

Understanding and Reaching Muslims

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[0 : 00] Well hello and welcome to our session on how we can better understand and reach Muslim friends and neighbours and colleagues. I'm Andy Bannister from the Solar Centre for Public Christianity and the whole topic of how we engage with Muslims has been one that I've thought about for some time.

Although I live in Scotland at the moment, I grew up in London, a very multicultural part of London, and there were Muslims all around us in my part of the city. In fact, many of my friends at school were Muslims, and I guess back then I probably largely assumed when I was in my teens and early 20s that Christianity and Islam were kind of largely the same.

But then in my mid-20s, I began going up to a place in London called Speaker's Corner, and that's part of Hyde Park in London. And at Speaker's Corner, anyone can stand on a ladder or a box and you can talk about anything, politics, religion, sports, you name it, get a crowd.

And I went up there with a group of Christians who were using Speaker's Corner as a vehicle to reach Muslims. And I began dialoguing, debating with Muslims, and I got absolutely fascinated, fascinated by the differences that I really discovered between Christianity and Islam, and really just discovered a real passion for sharing my faith with Muslims.

Now, back in that time, back in the late 1990s, most people weren't interested in Islam or in thinking about how we engage with Muslims. The church had her focus on other things. But in recent decades, of course, everything has changed, and particularly the UK's religious makeup has and is changing.

[1 : 28] It's changing rapidly, especially when it comes to Islam. Especially noteworthy are the changing immigration patterns that we see. 43% of Muslims who arrived in the UK between 2010 and 2016 were Muslim.

And according to the very well-respected Pew Research Centre, the number of Muslims here in the UK is predicted to rise to about 13 million in 30 years' time. And so it's vital as Christians that we think missionally and evangelistically about how we engage Islam.

And so what I want to do in this talk is to unpack the Muslim worldview in a bit more detail. What do our Muslim friends believe and why? What are some of the implications?

What are some of the apologetic issues? Apologetics, that branch of Christian thought concerned with giving a reason why we believe what we believe. How do we get ourselves equipped to share our faith with Muslims?

And what are some basic principles for sharing your faith with your Muslim friends? And there are some resources I've put together to help you get the most out of this talk. If you go to the SOLAS website, solascpc.org forward slash Islam, download the slides from this talk.

[2 : 38] You can get hold of information on my brand new book, The Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God, just out with IVP. Lots of really great stuff in there and also a free e-book we have on Islam.

And this talk is really designed as an overview, a kind of view from 30,000 feet. And we're going to cover a lot of ground at high speed, which is why I hugely recommend you visit the SOLAS website forward slash Islam.

Grab some of those resources because it will let you get the most out of this talk. Well, we've got a lot to cover in the next 35 minutes or so. So let's dive in and take a look at how Islam began.

And to understand Islam today, we do need to understand how it all began. The cultural context into which Islam was birthed and Mohammed, the founder of the religion we know today as Islam.

We need to take a look at his origins as well. Well, Islam emerged into a world of empires. The Arabian Peninsula of the 7th century lying sandwiched between the great Byzantine and Persian

empires who had been at war with each other for centuries, for years.

[3 : 40] The Arabian Peninsula kind of lay outside of the action, a bit of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious backwater. Arabia back then was religiously very diverse.

There were Christian groups and Jewish groups, other religions jostling around. And it was also largely an oral culture, storytelling and poetry being the main ways that religious and cultural ideas were circulated.

And into this world, Mohammed was born sometime round about AD 570. And according to the Muslim historians, and what follows next, I'm just basically following the standard Muslim biography of Mohammed.

More critical scholars might raise some questions about some of these dates and facts and so forth, but we'll stick with the Muslim view. Mohammed was born, according to Muslim historians, in Mecca, a minor trading and pilgrimage site.

And the Kabir, that cube-shaped black building, to which today every Muslim prays, well, that was there before Mohammed. It was used to host idols for a whole range of a wide range of pagan deities.

[4 : 44] Well, as he grew up, Mohammed worked first as a shepherd and then in the caravan trading business. At age 25, he married his wealthy caravan-owning boss, Khadija.

He was 25, she was 40, and she bore him two sons and four daughters, but only the daughters survived. That was a pattern that would be repeated with his later wives.

In fact, Mohammed would marry something like 20 different men, women, and his failure, but none of them would provide him with a male heir. And that arguably led to a number of succession problems after his death.

Well, Mohammed had spiritual interests, he had ascetic leanings, and as a young man, he would regularly retire into the desert for spiritual retreats and periods of reflection.

And according to the Muslim historians, it was one such sort of trip into the desert in AD 610 that the angel Gabriel appeared to him and revealed to him what is now chapter 96 of the Quran.

[5 : 45] The Quran is not in chronological order, so Muslims believe that chapter 96 were the first verses that were revealed to Mohammed there. And for the next 23 years, he continued to receive revelations as the angel would appear and revealed to him more and more and more of what would eventually be collected together and form the Quran.

Now, during those 23 years, Mohammed had two distinct phases to his career. The first was in Mecca, where from 610 to 622, he began his ministry, largely in his message claiming to be like the biblical prophets only sent to the Arabs.

And his message was threefold. He talked about monotheism, he talked about social justice, and he warned of the punishments in hell for those who refused to listen.

And he gained a few converts, but not very many. The main thing Mohammed gained in this part of his ministry was, in fact, opposition. Opposition to him grew quickly in Mecca, eventually leading to outright persecution.

And that became so bad that in the end, Mohammed and his followers had to flee for their lives.

And so it was in AD 622 that the early Muslims, a few hundred of them, migrated a couple of hundred miles north from Mecca up to Medina.

[6 : 58] And that date actually marks the start of the Muslim calendar. It's known as the immigration or the hijrah in Arabic. And Muslims date their calendar. Their year one dates from our year 622.

And that move to Medina is incredibly significant. One reason why, in fact, Muslims date their calendar from it. A very significant Mohammed's time in Medina, if we want to understand why Islam looks the way that it does today.

For it was at Medina, though Mohammed makes the transition from being a prophet to being a statesman. He gained control of the city. And that was accompanied by a shift in the character of his revelations.

Now Mohammed begins to claim that God was revealing to him new laws for a new nation with him in charge of it. And this has a number of implications. For example, it's at Medina that we first see the beginnings of jihad or holy war.

With a number of verses of the Koran, allowing for at first offensive use of battle, defensive rather, and then later offensive use of battle to further the Muslim cause.

[7 : 59] Following a number of military interactions with the Meccans, Mohammed finally conquers his home city in 630 AD and spends the last two years of his life bringing the whole Arabian peninsula under his control.

Before he died in 632. Now that really is a totally high-speed whistle-stop tour of Mohammed's life. But it's helpful to even understand that basic framework for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, for Muslims, of course, the Koran is deeply bound up with Mohammed's life. For Sunni Muslims, the largest sect of Islam in particular, if they want to understand what a particular verse of the Koran means, they will read it through the filter of Mohammed's life.

They will ask, what was Mohammed doing when that verse was revealed? And thus they can interpret it today. And then, of course, secondly, for Muslims of all varieties, although Mohammed is only a man, he is still the supreme example, they believe, of humankind.

And they want to study his life and try and emulate his life, his teaching, his practice, and so on. And really, history in Islam casts long shadows. And we cannot fully understand Islam and the issues around it today without understanding how it really began, and especially the centrality of Mohammed in the middle of it.

[9 : 15] Well, let's now turn from Mohammed and the origins of Islam to the core beliefs of Islam. And one of the things that sometimes confuses people and feeds this sort of belief we see in many places that Muslims and Christians believe the same thing is the fact that Muslims will use the same words as Christians do, but mean different things by them.

Don't assume that because your Muslim friend speaks of words like God, faith, scripture, revelation, or so on, they mean the same thing by that word that we do. We should always ask your Muslim friend, hey, you know, we use that word too, but tell me, what do you mean by it?

It's also worth noting, incidentally, as we move into talking about Muslim beliefs, that for our Muslim friends, belief often comes a close second to practice. The five pillars of Islam, if you've studied anything on Islam, read a book, or, you know, had classes, religious studies sort of stuff at school or university or whatever, you'll probably come across the five pillars of Islam, the five things that Muslims have to do to be a Muslim.

And in fact, it's been remarked, in fact, that Islam is far more a religion characterized by practice than by belief. In fact, somebody once remarked that, you know, in Christianity, what we have really is complex beliefs and very simple practices.

Not a lot of things you have to do to be a Christian, but some things you have to believe. Islam always reverses that. And Islam are very simple beliefs, very, very, very few things you actually have to believe, but quite complex things you have to do.

[10 : 41] But Islam, like Christianity, sets out to be a worldview that's a complete understanding of reality. And the same with other worldviews attempt to understand reality, be they worldviews like atheism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, or indeed Christianity.

And all worldviews set out to answer some fairly basic questions. In fact, I go into this in some detail, actually, in the third chapter of my book, *Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?* From where I'm drawing some of this material here today.

But there are some basic questions that worldviews try to answer. And here are four that I think are quite helpful. Worldviews try to answer questions like, is there a God? And if so, what is he like? What does it mean to be human? What's the problem?

What's gone wrong with the world? And what is the solution? And interestingly, on every one of those core questions, Islam and Christianity are utterly different. There's a common misconception in our culture that the world's major religions, and certainly Islam and Christianity, are the same, which is why I wrote the book I just mentioned.

Many people think it doesn't matter sort of what you believe, as well as you're sincere. I hear this on university campuses all the time. But Islam offers us a very good test case in the case of that question.

[11 : 50] Because as you look at Islam, you suddenly discover, very quickly discover, how profoundly different Islam and Christianity are from each other, how their worldview answers are not just sort of slightly different, but they're radically different.

They're miles apart from each other. And to show you that, what I want to do is survey the core beliefs of Islam. And as we do, we'll see how they fuel Islam's answers to those four worldview questions.

And according to the classical creeds of Islam, Muslims are committed, are commanded to believe in five core beliefs. Belief in God, belief in angels, belief in scripture, belief in prophets, and belief in the day of judgment.

So let's explore these briefly one by one. Let's start with belief in God. Muslims believe that God, who they call Allah, is utterly, indivisibly one, which is one reason, incidentally, why they tend to believe that Christians are polytheists, because we believe in the Trinity.

Muslims mishear that and think that we believe in three gods. The Quran, as it describes who Allah, the God of Islam is, puts a major emphasis on God's power.

[12:59] Listen to these words from the 112th chapter of the Quran, which is often considered to be the Quran's most succinct description of who the Quranic God is. Say, he is Allah, the one and only.

He is Allah, the eternal, the absolute. He begetteth not, nor is he begotten, nor is there any, and there is none like unto him. Notice the emphasis there on God's power.

He's eternal. He's absolute. But also notice the little dig at Christians there. He begetteth not, nor is he begotten. Well, the Quran also frequently stresses Allah's utter transcendence.

He's distant. He's high. He's lofty. He's remote. He's removed. In the Quran, he really reveals only his will, not his character or his nature or himself. So that really, a Muslim's relationship with God is one of obedience, like a slave to a master, not a close personal relationship.

And so in terms of the first worldview question, is there a God and who is he like? Well, Islam would answer, yes, of course, there's a God. And who is he? Well, he's ruler. He's creator.

[14:03] He's Lord. He's master. He certainly is not father, saviour, or friend. In fact, no relationship is really possible with the God of the Quran. Nowhere does the Quran invite its readers into a relationship with Allah.

He tends to sort of govern the world like a distant ruler, like a bit of an absent landlord, actually, quite honestly. So from belief in God, the second belief of Muslims we're going to look at, according to the classical creeds of Islam, belief in angels.

And angels form a core part of the Islamic belief system, far more so than in Christianity, where many Christians I spent we get through much of our lives without really thinking that much about angels.

But in Islam, angels are central. It is angels who brought revelation. Remember the story of how Muhammad received the Quran according to Islamic beliefs? It wasn't God who revealed the Quran to Muhammad, but it was the angel Gabriel.

It's angels who bring revelation down from heaven to the prophets. It's angels who, according to Islamic tradition, watch over your every deed. According to Islamic tradition, every person has two recording angels, one sitting on the right shoulder, one on the left, who record your good deeds, your bad deeds, so they can be weighed on the day of judgment.

[15:12] And all this means that angels are sort of everyday reality, really, for faithful Muslims, far more part of their belief and faith and practice. And this centrality of angels in Islam rather than Christianity, I think actually flows from beliefs about Allah.

Because Allah is so distant and remote and transcendent, angels have kind of come into the gap that's being created between humans and God. It's angels who interact with the earthly realm, and angels who, for the lowly Muslim, form his or her point of contact with the spiritual realm.

So think about the second worldview question. What does it mean to be human? And who are humans in Islam? Well, Islam would answer humans are slaves who must be constantly kind of watched to ensure that we're obedient, because they're forgetful and they go wrong in all kinds of ways.

And the Quran is very clear. Also, of course, that Allah only shows favor to those who first obediently act towards him. All the initiative is on our side.

There is no sense in the Quran that God loves or takes initiative in reaching sinners. The Quran says in chapter 3, verse 31, if you love Allah, follow me. Allah will love and then forgive you your sins.

[16:20] And it's the role of angels to keep an eye on human beings in the Quran to make sure they're following all of that out. What a contrast, I always say. What a contrast. The God of the Bible, who in Romans 5, verse 8, we're told loved us first and demonstrated that, that even while we're still sinners, he sent Jesus to die for us.

So from belief in God and belief in angels, let's turn to scripture, the third belief in the classical Muslim creed. So Muslims believe that Allah has revealed his will to human beings by sending books with his prophets.

And indeed, they believe that every prophet brought some sort of book or written revelation. Not all have survived, but the Quran does speak of the Torah sent to Moses, the Psalms or the Zabor in Arabic sent to David, the Injil or the Gospel sent to Jesus, and of course, the Quran talks about itself, the Quran, Allah's final revelation sent to Muhammad.

In fact, the Quran speaks very positively about those former scriptures, but Muslims believe that, of course, it's the Quran that is God's final word, and many Muslims have been taught to believe that the former scriptures have been corrupted and that only the Quran is reliable.

But there are some distinct differences in what Muslims believe about scripture. They believe that scripture consists of the first person direct speech of God. If you were to open the Quran and read it, you would notice that every verse is sort of God speaking in the first person.

[17 : 39] And that's useful to know because it can cause Muslims confusion when they encounter the Bible. A Muslim who comes to the Bible and opens it expecting to find it like the Quran can get confused by the different genres there in the Bible, you know, history, biography, poetry, lore, drama, song, and prophecy.

I've seen Muslims sometimes, you know, open the New Testament and say things like, well, you know, I can see books written by Matthew and Mark and Luke and John. Where is the book that Jesus wrote? Where's the book that God wrote?

Because they're approaching the Bible expecting to find it identical to the Quran. So if you've got a Muslim friend and you're going to do, say, a Bible study with them, help them understand what Christians think about scripture, how it works.

Another major difference, incidentally, concerns the content of scripture. The Quran very much is about Allah revealing his will. You know, here's what Allah wants you to do. Here are the commands you should follow.

But he never reveals his character or himself. Remember, we have a God who is remote and transcendent and ultimately unknowable. And so the Quran is largely concerned with God's will and commands.

[18 : 44] Also, it's concerned with those, because of its answers, its third and fourth world view question. The third and fourth world view question, what's the problem? What's gone wrong with the world? And of course, what's the solution? And Islam would reply to that, well, the problem is that human beings are weak and they're forgetful.

What they need is more information in the form of commandments. It's really important to understand that the Quran doesn't really talk about salvation. Islam doesn't really offer you salvation. The Quran offers really a self-help program.

You know, the problem is you forget God's commands. Here are some more of them. Whereas Christianity, of course, there's no something much more drastic has gone wrong. And there's a much more drastic solution needed. Let's turn to the penultimate belief of Islam, belief in prophets. Like Christians, Muslims believe that God has sent messengers, prophets to mankind. But there really the similarity ends. For Muslims believe some pretty different things about prophets. For example, the traditional Islamic belief is that prophets are sinless, protected by Allah from any wrongdoing.

And hence, Muslims actually have quite a difficult time with stories in the Bible, such as David's sin with Bathsheba. I've had Muslim friends say, look, there's proof the Bible's been corrupted because there's a story of David and Bathsheba and David as a prophet.

[19 : 56] How could he possibly have done that? Because they're reading it through that lens. And again, knowing that's what might be, could be going on in the head of your Muslim friend is helpful as you help them think about what the Bible says.

Muslims also believe there is a line of prophets, beginning with Adam, who was the last prophet, and then ending with Muhammad, of the first prophet, and then ending with Muhammad, who was the last and the seal of the line of prophets.

And among that long line of prophets, many mentioned in the Quran, you'll find many biblical prophets. The Quran mentions many biblical prophets, although often with Arabized names, people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Jesus, and so on.

And according to Islam, you see every prophet brought essentially the same message, the unity of God and a call to obedience and moral commands. And again, moral commands.

Think of the last worldview question, what's the solution? Well, Islam would answer moral commands. Human beings need instruction, instruction, instruction. You know, Islam really is a moral self-improvement plan.

[20 : 59] And by contrast, Christianity is a heart transformation plan. And in the seventh chapter of how the Muslims and Christians worship the same God, again, I go into this in some detail, actually, and talk about the massive difference between Islam and Christianity here, because Islam just thinks we need advice.

Christianity thinks we actually need a rescuer. And there's a massive, you know, world of difference between those two positions. And then we come to the fifth belief, belief of the classical Muslim creeds, the day of judgment.

Muslims believe at the end of time that God will wrap up history, those who have died will be raised, and all will face judgment. And it's important to understand the major role that the day of judgment forms for many of our Muslim friends in the Islamic worldview.

For many Muslims, you know, judgment is an ever-looming reality, and they are deeply concerned about not being found wanting on that day. You know, it's interesting, isn't it? You know, 100 or 200 years ago, there was a lot more preaching about judgment and hell in Christian churches.

Today, a lot of churches have kind of ranged that in, and you don't kind of hear those kind of messages anymore. But boy, read the Quran, warnings of hellfire everywhere. Read, hear many Muslim sermons, hellfire everywhere.

[22 : 10] Muslims take this stuff seriously, and maybe we need to rethink about taking this stuff seriously too. I find it quite helpful something to say to Muslim friends as we discuss, look, you know, I, like you, I believe in hell.

I don't want to go there, and I don't want you to go there. The reason I want to tell you about Jesus is I think he is the only way we can avoid spending an eternity separated from God, an eternity in the torments of hell.

I don't want that for you. I would never use that approach for my atheist friends, but with my Muslim friends, it can immediately establish you as someone who takes these spiritual things seriously.

Well, as I reflect on the four worldview questions, is there a God, and who is he like?

You know, who are we? What's the problem? What's gone wrong with the world? And then lastly, what's the solution? And then I look at the differences that I've just so briefly shown you in the Islamic answer. You know, one of the biggest differences that I see in Islam is lack of hope.

There is no hope in Islam. You know, Islam can't really offer, doesn't offer any promise of forgiveness. God might, if you take the initiative, he might show you favor. He might not. There's no indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to actually transform us.

[23 : 16] And ultimately, there's no savior who's come to rescue us. You are left on your own. And if your life is enough of a mess that you can't make it on your own, then you're in real trouble. And also, I often say to my Muslim friends, you know, ultimately, of course, moral commands can't save us.

You know, most of us don't have a problem knowing the right thing to do. We know the right thing to do. What we lack is the power to do it. Islam doesn't help you over that. Islam simply says, you know, you're fools.

You've messed this lot of commands up. Have some more. Try harder. Christianity says, no, actually, there is something broken in the very heart of human nature that needs more than just more instructions. Well, for all of that background, of course, Muslims present a particularly challenge to Christianity because, of course, they also take a pretty often quite highly polemical approach to Christianity.

And this means that if you're going to share your faith or talk about your faith with a Muslim friend, neighbor, colleague, or classmate, it might just be worth knowing some of the questions or objections that may be raised to your faith so you can respond.

And as I said, there's a wonderful discipline with a long history in Christianity called apologetics. In recent years, that goes back through people like, you know, C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell or Rebecca McLaughlin writing today.

[24 : 31] Many others have written in this area. And apologetics is simply a branch of Christian thought concerned with giving a reason for the hope that we have as 1 Peter 3.15 commands us.

And I think in the multicultural age that we live in, every Christian needs to know a little bit about how they can defend their faith and persuade, give people a persuasive reason to follow Christ.

But in terms of responding to the challenges of Islam, there are three areas that Muslim attacks against Christianity, Muslim polemics often focus on. Muslims will often talk about the Bible, they'll often talk about the Trinity, and they'll often talk about Christian history.

And again, we can only just touch on these in our last 10 minutes or so. But let me just give you a few highlights of what you might hear and a way you might respond. So in terms of the Bible, many Muslims believe the Bible has been corrupted.

Now, interestingly, that was a polemic, an argument, that developed quite late in Islamic history. So the Quran's quite positive about the Bible. But as Muslims began to discover the Bible, when Muhammad was preaching, the Bible was not widely available in Arabic.

He said that he was preaching the same message, nobody could check. But as Islam began expanding and building an empire after Muhammad's death, very quickly, Muslims began debating with Christians, they began reading the Bible, and they discovered horror of horrors that the Bible contradicted the Quran.

[25 : 46] And this posed a massive problem. Muhammad claimed to be a prophet like the biblical prophets, but his message was entirely different. So this really forced Muslim clerics in those first couple of centuries to a choice.

Either they had to claim their prophet got it wrong, which is pretty much unthinkable, or they had to claim that Jews and Christians had corrupted the Bible, and that was the route they took. And it can be helpful for our Muslim friends to know the history behind this argument.

Now, there are numerous ways to respond to Muslim attacks here, but I've sometimes found it helpful to address the theological problem this raises for Muslims. And it simply looks like this.

What kind of God, I ask Muslim friends, would send books with all of his prophets from Adam through Moses and Abraham all the way down to Jesus, and would allow, what kind of God would allow every single one of those to get lost, destroyed, or corrupted, before finally that God, what, round about 610 AD, goes, oh gosh, you know, I wish I'd thought of this before, perhaps I need to send a book at last that's incorruptible, and he sends it there with Muhammad.

And of course, even the Quran has textual variants in its manuscript tradition, so, you know, the debate about whether it's being preserved is a whole other issue. But what kind of God behaves that way?

[27 : 03] What kind of God literally can't protect his own word because he isn't powerful enough, or can't be bothered to because he doesn't care enough? And quite frankly, that's the kind of God who isn't competent to run a burger stand, quite frankly, let alone a universe.

By contrast, the God of the Bible says that my word stands forever. Well, then, there's the Trinity. Muslims, of course, have a hard time with the Trinity because the Quran stresses the unity of God so frequently and so starkly, and so many Christians, many Muslims rather, tend to think that Christians actually believe in three gods that were basically polytheists.

Now, there are so many ways you could respond here. There's some brilliant books that you can read to help you understand the Trinity better. My friend Mike Reeves has written a wonderful book called *Delighting in the Trinity* that's well worth a read.

But again, the most helpful way initially, I find with Muslims here, is turn the question around a bit and to say to them, look, often Muslims ask the question, how can a man be God?

But that's actually the wrong way around. Isn't it a better question to ask, could God take on human form if he wished to? Now, Muslims will often shy away from us saying God couldn't do this because they don't like to limit God that way.

[28 : 16] And once you've got to that point, you can say, well, okay, once we're agreed that God could do this should he wish to, then the question becomes, has God done this? And what a great invitation to take a long, hard look at the Gospels and the claims that Jesus made for himself.

So there's the Bible, there's a Trinity. One last area where Muslims may sometimes raise some questions is the whole issue of history and particularly, you know, examples of Christians behaving badly in history.

A common target is the Crusades or colonialism, you know, which has cast a long shadow really over Muslim-Christian relations. Now, when it comes to the Crusades, there are certainly many approaches that one can make, but I sometimes find it helpful to just take this approach really

because it's so Jesus-centered.

You can say to a Muslim friend, look, if a Christian commits violence, it's very simple, they're disobeying Jesus. You can point them to the words of Jesus who said, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

And then you say, tell me, when a Muslim commits violence in the name of Islam, what words of Muhammad would you point them to as a critique?

[29 : 25] Can you show me where Muhammad said, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? And you simply, you can't because Muhammad was a military leader. He was a warlord as well as a founder of a world religion.

And then thirdly, of course, most Christians would condemn the bloodshed of the Crusades, where I have not yet found any mainstream writer who has condemned the military expansion Islam engaged in in its first few centuries.

And this applies to colonialism too, actually. We hear a lot of critique today of the colonial period in British history, and many of those critiques are fair enough, but we don't often hear that every other civilization built great empires and Islam had a great empire.

Islam conquered North Africa. Islam conquered Spain. Islam conquered much of Asia. And today, many Muslims are taught that was the golden period of Islam. They don't engage in a reflective critique of their own tradition.

You know, look along North Africa. Why is a country like Morocco that I've been to many times, why is that a Muslim country? Why are the Berber people, the original people in that country, forced to, you know, living in small, scattered communities up in the mountains?

[30 : 29] Because it was conquered by Islam. In the centuries following Muhammad and Islam has never really come to terms with its colonial past. I think we can raise those kind of questions, but do so not to score political points, but to bring it back to Jesus.

On which note, that brings me to my final section in my last five minutes with you in this talk. And I want to think a little bit about some principles for evangelism. Because as we engage with Muslims, we don't just want to build friendships.

We don't just want to learn more about what our Muslim friends believe. And we certainly don't want to just try and score points and arguments. But we want to point people to Jesus. How do we do this? Well, let me share with you very simply four very brief principles for reaching Muslims.

And the first is straightforward. Go where Muslims are. You know, we live in a multicultural society where many of us may have Muslim neighbours, Muslim colleagues, fellow students at school if you're a student.

And so meeting Muslims is not difficult for us, but we can still live quite separate lives. So my encouragement to you, if you have Muslim neighbours in your community, if there are Muslims you meet at the school gate, if you're a parent, if there are Muslim students at school or university, Muslim colleagues at work, find an opportunity to introduce yourself.

[31 : 41] Be proactive in making friends with them. Take your opportunity the day you can. Don't wait for them to come to you. Go to them. Secondly, friendship. Any evangelism we engage in should be seeking to build long-term relationships, not just perform hit-and-run operations with the gospel.

And this is especially true when it comes to Muslims because for a whole range of reasons, Muslims can often be quite suspicious of Christianity and there can be long and ancient prejudices. Hospitality too is an important virtue in Muslim culture as a way of building deep friendships. And it's in the context of deep friendships that Muslims can see the gospel lived out and the difference Jesus makes day to day. So prayerfully and practically seek to make friends with the Muslims that you come across and invest time into them.

Thirdly, ask challenging questions. Questions are a great evangelistic tool. Jesus used them all the time. But learn to ask good questions. Ask questions about Muhammad and the Quran. As you read stuff and study stuff and you come across issues, raise those kind of questions.

Most Muslims have probably never heard tough questions about what they believe. And you can do this without being, you know, insulting. You don't need to deliberately insult Muhammad or the Quran. But you can still ask things like, well, I was reading the Quran and I, you know, came across what to me looked like a contradiction.

[32 : 55] Or you could say, what about Muhammad's many battles, you know, today when we need a paradigm for peace? What's going on there? And so on. And if you ask those questions in the

context of a friendship, you are far less likely to cause offence and you open up the invitation for questions to be asked back.

I've often said to Muslims when I've had conversations with them, look, there is no question that you can ask me about Christianity that I'll be offended by. And don't be afraid of the questions either. If a Muslim friend asks you a question you don't know, just say, you know, that's a great question.

I don't immediately have the answer to that. Let me get back to you. And either go and, you know, do an internet search, read a book, or, you know, talk to a pastor or older Christian leader who can help you get the answer to the question your Muslim friend has asked.

And then, fourthly, you can go where Muslims are, friendship, challenging questions. Lastly, keep centred on Jesus. Now, I cannot stress enough how sharing your faith with a Muslim friend or neighbour or colleague is not about winning arguments.

It's very easy to get into arguments because Muslims can be passionate people, but it's about introducing them to Jesus. You know, all the Muslims I have known who have come to faith in Christ have done so when they've encountered Jesus for the first time.

[34 : 06] and they've grasped who he really, really is. In fact, one of the most powerful testimonies I know of a Muslim who's come to faith in Christ in recent years was written by my friend Nabil Qureshi and it's a book called Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus.

It's linked, actually, on the webpage of resources that we've put together for you and I'll put that URL up in a minute at the end. Do check it out because, again, at the heart of it is Jesus. When Muslims discover who Jesus really is, they'll take spiritual steps forward.

And so, therefore, I would recommend when talking with a Muslim that you always bring it back to Jesus, whether it's comparing him and Muhammad, whether it's talking about what he's done in your life or what he was like, what the Bible says about him, keep it Jesus-focused.

And my prayer is that as you do that, that God will use you through those friendships to bring many Muslims to discover who Jesus is for themselves. On which note, let me pray for you.

Father God, thank you for the opportunity we've had to just think about this massive topic of how we reach and understand our Muslim friends. And I pray for my friends who've been watching this that it would really have sunk deeply, there'll be things here that will be helpful to them.

[35 : 13] But I especially pray for boldness and confidence that you would help them reach out at work, at the school gate, at school or university in the neighbourhood. Bring Muslims across their path, I pray, and give them boldness to build friendships, a heart of compassion, to just use hospitality and other ways to build bridges to them, and just the confidence and the compassion to share who Jesus is with them.

Lord, we thank you for the work that you're doing among Muslims, both here in the UK and around the world. And I pray that through some of those who are watching this, they would have the privilege of seeing you work in the lives of their Muslim friends too.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Well, there, as we close, thank you for listening. I hope you found this helpful. There, as we close, is the resource slide. One last time, do go to solas-cpc.org.

That's the Solas for Centre for Public Christianity for whom I work. solas-cpc.org forward slash Islam. You can download the slides from this talk and go through them again at your own speed.

There's the free e-book, Islam in Context, that I co-wrote with a friend. And then there's my new book, The Muslims and Christians Worship the Same Gods. You can read the first chapter of that or listen to it if you prefer an audio book free of charge online.

[36 : 22] Check it out. And if it's helpful, there are links to lots of different places you can get hold of it. And once again, thank you for watching and I hope you found this helpful and a real resource in terms of how you can reach Muslims that the Lord brings across your path.

Thanks again and goodbye.