in Christ. One of the young men in our ministry, who was a Muslim-background believer, visited Bahaa a few times at Turra. Through that friend, I managed to send letters with quotes from the Scriptures to comfort Bahaa. I would find out later that Bahaa's only source of solace at Turra prison was those few verses from the Bible.

After being there for a few months, Bahaa was finally taken to court, where he was declared not guilty. Nonetheless, as he walked out of the courtroom—and before having the chance to savor his restored freedom—the secret police arrested him again and took him to Wadi Natroun prison. Though he had just been declared not guilty and released, Bahaa was taken away and imprisoned again. (After the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, an emergency law was passed that allowed the police to arrest any potential suspect for six months without taking the prisoner to court. Some police abused this law so that a person could be arrested and released repeatedly.)

Wadi Natroun prison was a newly constructed prison in the desert between Cairo and Alexandria. Prisoners were placed in underground cells. Our same ministry team member who had visited Bahaa at Turra tried to see him at Wadi Natroun. He was stripped naked and thoroughly searched, and when they found the

message I had sent Bahaa, they confiscated it, and Bahaa never saw it. The young man never dared to visit Bahaa at that prison again. From a human perspective, Bahaa was abandoned.

God sustained the apostle Paul when he was in prison and drew him closer to himself. Likewise, God penetrated the locked doors of Bahaa's prison, sustaining Bahaa and drawing him closer. Through the prayers of God's people and the sacrificial love of a few, the Lord orchestrated a series of unusual events that allowed some of God's children to be his hands and feet in Bahaa's life.

Revelation 3:7 says: "What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." The sovereign Lord, faithful and true, worked all things for good for Bahaa, and miraculously he was released from prison. Shortly after his release, he left Egypt and now lives in the United States.

Bahaa's life reminds us of the power of the Holy Spirit to radically transform a life. Think of the diagram that God used to change Bahaa's life. Where are you on that diagram? Have you ever surrendered your life totally to Christ? If you're not sure where you stand, consider that Jesus might be right now standing at the door of your heart and knocking. He wants to come into your life, through the Holy Spirit, to create within you a new spiritual DNA, that of a child of God. You can take the next step by responding to him, opening your life to him, and inviting him to come in. If you do that, he has promised that he *will* come in.

Come before him with humility, admitting your brokenness and repentance, and say: "I am a sinful person, and I want to repent and surrender my whole life to you. Right now, I open the door of my life. Please forgive me for the way I have treated you with contempt and at times even with defiance. Have mercy on me. I repent and surrender to you. Lord Jesus, please come into my life."

## Chapter 30

### Intimidation Tactics

By now you know how much I love my native Egypt. It saddens me to air my country's dirty laundry, but to do so gives a more complete picture of what our ministry was like there.

I was contacted by the office of Pastor Safwat al Bayadi, asking me to come to his office to meet with a Muslim seeker named Muhammad Abdulhay. Pastor Safwat was the spokesman and representative of all the Protestant churches in Egypt when it came to government issues. I was told that I had been recommended as someone who could answer Muhammad's many questions about the Bible.

When I arrived at the waiting room of Pastor Safwat's office, I met Muhammad, a young man in his thirties with dark skin and a beard. As I shook his hand, he noted that I was not Pastor Safwat al Bayadi. I agreed and asked him how he knew, and he told me he had seen photos of Pastor Safwat in the newspapers. I asked him why he wanted to meet with Pastor Safwat, so he told me that he had a copy of the Bible and he had many questions about it. I told him Pastor Safwat was very busy and had asked me to meet with Muhammad about his questions.

We agreed to get together at 5 p.m. that day at my church's office. He was already waiting for me when I arrived. We started reading the Gospel of Luke, and after the first four chapters, he had no questions. I asked him whether we could stop there and continue next week. He told me he preferred not to wait a week, but to meet again the following day. We did, and after reading Luke 5 and 6, he still had no questions. He insisted, however, that we meet daily. I told him I could meet once a week, and in between he could meet with my friend John. Eventually, John took over and continued to study with Muhammad, and I stopped meeting with him.

Several months later, John called me and said a miracle had happened. The day before, Muhammad Abdulhay had come to him with a bloodshot eye, but a day later, it was completely cured. He told John that Jesus had appeared to him the

night before, and he had asked Jesus to heal his eye. John could tell by my response that I was skeptical. I don't put much weight in such "miracle" stories because they do not necessarily reflect a transformed heart and life.

Weeks went by, and John continued meeting with Muhammad, but with no progress. As John and I wondered about this, we came to the conclusion that Muhammad was probably sent by the undercover agents of the Ministry of Interior. This seemed to me like a golden opportunity to let the Ministry of Interior find out what we did. We were not doing anything illegal. Muslims had the freedom to proclaim their message, and we should have our freedom to proclaim the gospel without being scared or intimidated.

I invited Muhammad Abdulhay to several of the conferences where many believers from Muslim backgrounds attended. Muhammad never wanted to share about how Jesus appeared to him or the "miraculous" healing he experienced. He also did not want to be in any photos with others.

In Alexandria, 180 kilometers north of Cairo, a couple named Ibrahim and Rania worked for a Christian organization, which I will call Organization X. They were both involved in evangelistic correspondence with Muslims who had questions about Jesus, the Bible, and Christian faith. I worked closely with them. On December 1, 2005, Rania called to tell me she was extremely worried about her husband's disappearance.

Muhammad Abdulhay had met Ibrahim at one of our conferences. He had asked Ibrahim to meet with him at the train station on November 30 in the city of Tanta, which is south of Alexandria and north of Cairo. Rania told me her husband went to the train station the day before to meet Muhammad and had not returned home.

I found out later from Ibrahim what had happened. He met Muhammad Abdulhay at the train station, and they got into a taxi. Muhammad sat in front next to the driver while Ibrahim sat in back. Muhammad asked Ibrahim if he could borrow his cell phone, but in reality, he wanted to confiscate it. The taxi drove for about half a kilometer, then suddenly stopped. Two thugs got into the taxi and sat on either



side of Ibrahim as the taxi drove on. They threatened Ibrahim with knives before drugging him, which was the last thing he remembered before losing consciousness.



After I got Rania’s call, I called Muhammad and asked him where Ibrahim was. At first, he acted like he didn’t know what I was talking about, but as I continued to question him, he said he had met Ibrahim at the train station, but then he had left. In a commanding voice, I told him, “You have one hour to find him.” An hour later I called Muhammad again, and he told me to give him until the end of the day to locate Ibrahim.

Later that day, I received a phone call from the leadership of Organization X, where Ibrahim worked. They had been told that to secure his release, they needed to pay a ransom, and they asked me to join them in taking the money to Mahallah (close to Tanta), where the exchange would take place.

I went with four men from the organization to Mahalla. As we were driving, one of them received a call from Muhammad telling us to get to Mahalla as quickly as we could. I took the phone, surprising Muhammad, who had not expected me to be part of the exchange. Inexplicably, he pleaded with us to return to Cairo instead of proceeding to Mahalla and promised that he would bring Ibrahim to us the next day. I thanked him for his courage and willingness to help us. After discussing it for a few minutes, the five of us decided to return to Cairo and wait until the next day.

The next day, Friday, Muhammad called me and told me that he was in Asyut, a very distant city in the south of Egypt, and that he was bringing Ibrahim back to Cairo with him. He also called one of the leaders of Organization X and told him to come to Cairo with the ransom money. As we discussed the conflicting instructions, we concluded that Muhammad was trying to confuse us and stress us out. We decided to drive north to Mahalla.

On our way to Mahalla, one of the kidnapers called and said to hurry to Mahalla with the ransom money. I snatched the phone and told them to stop toying with us. He responded with a threat: "Your son's name is David, and he is studying engineering. I promise you that we will kidnap him, and he will join Ibrahim." I immediately hung up.

One of the men sitting next to me heard the threat, and the others agreed that this situation was getting out of hand and we should return to Cairo. I insisted that we continue to Mahalla, but I did call my wife and tell her to take the children and go to her parents' home.

On our way to Mahalla, we stopped in Tanta to have lunch. While there, I called Pastor Safwat, the head of all Protestants in Egypt, and informed him of all that had happened. He immediately called a high official in the Ministry of Interior and advised us to wait in Tanta for undercover agents from their office.

We waited until 5 p.m., but no one came. Finally, I told the other four men to give me the ransom money and I would go to Muhammad's apartment in Mahalla. While they waited in Tanta for the undercover agents to arrive, I drove to Mahalla

to see my friend John, who also lived there, because he knew where Muhammad lived.

John and nine of his Christian friends met with me, and we had a powerful prayer time together. We pleaded to God with tears, asking him to intervene. I asked John if he would drive me to Muhammad's apartment, but he refused, fearful that I could lose my life. So I called Muhammad, told him where I was, and asked him to meet me to get the ransom money, but he refused to come.

I was worried about my family in Cairo and wanted to get back to check on them and assure them that we were safe in God's care. As I started driving back to Cairo, Muhammad called me and told me that, for my sake, he "kidnapped" Ibrahim from the gang and was going to take him back to Alexandria. I did not believe Muhammad until I heard Ibrahim's voice on the phone. I told Muhammad to take Ibrahim to the train station in Tanta instead of taking him all the way to Alexandria and that I would meet him there with the ransom money. I contacted the four men from Organization X, who were still waiting in Tanta, and told them to go to the train station to see if Ibrahim was there. A few minutes later they called back and told me they found Ibrahim but that he needed urgent medical care.

I turned my car around and drove back to Tanta to pay the ransom money to Muhammad. I parked my car at a distance and walked toward Muhammad, but when I tried to give him the money, he refused to take it. I hugged him and thanked him for his courage. By the time I left, it was almost midnight.

The miracle of God's protection that I experienced that night came as the result of the car I was driving. I used to drive a stick shift, but because I had a problem with my left knee, I had just replaced my old car a day earlier with a newer automatic car that did not require me to use my left foot. Muhammad, Ibrahim's kidnappers, and anyone working for the Ministry of Interior would have recognized my old car, but not the one I drove in and out of Tanta that day. I was able to get in and out undetected. God in his sovereignty protected me! On the way back to Cairo, I enjoyed a deep intimacy with God my Father as my heart overflowed with praise and thanksgiving.

The next day, Ibrahim called me from his home. He said he needed to tell me something confidential and he wanted to see me in person. I drove to his apartment in Alexandria. When I arrived, he pulled me into a private room and said, "Muhammad Abdulhay wants to assassinate you." I laughed. Ibrahim then clutched my clothes and shook me, warning, "This is very serious! Please listen to me and take it very seriously." I became quiet, thanked him, and assured him that God would protect me. Then I returned to Cairo.

I thought that the whole thing with Muhammad Abdulhay was finished, but he called me the following day and wanted to see me. We met at my church, and I saw that he had shaved his beard. I asked him to help me make sense of what had happened in the past few days and months.

He told me that the undercover agents had hired some Muslim fundamentalists to do their dirty work for them, and that all that had happened recently took place with the full knowledge of the Ministry of Interior. I did not know whether to trust him or not, so I asked him what the undercover agents wanted from me. I reminded Muhammad that he had attended several of our conferences and spent a great deal of time with me. I asked him if he had ever seen me or my friends being disloyal to Egypt, not loving our Muslim brothers, or criticizing the Qur'an and Islam.

He took out a little tape recorder from his pocket and told me to record what I wished to say to the undercover agents. I said that I trained my Christian friends to love Muslims and that I had never criticized the Qur'an or Islam. He recorded that message and left, and I never saw his face again.

That was not the end of the story, however. We started receiving phone calls at our house where no one spoke on the other end of the line. When a pastor friend of mine was nearly kidnapped, I learned that Muhammad Abdulhay had been involved, posing as an orthodox priest. When my pastor friend confronted Muhammad, asking him why he was involved in a plot against a man he didn't even know, Muhammad told him, "Check with Sheikh Samuel." He said that I had tried to Christianize his wife and baptize her. In truth, I had never met or even seen Muhammad's wife.

Under the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, Muslim fundamentalists like Muhammad were used by the Ministry of Interior to intimidate Christian workers. They wanted us to be afraid. This is what had become of my beloved Egypt, and it left me with deep sorrow.

## Chapter 31

### A Different Kind of Conference

We used to have an annual conference where we brought together people from all of our discipleship groups across Egypt for fellowship and worship. Each year at these conferences we were joined by a few believers in Christ from a Muslim background.

At one of my moments of thinking outside the box, I wondered, “Why don’t we invite our Muslim friends who are still searching for the truth to join us? It would give us an opportunity to listen to them and them an opportunity to find out what we believe.” I decided that all of the members of our discipleship groups should bring their Muslim friends with them to that year’s conference. Some thought it was a strange idea, but as I had made it a condition of their invitation, they cooperated and invited their Muslim friends.

I wrote an official letter from our church to Egypt’s Muslim minister of religious affairs, asking his permission to allow this event to take place. I said that we would have an imam as one of our main speakers who would represent Muslims at the conference. The minister of religious affairs gave us permission for the dialogue conference, and the imam promised to bring with him some Muslim leaders from his mosque.

I invited several of the Muslims I knew: Sheikh Ramadan the engineer; Muna, the female teacher of Arabic literature at our church’s private school, who brought her lawyer husband and three adult children with her; and the wife and children of Bahaa, who was still in prison at that time. Others in our discipleship ministries invited their Muslim contacts, and we were all surprised by the positive response we received.

In total, 65 people attended that conference in March 2006, including 30 Muslims. Half an hour after our arrival in the early afternoon at the conference center in Alexandria, policemen came to the conference center to offer us

“protection.” We knew this was often the guise under which police would keep an eye on Christian evangelistic activities. They wanted us to know we were being watched. I submitted to the police officer in charge a copy of the permission letter from the minister of religious affairs. That officer told me that they came to “protect us from some Muslim fundamentalists who might attack us.” At the end of the morning session, I noticed that one of the police officers was sitting in the back behind Imam Ayman, taking notes of everything we said.

I had asked the conference center to have a room available during that week where Muslims could go to pray their ceremonial prayers. They removed the furniture out of one of the rooms and spread out carpets to cover the floor. We announced to the Muslims attending the conference that anyone wanting to pray could go to that room.

Our first session addressed the topic of God’s oneness in the Qur’an and the Bible. My friend Sheikh Ramadan addressed the topic from a Qur’anic perspective, and Imil Ibrahim, an engineer, addressed it according to the Bible. Imil started out by quoting Jesus in Mark 12:29: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” He quoted many other Scripture verses that talk about the oneness of God. The Muslims at the conference were surprised because they had always assumed we were polytheists. After the two presentations, I asked the conferees to write down their questions for our Q&A session after dinner.

After an excellent dinner—the conference center treated us to much better food than usual since this was the first time they had ever hosted Muslims and Christians together—we all came back to the meeting hall. Before our question time, I decided to break the ice a bit between participants. We split the conferees into two large groups, one led by Sheikh Ramadan and the other by Imil, and gave them a list of random items to find—five neckties, one Egyptian pound in coins, etc. A spirit of lighthearted competition spread throughout the room and broke down the artificial barriers that threatened to separate us.

The questions asked that night were mostly addressed to Imil and concerned the concept of the Trinity and the oneness of God. After a good first night of dialogue,

I slept soundly. Others, I learned, had continued talking late into the night, as we had intentionally put Christians and Muslims together in the same rooms.

The second day of the conference began with a session on prayer. Sheikh Ramadan presented prayer as a duty commanded by God. Imil spoke about prayer as a response of love to God and not as a duty.

After more Q&A, I asked the Christians at the conference if they had memorized the first Surah in the Qur'an. Most of them had memorized it, although some had not memorized it accurately. I suggested that we all memorize it together right then and there:

*"1 In the name of Allah, the merciful the compassionate. 2 Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the entire universe. 3 The merciful the compassionate. 4 The master of the day of recompense. 5 You alone do we worship, and You alone do we turn to for help. 6 Direct us on the straight way. 7 The way of those whom you have favored, who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray."*

I asked the Muslims if they had memorized the Lord's Prayer and said it out loud for them:

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. For your is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

I asked Imam Ayman if there was any polytheism in that prayer and he said no, there was not. Then I asked the Muslims if they had ever heard that prayer sung. I asked a musician among us to teach us how to sing it, and I asked the Christians to open their Bibles to Matthew 6 and share the words with the Muslims sitting next to them. We all stood and started singing the Lord's Prayer, a hymn in Arabic that Egyptian Christians love.



I had to work hard to hold back my tears as I witnessed this unprecedented event—Muslims and Christians raising their voices together and praying, “Our Father in heaven.”

We allowed for long afternoon breaks so that the conferees could socialize and interact with each other. A few young men headed to the swimming pool, while the rest chose to play soccer. They split into teams named after the cities they came from. I had so much fun watching them play together and listening to them call out the Muslim and Christian names on each team.

That evening, we invited the secret police to join us for our evening session. We had the two officers sit in the front row. The topic of that session was human rights in Christianity and Islam.

Sheikh Ramadan started out by saying that Islam respected personal freedoms, the freedom of expression, and all human rights. One of the pastors wanted to challenge this statement, but I asked him to wait until the Q&A time. Then Pastor Ikram Lamie addressed that same topic from a biblical perspective. He described how God gave every individual dignity and freedom. No man had the right to take from people their dignity and freedom because these were gifts from God.

As I was listening to both men talk, I had an idea. I thought of asking the two police officers to address the issue of human rights. As soon as Pastor Ikram finished his presentation, I asked the two police officers if they would share their thoughts. Right away Imam Ayman, who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, shouted out in a loud voice that there were no human rights when it came to Egypt’s secret police. Not wanting the discussion to digress or get out of control, I responded to Ayman by saying, “The national security and the secret police in Egypt are trying hard to protect us and to protect the whole country from dangers.” Ayman immediately interrupted me: “They are protecting themselves and their power.”

I politely but firmly stopped him by saying that the two men were our guests, and we would like to listen to them. The older of the two, with the higher rank, hesitated and said, “We always, day and night, work hard to protect our country

and all its citizens. We believe what is written in the bill of human rights, and our country Egypt had signed that document.” I then handed the microphone to the other security officer, who basically repeated the same thing and added his admiration for what Pastor Ikram had covered. We all clapped for the two officers, and I thanked them for their presence with us. Then, to avoid further disruption, I dismissed the group to the evening meal.

The next day we had our final session of the conference. Our topic was women in Islam and in Christianity. The speakers we had planned for had canceled, so I had to persuade two Muslim women and two Christian women to take their place.

Muna started out by addressing how God blessed women according to the Qur’an. The second Muslim woman, when her turn came to speak, said, “I am jealous of Christian women for the safety and the security that they experience. They have no fear of being divorced or their husbands marrying other wives.” Other Muslims in the audience started shouting out in disagreement and protest. I intervened by asking Sheikh Ahmad to come forward and share his knowledge on the subject. He said that divorce in Islam took place after both the husband and wife agreed that they could no longer continue in their marriage any longer. As for polygamy, the first wife had to agree on the second wife. He also added that polygamy was God-ordained, and who were we, as humans, to disobey God or argue with him?

The Muslim woman responded by saying, “I am not rejecting what God ordains, but it is hard when we see how the woman is crushed and forced to live with blind obedience and with no will of her own.” The Muslims interrupted her again, with Sheikh Ayman being the loudest. So I asked him to come forward, along with a Christian woman, who was a journalist, and I asked them to address the meaning of submission in both Islam and Christianity.

Sheikh Ayman said, “The woman who does not obey exposes herself to the anger of God and the angels. The women are naturally weak, and they need the leadership of men.” Then the Christian journalist said, “My husband is an engineer. When we build our house, I need to submit to him and his expertise because he knows more about the structural integrity of a building than I do. On

the other hand, during my years of education, I studied psychology, including the topic of raising children, so my husband needs to submit to me and trust my knowledge on how we raise our children.” The people at the conference approved of what she said, and they started clapping for her. The final session ended peacefully.

We had lunch, our final meal together, and people started heading to the buses that would take them home. I quickly gathered my bags and took my seat on the bus, eager to head back to Cairo after a busy and stressful time. As I looked out the window, I saw people talking together, not wanting to leave. They were shaking hands and even exchanging phone numbers.

A week later, I called my friend Sheikh Ramadan repeatedly and left him messages, but he didn't call back. After several failed attempts, I decided to go to his office to find out what was wrong. “Since you have come to see me,” he said, “I have to report your visit to the secret police. Because as soon as we returned from the conference, the secret police interrogated me, wanting to know who invited me to the conference and what we did there. I also had to commit to report every new interaction that I have with you.”

I asked him whether we did anything wrong at the conference. He said: “This is the problem. When I told them what we did at the conference, they got angry with me and told me that I was brainwashed. I told them that I am a committed Muslim and deeply rooted in Islam. I told them that what we had covered at the conference helped me make some corrections to my misconceptions about Christianity. I told them that no one tried to persuade me to leave Islam and join Christianity.”

After hearing that, I asked him to call the secret police and tell them about my visit to his office, and I encouraged him to tell them about our conversation. I also told him that I was willing to cut off our relationship even though he was a very dear friend to me. He said, “We did not do anything wrong, and we will continue to be friends, no matter what.”

When I called a friend in the Minya region, I was shocked to find out that all the Muslims who had attended the conference were also interrogated by the secret police.

I have a challenge for our churches: Instead of holding the same kinds of conferences year after year, let us instead think outside the box and invite our unchurched friends and acquaintances to go with us to these conferences. Christ left heaven and came to our planet. Are we willing to follow his example, to reach out to the world around us and connect with people where they are?

Who are the non-churched people you are praying for?

## Chapter 32

### From Egypt to the U.S.

In December 2006, the leadership team that I led was fully equipped and able to carry the load of the ministry in Egypt. I knew that they could function well without me. For the safety and sanity of my family—after the kidnapping and assassination threats we had endured—I made the difficult and challenging decision to move my family to the United States. I obtained a visa as an asylum seeker escaping persecution. I was nearly 60 years old at the time, and I wondered, would this be the end of my ministry? What would I do in the United States?

After arriving in California, we were hosted by dear Egyptian friends from our church in Cairo who had immigrated earlier. As they showered us with love, I was constantly seeking the Lord and quieting my soul in deep dependence on him and his provision for me and my family. A mere month after our arrival, an amazing opportunity opened up for us.

My wife and I were asked by a Christian Arabic-language TV network to produce a discipleship program in Arabic based on Colossians 2:7: “Rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” Drawing on my many years of experience in the discipleship ministry in Egypt, we produced a 70-episode video series in Arabic titled “Fi Khuta Sayid” (“In the Footsteps of The Master”). These episodes were recorded and aired on satellite TV in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of the world.

The door opened even wider as I found new opportunities to reach Arabic speakers in the United States through satellite TV. What attracted the attention of the TV networks was my approach to ministry, which included these distinctives:

1. The recognition that none of the three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, or Islam—can save a human being. To believe that they can is a lie. Only a personal relationship with Christ can save.
2. Christianity is all about Christ, not about the religious institution.
3. Christ’s message was not an invitation to Christianity, but an invitation to the Kingdom of God (see Matthew 4:17, 23).
4. Anyone wanting to reach out to Muslims needs to love them, respect them, and not attack their beliefs. That was our approach to ministry in Egypt.

These four distinctives of our discipleship ministry not only attracted the attention of TV networks, but they also elicited strong reactions and criticism by some Christian Arabs.

Their main critique was my belief that Christianity, as a religious institution, cannot save people and that only Christ can save people. They did not like that I considered it a lie of the devil to believe that following a certain set of doctrines and commands and prohibitions can help man please and appease God.

According to this erroneous understanding, man can fall into the trap of a ladder mentality, where we try to climb to God through religious practices, whether they be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. This is anti-gospel theology. We don’t climb to God. Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us, who came down to our planet to reconcile us with God the Father: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Jesus said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:16).

The second reaction came from those who believed we needed to first destroy Islam before we could share the gospel. This was directly opposed to our ministry approach in Egypt, which we had followed since 1975. As I have previously stated, we believe that the stronger the bridge of relationship that we can build with Muslims, the heavier the truth it can carry. Attacking Islam and the Qur’an is not an effective way to build bridges in my estimation.

The third reaction came from traditional Christian Arabs who immigrated to the West because they hated Islam and Muslims. They did not like my message about

loving Muslims. For those traditional Christians, it was a big and nearly impossible leap to think of loving those who persecuted those of us who grew up as Christians in a Muslim world. How can we love them, they would ask, after all we have seen and experienced in the form of persecution, after they have attacked Christians and burned churches back home? In the wake of 9/11, it had become very easy for Christians all over the world to demonize Muslims, to dehumanize them and justify hatred toward them. Our message of loving Muslims seemed shocking to many Christians who had seen the horrors of terrorism through Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

In the midst of this very difficult and complex atmosphere, God, in his providence, opened for me a very wide door with the biggest Arabic-language satellite TV network, Alkarma. I started a program called “Awlad Ibrahim” (“The Children of Abraham”). This is a reference to Jews, who claim Abraham as their father; Christians, who claim to be the true descents of Abraham by faith; and Muslims, who believe they are the descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. Alkarma TV is broadcast in about 90 percent of the world through satellite.

King David, when he was told that his son Solomon would be king after him, sat before the Lord and said, “Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?” (2 Samuel 7:18). Here, at the end of a blessed life of ministry in Egypt, at age 60, I moved to the United States, unable to speak the English language. And yet God gave me a new ministry in the U.S. that continues to this day. Indeed, who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far!

As a result of my TV ministry with Alkarma, in addition to Muslims, more and more Arab Christians in the U.S. have started to watch my program and know me and my ministry. Arab churches in the U.S. started inviting me to speak and motivate their people to reach out to their Muslim neighbors.

In one of my visits to New York, I came to know Sheikh Tarek Yousef, the imam of a mosque in Brooklyn, New York. He invited me to a dialogue session with 17 of the men at his mosque. To start with, he gave me the opportunity to share the

gospel in full with him and the other men at the mosque, followed by a question-and-answer time.

The first question came from Sheikh Tarek himself. He wondered about those who lived and died before Christ came to earth. How was Christ's message relevant to those who lived before his birth? I responded to this question by quoting and expounding on three texts:

"But with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:19-20).

"This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23).

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoptions to sonship" (Galatians 4:4-5).

Christ was chosen before the foundation of the world, according to God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, to visit our planet at just the right time. I pointed out that his redemptive plan was relevant not only to those who look back at what Christ has done, but also to those who looked forward to the first coming of the Messiah.

The second question also came from Sheikh Tarek. He said, "You say that you believe in one God, so who then is Jesus Christ?"

I responded to that question from John 1:1-2, 4: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This is a helpful passage to use because Muslims believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

I assumed that this session would be the end of my interaction with Sheikh Tarek. But 10 months later, in 2008, Sheikh Tark called me and told me he was visiting



California and would like to meet with me again. He was joined by some of his Muslim friends in California at the home of his host. I was eager for this opportunity, and I took with me some of my Christian friends. Upon our arrival at that large house, we found waiting for us about 70 Muslim men and women originally from Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, and now U.S. citizens. Sheikh Tarek and his friend Sheikh Muhammad were with them. They were all eager to dialogue with us and come to a better understanding of our biblical message.

We spent hours with them. We shared the message of the gospel with a special emphasis on our belief in the oneness of God, the sinfulness of all humans, and that salvation can be obtained only through Christ. We answered their questions and ended the night with me praying and asking the Lord to pour out his blessings on all of us.

In the account we read about in Acts 10, most likely Peter and his six friends, after their encounter with Cornelius and his household, must have wondered, "Did that really happen? Is God really opening the door wide to Gentiles?" My friends and I who had that encounter with Sheikh Tarek and his friends also wondered, "Is this really happening? Is God opening a door with Muslims in North America?" Our farewell with those new Muslim friends was warm and encouraging. They expressed a sincere desire for a continued relationship with us. Just before we left, Sheikh Tarek said, "I will look forward to your next visit to our mosque in New York."

Before my next visit to New York, I called Sheikh Tarek and told him I was coming. He invited me, along with my host, the pastor of an Arab church in New York, to speak at his mosque in Brooklyn. After a warm welcome at the mosque, I gave a lecture on the Kingdom of God. I said that religious institutions cannot save us, and our message was not an invitation to leave Islam and join the religious institution of Christianity. The message to every human being is an invitation to enter the Kingdom of God, through Jesus Christ. Through Christ, a mere human being can have a life-giving personal relationship with God, irrespective of their religious background. He is the only way to the Father. If we put our faith in Christ, our sins will be forgiven, and we will have the assurance of eternal life.

By the end of my visit to New Jersey, I once again assumed that my journey with Sheikh Tarek had come to an end. But to my joy, he came back again for another visit to California. I asked him if he would be willing to join me on my TV program in an episode on dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and he accepted. He even agreed that I could also invite two other guests to join us, Pastor Amir Shawky, a man who knows the Scripture in depth and knows how to respectfully connect and dialogue with Muslims, and my friend Andrew, a Muslim-background believer in Christ.

That TV episode was a landmark in Alkarma TV. The atmosphere of love, mutual respect, and open-mindedness astounded many Arab Christians around the world. Christians were amazed by how humble, loving, and respectful Sheikh Tarek was. Some of them even wondered, "Is he really a Muslim?" Their assumption was that all Muslims are combative and closeminded. The love and mutual respect between Sheikh Tarek and Pastor Amir Shawky were energizing and uplifting.

As a result of that very successful episode, I decided to invite Sheikh Tarek back to my TV program and have him dialogue with a famous man, Brother Rashid, who has a very successful TV program, "Sou'al Jaree'" ("A Daring Question"), on Al Hayaat TV network. Brother Rashid, the son of a Muslim imam in Morocco, is a Muslim-background believer in Christ and a famous apologist. Both Al Karma and Al Hayaat TV networks agreed to air that episode, which enabled it to be broadcast across most of the world. That episode is still available to Arabic-speaking people around the world on YouTube.

My friend Samir in California came to know Sheikh Aziz 'Abdin, a Syrian-born professor of Arab culture at an American university in Southern California. Samir connected me with Sheikh Aziz 'Abdin, and I invited him to join me on an episode of my TV program. In that episode, Sheikh Aziz talked about his respect for Christian values, such as what Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). He ended up inviting Pastor Amir Shawky to preach the gospel at his mosque.

At a later time, Sheikh Aziz invited me to join him in giving a presentation at a conference in Jordan for the Arab intellectuals of the Middle East. The conference had to do with how to combat terrorism by correcting misconceptions in the minds of Muslims, who assume that Christians are polytheists.

Through Sheikh Aziz, I came to know Sheikh/Dr. Marwan Sa'd Din, the most famous imam in Arizona. Sheikh Marwan invited me to Phoenix to be part of a panel on the oneness of God. Sheikh Marwan ended up joining us in several dialogue sessions, addressing theological issues. During the Arizona panel discussion, another participant was Dr. Ja'far al Hakim, a Shiite Iraqi Muslim, who is a highly respected scholar and a very open-minded person. My friendship with him continues to this day.

I am grateful to God that my move to the United States brought not an end to my ministry with Muslims, but new opportunities I would not have had in Egypt.

## Chapter 33

### More Encounters with Muslims

My life has been richly blessed through the friendships I have had over the years with Muslims. Here are a few more encounters.

Through Pastor Magdi Girges, I met Dr. Hassaan Hathout, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Los Angeles area. He welcomed us to his home for monthly visits and conversation. In the first visit, he started out by sharing with us how he admired Jesus Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. As he talked, he sounded like a pastor preaching a sermon on the teachings of Christ. In my experience, all Muslims who read Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, are attracted to Jesus and see the exceptionalism in his teaching.

In another visit to Dr. Hathout's home, he spoke highly of Jesus's love for the sick and the weak, but he objected strongly to our biblical claim that Jesus is the "one and only Son" of God, which appears in John 3:16. He insisted that all human beings are the children of God, not only Jesus. As we dialogued on that issue, I asked him if he would be willing to be part of a formal presentation about Jesus Christ according to the Bible and according to the Qur'an. He asked me who would be the Christian speaker to give the Bible's perspective on Jesus, and I told him it would be Dr. Nabeel Jabbour. Dr. Hathout agreed.

Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena allowed us to use one of its halls for that event. About 300 people attended, including at least 50 Muslims. The two presentations went smoothly and in an atmosphere of love and mutual respect. At the end of the session, we offered to many, and especially to the Muslims, a copy of the New Testament, the *Jesus* video, and a copy of the book *Unshackled and Growing: Muslims and Christians on the Journey to Freedom*.

Every year the Arab community in California organizes a three-day festival where Arab Americans come together to celebrate their cultures. It includes Arabic music, Middle Eastern food, folkloric events, a book exhibit, videos, embroidery,

and tapestry. At one of those annual festivals, Ramsis Naguib asked me to join him in a booth distributing the Bible and the *Jesus* film. A Muslim woman came up to me at that booth after recognizing me from my TV program. “Why do you Christians attack Islam?” she asked.

I asked her whether she had ever heard me attack Islam on my TV program. She answered, “I follow your TV program regularly, and I know that you do not attack Islam. But so many of the other Christian programs attack Islam, the Prophet, and Muslims, even though Christ commanded you to love.” I told her that other Christian programs are presenting the biblical truth, and some Muslims assume this is an attack on Islam because of how the Bible disagrees with some Muslim beliefs.

She then proceeded to say that she had many questions about Christianity. She asked if I was willing to listen to her, and I said that I was. Her first question, no surprise, was about polytheism: “Do you Christians worship several gods?” As I had done many times before in response to that question, I turned in my Bible to Mark 12:29, “The Lord our God is one.” She wanted to know why we Christians don’t present our message clearly. Why weren’t we more clear in what we really believe about Christ?

My wife wanted to get to know this woman more. We learned that her name was Asma, she was from Morocco, and she was a travel agent. The music at the festival was so loud that we could not hear each other well, so she invited us to her home.

There we met her husband Muhammad, who was from Jordan. The fact that she was a Sunni Muslim and he was a Shiite showed a nonsectarian spirit in that marriage and at that home. After drinking tea and enjoying the Moroccan sweets, we got into the topic of the oneness of God. I turned to John 1:1, 14 in my Bible, as I know that Muslims understand from the Qur’an that Christ is called the Word of God. Both she and her husband talked about their admiration for Jesus and his teaching. They believed that he was a prophet but clearly stated that they did not believe he was crucified. Over the course of about two hours, we continued

looking at the Scriptures. At the end of the visit, I asked them if I could pray for them and their family, and they welcomed it.

Several years later, they invited us to come to their home and meet with several of their Muslim relatives and friends. My wife and I, along with some of our Christian friends, went to their house. We started out by singing some hymns with oriental tunes accompanied by the 'oud (Arab guitar). Then I spoke on the gospel and answered the questions they had. At that time, ISIS, also known as the Islamic State, was headline news. They strongly stated that people who are part of ISIS are not real Muslims and that the verses in the Qur'an that speak about killing are being wrongly interpreted by ISIS members. After our time together, I prayed and asked God for his blessings on all those who were there and their families. That visit was videoed and appeared on YouTube.

As long as there are human beings on the earth, there will be a desperate need to know Jesus, and the work of expanding his Kingdom will continue. The doors are wide open to those who can see. What Jesus said in Samaria is still true today: "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35).

The Great Commission does not exclude Muslims. On the contrary, it includes them. As long as there are human beings alive, there will always be a message to share about the love of Christ with people who long for hope. God has brought many Muslims to the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and many other countries around the world. Reach out to the Muslims that God allows you to meet. Begin building a bridge of love. The stronger the bridge of relationship that you can build with a Muslim friend, the heavier the truth it can carry.

Finally, my dear reader, if you have questions, please email me: [samfaw@gmail.com](mailto:samfaw@gmail.com). And may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

## Closing Thoughts

As you have seen by the stories in this book, some Muslims are eager to enter the Kingdom of God and put their faith in Christ. The struggle for us, as their Christian friends, is what to advise them to do after that. Which Christian denomination should they join—the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Charismatics, the Orthodox, or the Catholics? Stand in the shoes of a Muslim who has recently trusted Christ and is looking at our innumerable denominations. It is a bit overwhelming.

Could these Muslim-background believers have their own place of belonging rather than having to uncover the unique beliefs and practices of hundreds of denominations and churches that all feel unfamiliar to them anyway? This question is worth asking.

When Muslims in Muslim countries put their faith in Christ and surrender their lives to him, they face many challenges.

- Their society considers them infidels and traitors to Islam and Muslims.
- They could be expelled from their schools or their places of work.
- They could be shunned and cut off from their families and lose their inheritance.
- They run the risk of being arrested and even tortured by the secret police.
- They could lose all their possessions and become destitute.
- Because they are still considered Muslim, their children will continue to be indoctrinated with Islamic religious education in their schools.

What could be some solutions to these very difficult challenges? Here are some questions that I would like to raise.

- Could the Muslim who has put his faith in Christ continue seeing himself as a cultural Muslim, because he was born into Islam, and yet identify now as a follower of Christ?
- Could he maintain his Muslim name rather than feeling the need to change it to a Christian name?

- Could he stay relationally and culturally connected with his family and friends rather than being completely extracted from his former culture and relationships?
- What if, instead of preaching to his family and friends against Islam, the new believer instead focuses on cleaning the channels of relationships with people?
- Could we come up with a curriculum to supplement the children's education, focusing on giving them an accurate understanding of the Bible?
- Can we trust that the Holy Spirit can guide these new believers to all truth rather than hovering over them with tight control?
- Can we help create an atmosphere and a social structure in which single Muslim-background believers are able to meet one another and marry?
- Can we create employment opportunities for them in their own countries?
- Can we leave behind the mentality that every Muslim-background believer should immigrate to Western countries? What would it take to keep them in their own countries with dignity and employment?



## Recommended Readings

Jabbour, Nabeel. *The Crescent Through the Eyes of The Cross*. You can download it free from the internet at [www.nabeeljabbour.com](http://www.nabeeljabbour.com)

Jabbour, Nabeel. *Unshackled and Growing: Muslims and Christians on the Journey to Freedom*.

Kuhn, Mike. *A Fresh Vision of the Muslim World*.

Kuhn, Mike. *Finding Hagar*.

## **With Gratitude**

I am deeply grateful to God for rescuing my life from sin and for adopting me into his family. He gave me the assurance of eternal life with him. He has been my shepherd over the years. He has taught me so many things during life's journey, and I share in this book some of what I have learned and experienced.

I am deeply grateful for my dear wife in the way she has co-labored with me in serving our Lord with sacrificial love and patience. I am grateful also for our children, who partnered with us over the years and allowed me to travel and be fully involved in a busy ministry where our home, whether in Egypt or the U.S., became a center of purposeful activities.

I am deeply grateful to all of you who have helped me produce this book. Thank you for your valuable editing and constructive suggestions. To mention a few, I am grateful to Dr. Nabeel Jabbour, Dr. Hend Hanna, and Leura Jones for your sacrificial labor of love.

## **Appendix A**

### **How to Explain the Oneness of God**

The Bible contains many passages on the oneness of God. I use many of these in my evangelism with Muslims, for whom this issue is a sticking point.

Note: In English translations of the Bible, when the word “LORD” appears in capital letters, it is a translation of the word *YHWH* or *Yahweh*, which communicates the oneness of God. “LORD” appears 5,247 times in the Bible. It appears 4,889 times in the Old Testament (1,328 times in the first five books of Moses, the Torah, alone) and 358 times in the New Testament. In comparison, the word “God” appears 1,958 times in the entire Bible.

#### **Old Testament Verses on the Oneness of God**

Deuteronomy 4:35

“You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.”

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

Deuteronomy 32:39

“See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.”

Isaiah 44:6

“This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”

Isaiah 45:21

“Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.”

Isaiah 46:9

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.”

Malachi 2:10

“Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?”

### **New Testament Verses on the Oneness of God**

Matthew 4:10

“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”’”

Mark 12:29

“‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”’”

John 17:3

“‘Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.’”

Romans 3:30

“‘Since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.’”

1 Corinthians 8:4

“‘So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that ‘An idol is nothing at all in the world’ and that ‘There is no God but one.’”

1 Corinthians 12:6

“‘There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.’”

Galatians 3:20

“‘A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.’”

Ephesians 4:6

“One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

1 Thessalonians 1:9

“For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

1 Timothy 1:17

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

1 Timothy 2:5

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

James 2:19

“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”

Jude 25

“To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”

## Triunity in the Oneness of His Being

From Nabeel Jabbour's book *Unshackled and Growing*:

In the Bible, we see complexity in the being of God, yet at the same time there is oneness. Some Muslims think that the "Trinity" Christians talk about is made up of God, Mary, and Jesus. They assume that because Jesus is called the "Son of God" that this means he was God's physical son. But the Bible does not talk at all about Jesus being the physical son of God. The idea that God had a physical relationship with Mary that produced Jesus is completely unfounded and exists nowhere in the Bible. In fact, the Bible categorically rejects such thinking. The Qur'an calls this kind of belief *shirk* and blasphemy (Nisaa': Surah 4 verse 48; Sincerity: Surah 112 verses 1–4).

When the Bible refers to Jesus as the Son of God, it is symbolic language to describe the relationship of Jesus Christ to God. In Arabic, we use similar expressions. *Ibn Sabil* means "son of the road" and "*Abna' Al Neel*" means "sons of the Nile." Does that mean the road or the Nile have physical children? Of course not; the language is symbolic.

The entire Bible clearly teaches the oneness of God (*tawhid*). In the *Tawrat* (*Torah*) section of the Old Testament, Moses wrote: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). Centuries later, at the time of Christ, one of the experts on the law came to Jesus and asked him: "'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: ". . . the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these'" (Mark 12:28–31).

The true followers of Jesus today also believe in the oneness of God (*tawhid*). Sometimes Christians use illustrations, however inadequate, to help us grasp this complex idea. For example, H<sub>2</sub>O is manifested as liquid (water), solid (ice), and gas (steam). Similarly, God is manifested to us in three different ways. God the creator (*Al Khaliq*), the originator of all things, has the power to create; therefore, he is called the *Father*. The very same God, not another God, has the power to speak forth his Word (*Kalimatuhu*) through *Jesus Christ*. In the Gospel of John,

Jesus is called *Logos*, which is Greek for “Word” (*Kalimatuhu*). The very same God, not another, has the power to give comfort and guidance. He is the *Holy Spirit*, who is called the Comforter. God the Father is *for us*, Jesus is *with us*, and the Holy Spirit is *in us*. The Holy Spirit is not a mere force of divine power; he is the very Spirit of God. When he indwells someone, in a miraculous way, God himself actually lives in that person.

The Bible does not talk about tritheism (three gods) but about triunity in the oneness of his being. It is not about God, Mary, and Jesus, but about the oneness of God in the Father, his Word, and his Spirit. It is God, coming to earth in the person of his Word, Jesus.



## Appendix B

### *Sharia* in the Bible

We associate the word *Sharia* with the Islamic law. Yet our Arabic Bible uses this same word when talking about the law in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Most Muslims I have known over the years live with what I call a “scale mentality.” Devout Muslims, day in and day out, are trying to please God and to appease him in an effort to avoid stirring his anger and damnation. They imagine a scale hanging above their heads, with one side heaped with their sins and shortcomings and the other side with their good works and kind deeds. Their destiny is determined according to that scale, and they are forever trying to increase their good deeds and decrease their sins and transgressions. Legalism in all religions suffocates freedom and joy. Satan knows its power and has used it through the centuries.

A few years ago, I addressed the topic of “Christ and the Sharia” in a radio program, along with my friend Aabed Iskandar. Here is an outline of what we covered:

1. What is meant by the Law?

The law has to do with the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses, along with the moral law, which is outlined, according to Jewish tradition, in 613 commandments. The Jews had to adhere to these laws, whether positive commandments to perform an act, or negative commandments to abstain from certain acts, as we see in Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15: “If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on the earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God. ... However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you.”

According to the above scripture, those who obey all the commands, day in and day out, will receive the blessings mentioned in Deuteronomy 28:3-14. On the other hand, those who do not fully obey all the commands, each and every day, will experience the long list of curses that are detailed in Deuteronomy 28:16-68. Adam had a hard time obeying one command, so how can people fully obey all 613 commandments every day of their lives?

What is the passing grade with God? Is it 60% or 70% or 95%? Even a grade of 99% is a failing grade. The passing grade with God can only be 100%, because he is a holy God. Christ was the only one in history who earned the 100% passing grade that met God's absolute demands and standards. Please remember that Christ took upon himself our sin and gave us his 100% perfect grade of righteousness.

## 2. What is the purpose of the law?

The main purpose of the law is to serve as a mirror (or an MRI machine might be a better example) that reveals to us our brokenness and depravity and our desperate need for God's mercy and grace. The law served as a measuring tape, and since God is holy, his measure was absolute holiness. If the measuring tape was made of rubber or elastic rather than metal, then it could shrink or expand according to our abilities. If God's law is watered down to match and suit our lifestyles, then it would no longer awaken our consciences. The law also served as a light to show us what is good and what is evil.

## 3. What did the law do to us?

As people tried to climb a ladder of the law in order to please and appease God, sooner or later they despaired because no one could earn the 100% passing grade with God. According to Jesus, in Matthew 5, anger is equal to murder and lust is equal to adultery.

## 4. How did Jesus see the law?

Jesus lived his daily life in perfect obedience to the heart of the law and to its original purpose. Every human and every prophet throughout the centuries have

lived in brokenness and in sin. Every man who was perceived as a “type” of Christ was a very pale reflection of Christ. King David, for instance, had his strengths, but when he was measured to Christ, the perfect standard, he fell short and was a very pale reflection of King Jesus.

The New Testament declares that Jesus never sinned:

“God made him who had *no sin* to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21, emphasis added).

“He committed no sin, and not deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).

“In him is *no sin*” (1 John 3:5, emphasis added).

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he *did not sin*” (Hebrews 4:15, emphasis added).

Because of who Christ is and because of his perfect obedience, he earned that perfect righteousness. In that great transaction, after he took upon himself our sin and filth, he gave us his perfect robe of righteousness: “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with *garments of salvation* and arrayed me in a *robe of his righteousness*” (Isaiah 61:10, emphasis added).

Christ invited his hearers to heed the heart of the law rather than just the letter of the law. He cared for the heart, and his focus was always on motives and intentions rather than on behaviors. When he addressed murder, he went deeper to the roots of murder. He said: “You have heard that it was said to the people of long ago, “You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “Raca” [an Aramaic term of contempt], is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, “you fool,” will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:21-22).

When Jesus addressed adultery, he also went to the heart of the law rather than the letter of the law. He said: “You have heard that it was said, “You shall not

commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Instead of focusing on the letter of the law, of an “eye for an eye,” Jesus said: “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ... If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles” (Matthew 5:39-41).

Instead of blind obedience to the letter of the law, Jesus summarized the 613 laws and precepts into two laws: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

Worshiping God is not an act of ceremonial duty that we need or are required to perform, but rather a love relationship. Because he is spectacular in his glory, I can’t help but come before him with awe, love, and worship. Because I love him, songs of worship and praise will overflow from my heart before my lips. Because I love him, I desire and long to sit at his feet, pray, and talk to him. Because I love him, I hunger and thirst for his Word. Because I love him, I want to love all those around me because they are created in his image.

When Christ looked at the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, he saw himself as the ultimate sacrifice: “For the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Instead of doing what the Pharisees did, focusing on the outer ceremonial cleanliness, Jesus focused on the inner cleanliness of the heart. He said: “Listen to me everyone and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. ... For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person” (Mark 7:14-15, 20-23).

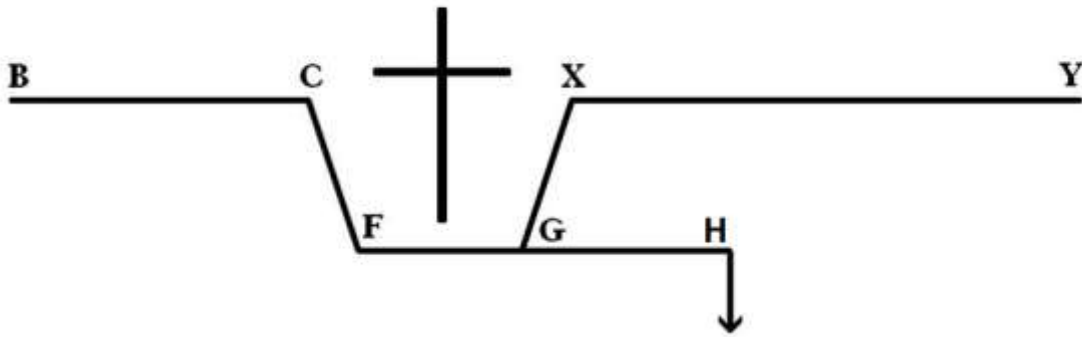
## Two Kinds of Righteousness

Some people perceive themselves as “righteous” because they treat others well and people like them. They do not cheat on their marriage partners or their taxes and because of that, they assume that they are considered by God to be “righteous.” Isaiah 64:6 states, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and our righteous acts are like *filthy rags*” (emphasis added).

What does “filthy rags” mean? Imagine a Jewish woman at the time of Christ, coming to God and bringing him her used, bloodied filthy rags (modern-day pads that women use during menstruation) and assuming that her “gift offering” will make her righteous in God’s eyes! As shocking and distasteful as this may sound, this image was exactly what Isaiah was saying. Our righteous acts, in God’s sight, are no cleaner or more acceptable than these filthy rags.

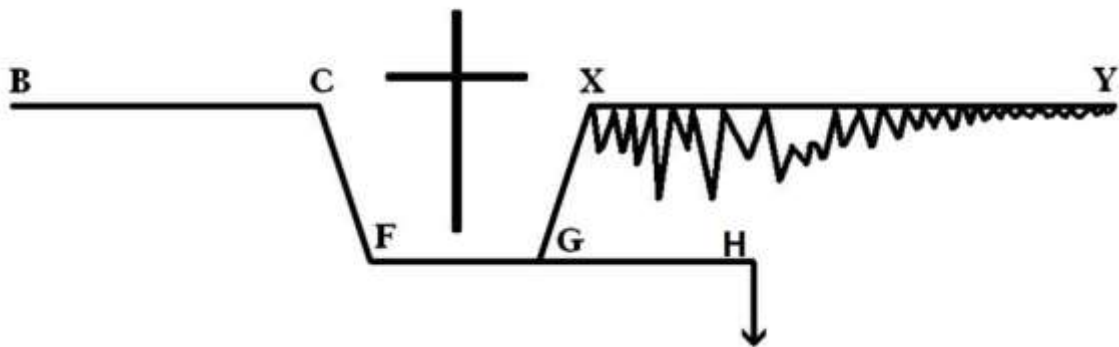
Some believe that they were indeed justified by faith, but when it comes to their sanctification process, they live their daily lives with a co-payment mentality—80% God’s grace and 20% their own efforts and good works. But God sees that 20% as filthy rags. If we think that God’s perception of us is based on our daily *performance*—such as having a regular quiet time reading the Bible, going to church, memorizing Scripture, praying, talking to people about Christ—and that we are *earning* his acceptance, we are mistaken. These things are merely “filthy rags.” Of course, it is good for us to pray, read the Bible, and go to church, but these activities do not win us points with God or make us righteous in his sight.

These activities should naturally flow as a result of loving the Lord and being transformed after someone has experienced the power of his redemptive love. When God looks at his beloved children who put their faith in Christ, he always sees them “in Christ” and therefore always on Line **XY** (below). They are justified, regenerated, adopted and the Holy Spirit dwells in them. They are not saved sinners trying hard to become saints. No, they are saints who still sin and have an inclination to do evil because of the flesh. They are like genuine silver because they are in Christ, but the silver is tarnished. God always sees them at **XY**, because they are in union with Christ.



If you have put your faith in Christ, you are no longer on **FGH**, a servant of God trying to win his approval. You have become a child of God since you are in Christ. God always sees you on **XY**, even when you sin. When our children do something wrong, we discipline them, but we do not expel them from our house or abandon them. They are still our children.

When we get carried away by how horribly we feel about ourselves, when we think that God sees us through the lens of our sins and failures, remember that our life's graph does not look like this zigzag line:



Those zigzag lines (representing our actions) are not part of God's view of us.

How do you see yourself? Are you a saint who often sins, or a saved sinner who is trying hard to become a saint? Your view of who you are colors how you see God.

## Endorsements by Muslim Scholars

*Bridge Building* is very much worth reading. I was drawn to its captivating storytelling and enjoyable style, along with the honesty and transparency of the author. It shows beautifully the journey of a man of God who is serving Christ and seeking eternal life. This book can be read without suspicion or distrust. After all, the Qur'an states clearly: *"The truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject it"* (Surah 18:29). What unites all of us is our common humanity, and it appears to me that this is the essence of Samuel's book. Our common goal, irrespective of our religions, is to seek the Kingdom of God, and I am on this journey.

- **Dr. May Mugeeb**, Professor of Economics and Politics at the University of Cairo, Egypt

Life confronts us with many twists and turns. One of the enjoyable turns has been my friendship with Samuel Fawzi Khair. He is one of my Christian friends who loves Jesus. It is well known that Jesus is highly esteemed in both the Bible and the Qur'an. On many occasions, Samuel and I have strived to build bridges and destroy barriers that exist between Muslims and Christians by highlighting verses from the Bible, such as *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you"* and verses from the Qur'an, such as *"You will find the nearest in love to the believers those who say we are Christians."* Samuel's aim is to build bridges and destroy barriers and build bridges of love and coexistence. Let it be known to the millions of faithful in both religions that the world still has good people in it, despite the presence of the strong forces of evil.

- **Dr. Aziz 'Abdin**, Imam of a mosque and president of The American University For Human Sciences, Los Angeles