

**Why You Need
More Muslim Friends?**

-By Jon Huckins

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As ISIS fills the headlines, Islamphobia spreads like the common cold and sound bites trump human interaction, there is no more important time to build friendships with our Muslim neighbors.

5 reasons we need to form true (not agenda driven) friendships with people of other faiths.

□ □ **By Jon Huckins** □ □ □

I can remember when I was scared of Muslims.

I don't think I would have ever uttered those words, but subconsciously, they were true.

As a good, Bible-Believing-Evangelical-Christian (that's all one word, right?) who could recite the two greatest commandments to love God and love others before I was out of diapers, how had this fear developed in me?

Well, it's easy. Stories we are told about Muslims are often related to terror, oppression and violence. And, to be honest, it is far more comfortable to remain in a place of isolation and ignorance than it is to engage in the intentional work of education, experience and relationship.

Further, I used to think the only way to meet Muslims was to fly half way across the world and enter into a reality completely foreign to my own. “They” are somewhere over there and “we” are over here, so let’s just agree to keep our distance and allow our politicians and power brokers to work things out.

That all changed for me when my wife and I joined a faith community committed to Jesus' invitation to love our neighbors. We quickly realized loving our neighbors required we know our neighbors. And, living in a city that is home to tens of thousands of international refugees, we discovered that “they” don’t only live across the world, “they” are at “our” baseball games, in our neighborhood and our parks. It wasn’t that our Muslim friends had just moved in, it was that we hadn’t had the eyes to see them, let alone enter genuine friendships.

Over the years, I have discovered that the only way to love and be loved by my neighbors (locally and globally) is to be in relationship. The reason I used to be scared of Muslims was simply because I didn’t know any. I had never heard their stories. I had never been to their sacred places. I didn’t understand their traditions. I hadn’t even shared a meal with them.

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I have come to realize what an incredible opportunity I had squandered. Interestingly, what I had squandered wasn't primarily what I had to offer my neighbors, but what they had to offer me.

As ISIS fills the headlines, Islamphobia spreads like the common cold and sound bites trump human interaction, there is no more important time to build friendships with our Muslim neighbors. Here are five reasons why:

1. A Cure for Fear

Fear is one of the most toxic diseases hijacking Christian's ability to live as salt and light. Not only do we often tell ourselves that everyone is out to get us, we think relationships with those different than us leave us open to falling down the slippery slope of compromise.

I have never met a Muslim who asks me to compromise my commitment to Jesus. If anything, they encourage me to take it more seriously. Being in relationship with people who are different than us doesn't compromise our faith, it reflects the very best of it. A mentor of mine recently said, "The deeper our roots are in Jesus, the wider our branches can extend into other traditions."

2. An Expanded World view

I recently sat in a West Bank backyard with a collection of 20 Christians and Muslims. Having just spent a few days together, we sang, danced and shared what we had each learned about the other's religious tradition based on our experience together. It was sacred. The worldview of both the Christians who were with me and the Muslims who lived in this village will forever view the "other" in a more helpful, human way.

In many other parts of the world, Christians and Muslims don't see themselves as enemies, but as dear friends, partners and fellow humans. When we extend past our inherited worldview, we may see a very different landscape of interfaith collaboration. What media sources, experiences or influencers are we allowing to inform our worldview? How might that become more diverse?

3. An Antidote to Isolationism

We, the Christian community, can fall victim to becoming insulated and isolated, which inherently puts us in a posture of defense rather than invitation. When our relationships remain only among those who think, look and believe like we do, we run the risk of becoming exclusive and tribal. Which, ironically, is so much of the West's critique of regimes like ISIS.

The antithesis of Christ-like love is to only be in relationship with those who are like "us," while excluding "them." As we begin to build relationships with those outside of our tradition, we break

out of our little bubbles and are able to truly love like Jesus. Jesus never ran in fear from those who were different than him. No, he ran to people who were different. Our inherited theology may distance us from those of other religions, but Jesus never does.

4. A Solution for Our Need for Mutual Relationship

Our Christian tradition hasn't historically done well at entering relationships with those outside of our tradition in a posture of mutuality. Our tendency has been to enter relationships as the hero rather than the learner.

As we build friendships with our Muslim neighbors, we must do so seeking to understand rather than be understood. Genuine friendship is not a project. Get curious. Share life and space. Spend long hours around the dinner table. Take each other's kids to school. Accept their love in the same way you would expect them to receive yours.

5. An Understanding of Misrepresentation

I just got an email from my friend, Jarrod McKenna, who as a Jesus follower, is doing remarkable work reassigning dignity to the Muslim community in Australia. Sadly, his email was to tell me that a Muslim family was violently attacked, not because of their actions, but because of their religion.

In my city, a Muslim mom was recently killed outside of her house for similar reasons. These are just a couple acts of hatred and prejudice of our Muslim neighbors are enduring as a result of our inability to differentiate between Islamic extremists (ISIS, etc.) and the majority of Muslims.

The Christian Community must understand that the vast majority of Muslims are embarrassed and concerned for their own safety as a result of ISIS, and we must advocate for their humanity. If we are in genuine friendship, our advocacy will become a non-negotiable.

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Don't forget! ISIS is a Fabrication of Israel