

## American Christians' Perception of Muslims and its Implications for Ministry

Around 1.6 billion Muslims inhabit the world today, and an estimated three to seven million reside in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that Muslims are the largest unreached people group, only 2% of Protestant Christian missionaries are engaging the Muslim world.<sup>2</sup> In fact, 86% of Muslims globally have not had personal contact with a Christian, which equates to only one in seven Muslims having met a Christian.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Christians who live in the United States have a tremendous opportunity to minister to the millions of Muslims residing in the United States. Thus, it is perplexing as to why the 257 million Christians in the US seem reluctant to engage this prime mission field even though it is in their own backyard.<sup>4</sup>

For the most part, Muslims in America remained quietly under the radar until the events of September 11, 2001, when they were unwittingly thrust into the spotlight. The tragic events of 9/11 signaled a shift in American perception of Muslims around the world, and also highlighted an unprecedented focus on Muslims in America. Consequently, since 9/11, prejudice and discrimination against Muslims have escalated in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the Bible calls for Christians to love their neighbors, which rightly includes Muslims. Therefore, it is crucial to ascertain the basis for this neglect of Muslim ministry in the United States, and why Christians are ignoring this opportunity for outreach. Thus, this study will examine American Christians' perception of Muslims, whether or not prejudice exists in the American Church, and also evaluate how Christians' perception of Muslims affects ministry to Muslims. In order to resolve these questions, it is important to have an understanding of the history and key events surrounding Muslims' presence in America. Significant factors contributing to this include Muslims' immigration to America, their overall experience in America, and the factors that have shaped American Christians' perception of Muslims. Most importantly, it is crucial to examine how American Christians can be prepared to engage Muslims who are figuratively, and, sometimes literally, on their doorsteps.

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<sup>1</sup> Azadeh Ghaffari and Ciftci Ayse, "Religiosity and self-esteem of Muslim immigrants to the United States: the moderating role of perceived discrimination," *International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion* 20, no. 1 (January 2010): 14, ATLA Religion Database (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Christy J. Wilson, "The Great Muslim Challenge: Learning from their Dedication," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no 3 (July-September 1996): 131, [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/13\\_3\\_PDFs/06\\_Wilson.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/13_3_PDFs/06_Wilson.pdf) (accessed February 10, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Todd Johnson, "Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970 – 2020," Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, (June 1, 2013), 8 <http://www.gordonconwell.com/netcommunity/CSGCResources/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 193.

<sup>5</sup> CAIR Report, "Islamophobia and Its Impact in the United States" (January 2009 - December 2010): 24, <http://www.cair.com/images/pdf/2010-Islamophobia-Report.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2015).

## Methodology

Ninety-four surveys were administered to collect responses from American Christians about their perception of Muslims and how they obtain the majority of their information about Muslims. Twenty-four physical surveys were received after being distributed at a local nondenominational church. An identical survey was created on-line and a link was distributed to Christians, which resulted in an additional seventy surveys. The age range of participants was nineteen to seventy. Twenty-nine participants were male and fifty-eight were female. All participants were U.S. Citizens and Christians. Seven surveys were eliminated because participants did not meet the required criteria, which resulted in a remaining total of eighty-seven surveys. Complete survey results are presented in Appendix A.

In addition, participant observation was incorporated in this research project. The author of this paper wore a *hijab*, which is a Muslim head covering, to four nondenominational Christian churches. The same color and style of *hijab* was utilized consistently so as not to attract more or less attention. A control was utilized in the form of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, college-aged woman who would typically be perceived to be an American. Both participants visited the churches at the same service time, but entered and sat separately to determine whether they received the same reception. In addition, other observers who were helping with the study sat nearby and took notes about people's reactions. Field notes from this experience are recorded in Appendix B.

## Muslim Immigration to America

Before examining the perception of Muslims in America, it is important to understand the historical journey of how Muslims first arrived in America. However, this cannot be accomplished without difficulty, as the historical reports of Muslim immigration to the United States vary widely and are not without dispute. Purportedly, the initial Muslim immigrants were actually forced by means of the African slave trade in the 1700s. Edward Curtis briefly traced the lives of a handful of slaves during colonial times that arrived in what is now the United States. He suggests that perhaps thousands to a million Muslims were residing in North America, but stops short of providing any evidence of this notion.<sup>6</sup> He also claims that Muslims might have traveled in 1492 alongside Columbus, but, again, abstains from producing any evidence or sources for this claim.<sup>7</sup> Ghulam M. Haniff provides a different assessment when he admits,

The claim that Africans imported as slaves included Muslims, while quite plausible in view of the disparate evidence collected, has yet to be subjected to credible scholarly scrutiny. Unfortunately, slaves did not leave behind a community of any kind nor did they develop institutional structures in the form of mosques or graveyards that could have constituted tangible proof. However, some descendants of African slaves did embrace Islam during the first half of the twentieth century but their numbers never amounted to more than a handful.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Edward E. Curtis, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ghulam M. Haniff, "The Muslim Community in America: A Brief Profile," *Journal Of Muslim*

Similarly, other studies suggest a modest number of Muslims in America's history. Mehmet Ugur Ekinci pored over Ottoman documents to discover the origins of Muslim immigration. He relates that the Ottoman state reported that it became aware of a small cluster of Muslims who fled to North America around 1890. Unfortunately, no legal records of this were maintained, so tracking the precise number of Muslims was impossible. The majority of this immigration was done surreptitiously, so the Muslims never "[grew] into a large or visible group."<sup>9</sup> By 1892, it was reported that there were around 200 Muslims in the United States, but three years later this estimate had diminished to a mere fifty.<sup>10</sup> The majority of these immigrants desired to make a living and then return home with money to support their families.<sup>11</sup> Most members of this initial Muslim community settled in Worcester, Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup> Ekinci describes, "The earliest list of Muslims living in the United States, prepared by Topanelian in January 1892, is limited to Worcester. It includes the names of 28 men between the ages of 15 and 48."<sup>13</sup> Whether there were other Muslim immigrants living outside of Worcester at that time remains unclear. Ghulam M. Haniff's report corresponds to this view of small clusters immigrating to the US toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

Briefly, it is pertinent to examine how these early Muslims were considered in light of their early arrival in the US. Lawrence Davidson describes the attitude toward Islam and Muslims in their earlier days as one that was "friendly." He explains,

The presence of these early Muslims was recognized by the inclusion of the religion of Islam in the discussion of religious freedom in the early years of the nation's history. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin all mentioned Islam in their arguments supporting the broadest possible religious freedom and tolerance. This was the position of almost all those supporting the adoption of the Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. Thus, from the very founding of the nation, a friendly regard toward individual Muslims was part of the American outlook.<sup>15</sup>

In the early colonial days, Muslims probably practiced Islam independently without an established community framework. Curtis points out, "There is no evidence to suggest that Omar [a slave in the colonial period] practiced Islam in a communal setting with other Muslim slaves."<sup>16</sup> Around 1919, the development of at least one mosque in Michigan signaled communal

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*Minority Affairs* 23, no 2 (October 2003): 303, *Academic Search Premier*, (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Mehmet Ugur Ekinci, "Reflections of the First Muslim Immigration to America in Ottoman Documents," *International Journal Of Turkish Studies* 12, no 1/2 (October 2006): 47, *Social Sciences Full Text*, (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Ekinci, 47-48.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ekinci, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Ekinci, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Haniff, 303.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Davidson, "Islamophobia, the Israel Lobby and American Paranoia: Letter from America," *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* (Edinburgh University Press) 10, no 1 (May 2011): 90, Religion and Philosophy Collection, (accessed January 27, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Curtis, 13.

practice of Islam and a more widespread presence of Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Four more mosques were built before World War II, which resulted in a total of around five mosques in the entire US by the end of World War II.<sup>18</sup> Most of the early Muslim immigrants were predominantly Lebanese and Syrian with some, “Turks, Tartans, Yugoslavs, Albanians, and Indo-Pakistanis” adding to the diversity.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of the uncertainty surrounding the original Muslims who immigrated to North America, one element that is certain is that the arrival of larger groups of Muslims can be traced to 1965.<sup>20</sup> Before then, only “light levels” of Muslims migrated to the United States before and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Immigration began to propel after World War I, and another significant influx was ushered in after World War II.<sup>22</sup> By the 1950s, three significant factors contributed to Muslim growth in the US. Ghulam M. Haniff explains, “One [factor] was the founding of FIA [Federation of Islamic Associations], the second was the construction of a major mosque [in Washington, DC], and the third was the arrival of students from Muslim countries for studies on American university campuses.”<sup>23</sup> In 1965, the immigration law was changed due to the *Immigration Act of 1965*.<sup>24</sup> At that time, an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Muslims resided in the United States.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in the 1960s, Muslim immigration began to spike and the majority of Muslims in America today are “newcomers” who arrived after 1965.<sup>26</sup> After 1980, immigration laws were once again relaxed, and another wave of Muslims arrived to embrace opportunities in the United States. Not only were students arriving, but also “professionals and skilled workers.”<sup>27</sup> Of these first-generation immigrants, 45% of them moved to the US since 1990,<sup>28</sup> 60% since 1980, and 85% since 1970.<sup>29</sup>

In regard to modern times, a serious challenge exists in tracing Muslim immigration, because the U.S. Census Bureau does not count people based on religion.<sup>30</sup> Other challenges involve which Muslims to include, such as whether Ahmadis should be considered Muslims.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Haniff, 304.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Curtis, xi-xii.

<sup>21</sup> Davidson, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Haniff, 304.

<sup>24</sup> Jackleen M. Salem, "Citizenship and Religious Expression in the West: A Comparative Analysis of Experiences of Muslims in France, Germany, and the USA," *Journal Of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no 1 (March 2013): 81, *Academic Search Premier*, (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Pipes and Khalid Duran, "Muslim Immigrants in the United States," *Background* (August 2002): 2.

<sup>26</sup> Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," (May 2007), 2 <http://pewresearch.org/files/old-assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf> (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Haniff, 305.

<sup>28</sup> Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," (August 2011), <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/08/muslim-american-report.pdf> (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Haniff, 308.

<sup>30</sup> Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," 9.

<sup>31</sup> Pipes, 1.

Thus, even today, there is a wide disparity in estimates of between four and eight million Muslims in the United States. Ghulam M. Haniff reveals the struggle:

Demographically, there are no official statistics on the Muslim minority population. Estimates of their numbers, based on data obtained through a variety of techniques, vary from four to eight million. The most frequently cited figure, reported widely in the media, is that of seven million.<sup>32</sup>

Figures are typically attained by means of the Census Bureau's records of "immigrants' nativity and nationality."<sup>33</sup> To put it simply, this method essentially equates to an educated guess. With that in mind, it is believed that since 2010, Muslims represent somewhere between 0.2-1% of the current population in the United States.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, Muslims are attracted to the United States for many reasons. For example, some Muslims are seeking refuge from war-torn regions, and some are experiencing religious or ethnic persecution, or fleeing Islamism.<sup>35</sup> Others are attracted to the United States because they desire to receive an education.<sup>36</sup> As Jackleen M. Salem reveals, "Today, immigrants can enter the USA and become citizens...through family sponsorship, work, political asylum, the diversity lottery, and special circumstances."<sup>37</sup> Many of these Muslims have become valued citizens in society as "lawyers, doctors, politicians, teachers, and are learning to manage their multiple identities as Muslims, Arabs, Turks, and Indians with their American...identities."<sup>38</sup> Although other nations such as France and Germany attracted uneducated and poorer Muslim immigrants, the United States received the opposite trend. In regard to Muslim immigrants in America, Salem contends, "[They] were both educated and professionals who could speak English proficiently. This allowed them to integrate in the American society's upper middle class smoothly as they were often doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, and businessmen."<sup>39</sup> Thus, Muslim immigrants in the U.S. have valuable skill-sets, are educated, and tend to be scattered throughout the country as opposed to tightly woven enclaves.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Haniff, 306.

<sup>33</sup> Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," 3.

<sup>34</sup> Pew Research Center, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030" (January 2011), 141, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/01/FutureGlobalMuslimPopulation-WebPDF-Feb10.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2015); Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," 10.

<sup>35</sup> Pipes, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Haniff, 303.

<sup>37</sup> Salem, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Salem, 78.

<sup>39</sup> Salem, 83.

<sup>40</sup> Sabri Ciftci, "Islamophobia and threat perceptions: explaining anti-Muslim sentiment in the west," *Journal Of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no 3 (September 2012): 298, ATLA Religion Database (accessed January 26, 2015).

Moreover, nearly two-thirds of the Muslim population in the United States consists of immigrants,<sup>41</sup> and 63% of Muslims in the U.S. are “first-generation immigrants.”<sup>42</sup> Another interesting consideration is that 81% of Muslims immigrants are U.S. citizens.<sup>43</sup> The first generation Muslims in America come from a diverse background, which is worth noting:

About four-in-ten (41%) are immigrants from the Middle East or North Africa, while about a quarter (26%) come from South Asia nations including Pakistan (14%), Bangladesh (5%), and India (3%). Others came to the U.S. from sub-Saharan Africa (11%), various countries in Europe (7%), Iran (5%) or other countries (9%).<sup>44</sup> Pakistan is the single largest contributor to Muslim immigration in the U.S.

### **Muslims’ General Experience in America**

Muslims’ experience in the US has been shaped by many factors, but none could be more significant than September 11, 2001. The Muslim population had kept a relatively quiet profile in the US, but all of that changed on 9/11. Jackleen Salem explains, “The political situation in the Middle East has always impacted Muslims in America, from the Six Day War in 1967 to the US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. But it was 9/11 that put the spotlight on Muslims in America unlike it had ever been before.”<sup>45</sup> Although unease around Muslims existed perhaps before 9/11,<sup>46</sup> this feeling of discomfort seemed to morph into outright fear overnight. Since 9/11, 28% of Muslims report that they have felt people considered them to be suspicious, and 22% have had insults hurled at them.<sup>47</sup> Before 9/11, hate-crimes against Muslims were rare. Since 9/11, Mona M. Amer describes, “Anti-Muslim hate crimes have surged...to possibly the most prevalent type of hate crime now taking place on American soil.”<sup>48</sup> This is evident just by examining FBI statistics, which reveal thirty-three hate crimes committed against Muslims in 2000, but by 2001 this number skyrocketed to 546.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, 52% believe that policies in the U.S. pertaining to anti-terrorism efforts promote additional negative focus on Muslims.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pew Research Center, “Summary of Key Findings: U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” (February 2008), 8, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Salem, 88.

<sup>46</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxii.

<sup>47</sup> Pew Research Center, “Portrait of Muslim Americans,” (August 2011), <http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/a-portrait-of-muslim-americans/> (accessed February 1, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Mona M. Amer and Anisah Bagasra, “Psychological research with Muslim Americans in the age of Islamophobia: Trends, challenges, and recommendations,” *American Psychologist* 68, no 3 (April 2013): 135, *PsycARTICLES* (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Mohamed Nimer, “Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Measurements, Dynamics, and Consequences,” in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80.

<sup>50</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

One Muslim man, Abdullah Noorudeen Durke, laments this grievance when he says, One of the results of 9/11 that all Muslims endure is that we are now no longer individuals, but are a ‘religion’ and, as such, we all have become answerable and accountable for what fellow religionists did and do in various parts of the world – what used to be termed, in the McCarthy era ‘guilt by association.’ Could we similarly assign guilt to all Christians for the excesses of Hitler (who during his final day in his Berlin bunker avidly read the New Testament), or Stalin (an altar boy in his youth). These two killed some 18 million people.<sup>51</sup>

Due to increased suspicion, Muslims are under additional scrutiny by both law-enforcement and the government. This has resulted in, “surveillance, profiling, interrogation, detention... deportation, and additional violations of civil liberties.”<sup>52</sup>

Consequently, 55% of Muslims in America believe that challenges and difficulties have increased for them since 9/11.<sup>53</sup> It is hard to be a Muslim in the United States now more than ever. One Muslim man pleads,

We’re Muslim Americans, we’re neighbors, we’re politicians, we’re doctors, we’re lawyers. You know we’re teachers. We’re part of the American fabric. And to single us out and to put out these bills that are unconstitutional saying you can’t practice your religion and anti-sharia bills and things like that. These Pavlovian triggers that the Islamophobes are very good at putting out there... That’s something that our community really, I’d say, we are hurt by.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, American Muslims are resilient, which is reflected in their appraisal of their overall experience in the United States. Regardless of the aforementioned difficulties, Muslims are surprisingly happy in the United States. 82% say that they are content with their lives in the US, and 79% consider the communities where they reside to be positive places to live.<sup>55</sup> In addition, 48% believe that the average American is typically friendly toward Muslims in America, which is partnered with 32% who feel Americans respond in a neutral manner toward Muslims.<sup>56</sup> In fact, 66% indicate that Muslims in America have an improved “quality of life” over Muslims residing elsewhere in the world.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Muslims are actually happier with the direction the United States is heading compared to the general population (56% vs. 23%).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Abdullah Noorudeen Durke, “Reflections of a Post-Modern Muslim Living in Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century American,” *Dialogue and Alliance*, 21 no 2 (Fall/Winter 2007): 56, (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Amer, 135.

<sup>53</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>54</sup> Halim Rane and Jacqui Ewart, “The Framing of Islam and Muslims in the Tenth Anniversary Coverage of 9/11: Implications for Reconciliation and Moving On,” *Journal Of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no 3 (September 2012): 319, ATLA Religion Database (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>56</sup> Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Muslim Americans.”

<sup>57</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>58</sup> Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Muslim Americans.”

## Islamophobia? Assessing the Perception of Muslims

Before proceeding, it is important to take a moment to define a key term, *Islamophobia*, which will be used for the duration of this paper. Jocelyne Cesari suggests that Etienne Dinet first posited the term in 1922 in the essay *L'Orient vu de l'Occident*, but the term perhaps did not carry the same weighty connotation as it does in modern times.<sup>59</sup> Regardless, it was the Runnymede Trust in 1997 that highlighted the term in a published report, which bolstered the term's usage and familiarity.<sup>60</sup> Although scholars have not come to a consensus concerning the definition of Islamophobia,<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Davidson supplies an apropos definition when he describes,

Islamophobia is a stereotyping of all Muslims (that is the stereotyping of over a billion human beings) as real or potential terrorists due to the alleged hateful and violent teachings of their religion. Islam is reduced to the concept of jihad and the concept of jihad is reduced to terror against the West.<sup>62</sup>

Another appropriate definition by Stephen Schwartz explains, "Islamophobia is the condemnation of Islam in its entirety as 'extremist' while denying the very existence of a moderate Muslim majority."<sup>63</sup> Essentially, this term means that people bundle negative, derogatory, or threatening terms, such as "violence and terrorism," with all of Islam and Muslims.<sup>64</sup>

Some scholars believe Islamophobia is akin to a new type of racism, and describe the term as a "cultural racism."<sup>65</sup> Ramon Grosfoguel suggests that by focusing on the religious aspect of Islam, it allows Americans to sidestep the distasteful label of racism. He relays,

Cultural racism is a form of racism where the word 'race' is not even mentioned. It is focused on the cultural inferiority of a group of people. Usually it is framed in terms of the inferior habits, beliefs, behavior, or values of a group of people... In the new cultural racist discourses, religion has a dominant role. The contemporary tropes about 'uncivilized,' 'barbarian,' 'savage,' 'primitive,' 'underdeveloped,' 'authoritarian,' and 'terrorist' inferior people are today concentrated in the 'other's' religious practices and believes [sic]. By focusing on the 'other's' religion, the...Euro-Americans...manage to escape being accused of racism.<sup>66</sup>

In truth, it is a form of racism, but just packaged differently.

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<sup>59</sup> Jocelyne Cesari, "Secularization and Religious Divides in Europe. Muslims in Western Europe After 9/11: Why the Term Islamophobia is More a Predicament than an Explanation," Submission to the Changing Landscape of Citizenship and Security, 6<sup>th</sup> PCRD of European Commission (June 1, 2006): 5, [http://www.libertysecurity.org/IMG/pdf\\_Challenge\\_Project\\_report.pdf](http://www.libertysecurity.org/IMG/pdf_Challenge_Project_report.pdf), (accessed February 25, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> Sherman A. Lee, et al, "The Islamophobia scale: instrument development and initial validation," *International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion* 19, no 2 (April 1, 2009): 92, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Ciftci, 294.

<sup>62</sup> Davidson, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Lee, 93.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, 94.

<sup>65</sup> Ciftci, 294.

<sup>66</sup> Ramon Grosfoguel, "The Multiple Faces of Islam," *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 1 no. 1 (Spring 2012): 13-14, <http://crg.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Ramon-Grosfoguel.pdf> (accessed January 25, 2015).



Furthermore, Islamophobia is typically expressed via four dimensions. Sabri Ciftci describes, “These dimensions are exclusion, discrimination, prejudice, and violence.”<sup>67</sup> The most dangerous aspect of Islamophobia is when it evolves from prejudice (a belief) to discrimination (an action), which could escalate to violence.<sup>68</sup> In regard to Islamophobia, one Muslim man, Mohamad Nimer, comes to an interesting conclusion and actually pleads with his fellow Muslims to have patience with the general population. He contends, “My argument is there are a few Islamophobes...but the vast majority of Americans are people who’ve been misinformed, who don’t know the truth and don’t know the real facts.”<sup>69</sup>

Correspondingly, it is important to ascertain whether Islamophobia exists among the general population of America, and how Americans’ perception of Muslims compares to Christians’ perception. Around 50% of Americans believe that the general population is prejudiced against Muslims in America.<sup>70</sup> Forty-five percent think that Muslims experience “a lot” of discrimination in the US along with 28% who suppose they receive “some” discrimination.<sup>71</sup>

In fact, Muslims who call America home have experienced a more elevated level of prejudice than members of other religious groups.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, they receive more prejudice than other groups such as “gays, lesbians, Hispanics, African Americans, and women.”<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, 60% of Muslims in America recognize this prejudice, and 48% acknowledge being the recipient of discrimination just in the last year.<sup>74</sup> This is a staggering number when one considers that there are an estimated seven million Muslims residing in the United States.

In the past, atheists were considered to be the most untrustworthy group in the American opinion. Now, this designation has shifted to Muslims, and 45% of the general population considers Muslims to be the most suspicious and least trustworthy group.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, this lack of trust has resulted in four out of ten Americans believing that Muslims should be forced to wear special identification cards,<sup>76</sup> and 52% urge that mosques should be wiretapped.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in 2014, 46% of the general public felt they did not “share a vision of society” with

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<sup>67</sup> Ciftci, 294.

<sup>68</sup> GALLUP World, “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West,” January 1, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx> (accessed February 1, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> CAIR Report, “Islamophobia and its Impact in the United States,” 11.

<sup>70</sup> GALLUP World, “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West.”

<sup>71</sup> Pew Research Center, “After Boston, Little Change in Views of Islam and Violence,” (May 2013): 2, <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/5-7-13%20Islam%20Release.pdf>, (accessed February 23, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Pew Research Center, “How Americans Feel About Religious Groups,” (July 2014), <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/07/Views-of-Religious-Groups-09-22-final.pdf> (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> Pew Research Center, “After Boston, Little Change in Views of Islam and Violence,” 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> American American Mosaic Project, “Boundaries in the American Mosaic: Preliminary Findings,” University of Minnesota, (Summer 2014): 4, <http://www.soc.umn.edu/assets/doc/BAMPreliminaryFindingsReport.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2015).

<sup>76</sup> Willem Abraham Bijliefeld, “Christian-Muslim relations: developments of 2006 in historical context,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35, no 2 (April 1, 2008): 87 ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, (accessed January 27, 2015).

<sup>77</sup> Bijliefeld, 87.

Muslims.<sup>78</sup> This might be because 54% of the general American population thinks that American Muslims are supporters of terrorist branches, such as al-Qaeda.<sup>79</sup> In the same vein, 69% of Americans possess “widespread concerns” about Islamic terrorists,<sup>80</sup> 46% believe that Muslims are fanatics, and 47% think they are violent.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, this indicates that many Americans possess some measure of Islamophobia and view Muslims and Islam in a less than favorable light.

In addition, this heightened prejudice extends beyond just the American perception and seems to have injected itself into the hearts and minds of American Christians as well. In all actuality, the American Christian perception of Muslims is perhaps even more corroded. Several studies have determined that the greater the emphasis an individual places on their religious identity the more likely they are to perceive Muslims as a threat.<sup>82</sup> Sabri Ciftci asserts, “The odds that an individual with a strong Christian identity will hold such attitudes are 1.68 times larger than for someone who has a weak religious identity.”<sup>83</sup> This is confirmed by thirty-seven out of forty-seven other studies that correlate greater degrees of religiosity with an increase in prejudice.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, the Pew Research Center further tested this postulation by surveying 3,217 participants in 2014 from among Jews, Catholics, atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, Mormons, and Christians. They evaluated the opinions of various religious groups by utilizing a figurative thermometer as a measurement, and by asking respondents to rate their feelings about Muslims on a scale from warm (one hundred) to cold (zero). The mean score of Muslims by all participants was a forty, but Protestants were among those who labeled Muslims with one of the lowest measurements which was thirty-six. In fact, Muslims received their coldest assessment from white evangelicals who ranked them the lowest by assigning them a thirty.<sup>85</sup>

Additional studies prove that this is a consistent trend. A 2013 study by the Pew Research Center discovered that 63% of white evangelical Protestants believe that Islam “encourages violence more than other religions.”<sup>86</sup> In comparison, only 42% of the general public holds the same view. Further confirming this idea, sixty-five Christians who were surveyed for this paper said that they believed Islam was a religion of violence, and only nineteen said they considered it

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<sup>78</sup> American Mosaic Project, “Boundaries in the American Mosaic,” 8.

<sup>79</sup> Ciftci, 300.

<sup>80</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim-Western Tensions Persist,” (July 21, 2011): 3, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2011/07/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Muslim-Western-Relations-FINAL-FOR-PRINT-July-21-2011.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2015).

<sup>81</sup> Ciftci, 300.

<sup>82</sup> Ciftci, 306.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Hisham Abu Raiya et al., “When Muslims Are Perceived as a Religious Threat: Examining the Connection Between Desecration, Religious Coping, and Anti-Muslim Attitudes,” *Basic & Applied Social Psychology* 30, no 4 (October 2008): 312, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, (accessed January 27, 2015).

<sup>85</sup> Pew Research Center, “How Americans Feel About Religious Groups.”

<sup>86</sup> Pew Research Center, “After Boston, Little Change in Views of Islam and Violence,” 1; 3.

a religion of peace. One man commented on the survey, “Muslims have pretty much given themselves a bad name by not doing more to protect what they say is peaceful.” In addition, in regard to the surveys received for this paper, seventy Christians out of eighty-seven said they were concerned about attacks by Muslims in the US and around the world, while only seventeen said they were not concerned.

In the same surveys, when asked if they had more positive or negative feelings and thoughts about Muslims, fifty-seven Christians responded with “negative,” while twenty-seven responded with “positive.” One of the questions on the survey asked, “When you hear the word *Muslim*, what is the first word that comes to your mind?” Only six Christians out of eighty-seven responded with a positive word, such as *friend*, *excited*, *hospitable*, *misrepresented*, *evangelism*. Forty-four responded with more neutral words, such as *Arab*, *covering*, *religion*, *Middle East*, and *burqa*. But, thirty-two responded with negative words associating the word *Muslim* with *ISIS*, *terrorist*, *violence*, *radical*, *hate-filled*, *9/11*, *dislike*, *oppressive*, *militant*, and *Anti-Christ*.

Furthermore, past studies corroborate that throughout history Protestants have consistently held a more severe view of Muslims and Islam than the general public:

The 2005 Pew survey found that while the overall unfavorable view of Islam was at that time 36 percent, the percentage was 47 among white evangelical Protestants. Similarly, the percentage of white evangelical Protestants convinced that Islam was more likely than other religions to encourage violence was 49 [percent], compared with an overall rating of 36 [percent]. The Pew Center poll of 2007 shows the same pattern. The overall unfavorable view is 35 percent, but that for white evangelical Protestants it is 57; and for the affirmative answer to the question about Islam's encouraging violence the percentage for white evangelical Protestants is 56 compared with an overall percentage of 45.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, some of the most recent research conducted in September 2014 does not stray from this trend, and instead actually reinforces it. LifeWay Research conducted two studies examining Americans' perception of Islam and Christians' perception of Islam in light of ISIS. As a result, the survey also sheds light on whether or not Americans and Christians can differentiate between Islam and extremism. To accomplish this, LifeWay surveyed one thousand Americans and one thousand senior pastors in America. In reference to the study, *USA Today* reported, “What might be most notable about the LifeWay surveys is the strikingly harder views on Islam among clergy compared with Americans at large.”<sup>88</sup> To begin, 27% of Americans believe that “ISIS is a true indication of what Islam looks like when Islam controls a society.”<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, 45% percent of Protestant pastors agree with the statement, and 51% of evangelical pastors.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, 37% of Americans are concerned about the implementation of

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<sup>87</sup> Bijlefeld, 88-89.

<sup>88</sup> Aamer Madhani, “Study: 27% of Americans Say ISIL Represents True Islam,” *USA Today*, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/02/11/27-americans-isil-true-islam-lifeway-research/23231713/> (accessed February 11, 2015).

<sup>89</sup> LifeWay Research, “Two Surveys on Americans: Views on Islam and ISIS,” (September 2014): 16, <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/files/2015/02/American-Views-on-Islam-and-ISIS.pdf>, (accessed February 11, 2015).

<sup>90</sup> Bob Smietana, “One in Three Americans Worry about Sharia Law Being Applied in America,”

sharia law in the US,<sup>91</sup> and even more evangelical Christians are concerned about it (51%).<sup>92</sup> Further supporting this idea, one Christian woman wrote on her survey for this paper, “I do not understand Sharia law above our country’s law.” Moreover, 76% of Protestant preachers in the LifeWay research agree with the statement “airstrikes against ISIS are needed to protect Christians.”<sup>93</sup> Sherman A. Lee suggests this harsh perception perhaps stems from many Christians viewing Islam as the “enemy of Christianity.”<sup>94</sup> In the end, these studies seem to suggest that not only is prejudice toward Muslims in existence among the general population of America, but perhaps even to a greater degree among American Christians.

### **Perception versus Reality**

Clearly, many Americans in the general public, including Christians, believe that Muslims in America subscribe to violent beliefs, but this can be an inaccurate and unfair assessment. For example, many Americans would be surprised to learn that a study conducted ten years after 9/11 emphasized that Muslims in America do not support extremism. Only 21% of Muslims agreed with the notion that there is at least a small amount of support for extremism among the Muslim communities in the US.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the general American public disagreed with this assessment, and 40% believe there is between a small amount to a great deal of support for extremists among Muslims in the US.<sup>96</sup> In truth, 1% of Muslim Americans subscribe to the belief that suicide bombings or violence are acceptable in order to “defend Islam from enemies,” and 7% say that this is “sometimes acceptable under those particular circumstances.”<sup>97</sup> But, the overwhelming majority (81%) espouse that neither violence nor suicide bombings against civilians are ever acceptable under any circumstances.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, 2% of Muslims in America view al-Qaeda in a “very favorable” light, and 3% in a “somewhat favorable” light, but 70% rank al-Qaeda as “very unfavorable.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, Muslims in American tend to be moderate and reserved in their beliefs. In fact, Muslims are sometimes credited as the ones who help thwart attacks against the United States as Gallup reveals,

Since 9/11, the Muslim-American community has helped security and law enforcement officials prevent nearly two of every five al-Qaeda terrorist plots threatening the United States, and tips from the Muslim-American community are the largest single source of initial information to authorities about these few plots.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore, the harsh perception that the American public generally maintains is not one based on truth and does not correspond with reality.

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LifeWay Research, February 11, 2015, <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2015/02/11/1-in-3-americans-worry-about-sharia-law-being-applied-in-america/> (accessed February 20, 2015).

<sup>91</sup> LifeWay Research, “Two Surveys on Americans: Views on Islam and ISIS,” 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> LifeWay Research, “Protestant Pastor Views on ISIS,” (September 2014): 6, <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/files/2015/02/Pastor-Views-on-ISIS-Sept-2014.pdf> (accessed February 11, 2015).

<sup>94</sup> Lee, 101.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> GALLUP World, “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West.”

Despite the typical assumption, American Muslims actually seem to be more in line with the general American population than with their Muslim counterparts around the world. Typically, Americans hold an erroneous view that Muslims do not desire to assimilate. In reality, 56% of Muslims sincerely believe that Muslims immigrating to the US want to adopt and embrace the traditional American way of life.<sup>101</sup> Only 20% of Muslims believe that other Muslims want to alienate themselves from others and cling to a Muslim-only segment.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, the majority of the general population (67%) believes that Muslims do not desire to assimilate.<sup>103</sup> This is an important factor, because studies have indicated that when people perceive that Muslims do not desire to assimilate, it increases their negative attitude toward Muslims.<sup>104</sup> For example, those who believe Muslims are segregating themselves are more likely to correlate Muslims with, “violence, fanaticism, and terrorism.”<sup>105</sup> Similarly, as recent as 2014, 61% of the general public perceives that Muslims are “more loyal” to Islam than to America.<sup>106</sup>

Surprisingly, only 48% of Muslims in America say that the majority of their friends are Muslims and only a minority (7%) says that *all* of their friends are Muslim.<sup>107</sup> This only confirms the willingness of Muslims to integrate into society and that most of them are not alienating themselves. Clearly, Muslims in America are open to the idea of being friends with people who are of other religions, which is an opportunity that Christians should embrace.

Continuing, at least one in five Americans believes that Muslims are intolerant of other religions or people of different races.<sup>108</sup> On a scale measuring threat perception, Muslims rated significantly higher than all of the other groups when it came to being “intolerant of others, do not share morals or values, and threat to public order and safety.”<sup>109</sup> Despite this opinion, Gallup’s research found evidence of the opposite and revealed an interesting assessment, Gallup finds Muslim Americans, however, are among the most integrated religious groups in the U.S. Gallup Religious Tolerant Index, which measures people’s attitudes toward religious faiths different from their own and ranks survey respondents by three categories: Isolated, Tolerant, and Integrated people. Among US religious groups, 44% of Muslim Americans are integrated, on par with Mormons (46%) and greater than Jewish Americans (36%), Protestants (35%), and Catholics (34%).<sup>110</sup> Understanding Gallup’s definitions of *integrated* and *tolerant* is critical. *Tolerant* in this study is defined as, “Individuals [who] have a ‘live-and-let-live’ attitude toward people of other faiths, and they generally feel that they treat others of different faiths with respect. However, they are

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<sup>101</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ciftci, 303.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 303-304.

<sup>106</sup> American Mosaic Project, “Boundaries in the American Mosaic: Preliminary Findings,” 8.

<sup>107</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>108</sup> GALLUP World, “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West.”

<sup>109</sup> American Mosaic Project, “Boundaries in the American Mosaic: Preliminary Findings,” 6.

<sup>110</sup> GALLUP World, “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West.”

not likely to learn from or about other religions.”<sup>111</sup> In addition, Gallup defined *integrated* individuals as, “[People who] go beyond a ‘live-and-let-live’ attitude and actively seek to know more about and learn from others of different religious traditions. They believe that most faiths make a positive contribution to society.”<sup>112</sup> This study seems to indicate that at least 44% of Muslims in America are open, willing, and seeking to learn from people of other faiths. The question remains as to whether Christians are willing to embrace this opportunity.

In the same vein, Muslims share many similar beliefs with the standard American population. Seventy-four percent of Muslims agree that working hard leads to success compared to 62% of the general public maintaining this belief.<sup>113</sup> Interestingly, despite typically receiving a bad reputation in regard to women’s rights, 90% of Muslims in America believe women should be able to have a job outside of working in the house.<sup>114</sup> Sixty-eight percent believe that there is “no difference” in regard to male and female political leaders.<sup>115</sup> These views are atypical for Muslims in other parts of the world, which demonstrates that Muslims in America in large part are adapting to American ways of life.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, despite the caricature that Muslims are grotesquely different from the general public, Muslims actually share many similar features as others in the general population. For instance, Muslims and the general public had comparable percentage responses in regard to watching TV, recycling, playing video games for entertainment, interacting on social media, displaying the American flag, and rooting for sports teams.<sup>117</sup> Obviously, this information is significant, because many Christians and Americans view Muslims as different and consider them to be an “other” or an “out-group,” but in reality they share many similarities.<sup>118</sup>

In fact, Edward Curtis sums up this very mainstream way of life that most Muslims share with their fellow Americans when he describes, “With only a very few exceptions, Muslim Americans are not and never have been terrorists. Focusing on the supposed Muslim ‘enemy’ inside America may stir fear and sell books, but it does not accurately or fairly portray the mundane realities of Muslim American life.”<sup>119</sup> The stereotypical depiction of Muslims as terrorists determined to annihilate the West is not an accurate reflection of the many Muslims peacefully living life in the US. Most Muslims in America just want to live normal, quiet lives like the rest of the general population. In fact, 63% do not see any issue with being a “devout Muslim and living in a modern society.”<sup>120</sup> This point is important because it shows a clear

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Muslim Americans.”

<sup>118</sup> Ciftci, 296.

<sup>119</sup> Curtis, xiii.

<sup>120</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream.”

distinction between the general perception and reality. Jocelyne Cesari reveals why this is critical when she divulges,

A common point across surveys is that non-Muslims mostly fear that the presence of Muslims will affect their way of life or alter the norms of an assumed mainstream. In other words, while non-Muslims may not have a direct problem with Muslims or individual Muslims, they fear that Muslims – particularly growing numbers of them – will impose unwanted changes in their countries.<sup>121</sup>

Accordingly, this is in line with the survey results received for this paper. While fifty-three of eighty-seven Christian respondents were comfortable having Muslims as neighbors, only thirty were comfortable with a mosque being built near their house. Similarly, only thirty-three said they felt fear when they saw a Muslim, yet fifty-seven were alarmed by the number of Muslims moving to the US. This seems to indicate that Christians are comfortable with Muslims in small numbers, but feel threatened by swarms of them. This might also explain why Christians primarily responded in a positive manner during the participant observation portion of this study. Most Christians were regarded as friendly when they perceived a Muslim woman in their church, which might indicate that a solitary, female Muslim is considered non-threatening in comparison to a multitude of Muslims.

Continuing, despite the concern of the general public in regard to large numbers of Muslims causing a change to societal norms, the figures previously discussed clearly indicate that most Muslims are adopting American culture and assimilating. To put this into perspective, there are around 320 million people in the US, and 257 million of those people proclaim to be Christian.<sup>122</sup> Essentially, this equates to eight in ten people in the US being a Christian.<sup>123</sup> In comparison, there are only four to seven million Muslims in the US, which makes this fear of Muslims altering the norms of society seem unfounded.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, Muslims in America deviate from other Muslims around the world in that they are less dogmatic when it comes to religion. A surprising 57% believe that there is more than one way to interpret Islam, and even more surprising, 56% hold the belief that “many different religions can lead to eternal life.”<sup>125</sup> Only 35% assert that Islam is the exclusive means to eternal life. The Pew Research Center survey concludes by saying, “In this respect Muslim Americans differ from many of their counterparts in the Muslim world and are similar to U.S. Christians.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, it has been demonstrated that many Muslims in America believe that other religions can

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<sup>121</sup> Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15.

<sup>122</sup> “United States Census Bureau,” Population Clock, <http://www.census.gov/popclock/> (accessed February 24, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Pew Research Forum, “How Muslims Compare with Other Religious Americans,” July 6, 2007, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2007/07/06/how-muslims-compare-with-other-religious-americans/> (accessed February 20, 2015).

<sup>124</sup> Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam*, 15.

<sup>125</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

<sup>126</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim Americans: No Sign of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism.”

lead to eternity, and many are open to learning from people of other faiths. Clearly, their open-mindedness is a wide door of opportunity for Christians to share the Gospel with them. Yet, there is a tremendous gap between the perception of Muslims and the reality, which is perhaps hindering outreach. Therefore, given this disparity, it is necessary to understand the factors that contribute to forming these misconceptions in American society and within the church.

### **Factors that Shape Americans' Perception of Muslims**

Now that the actual perception of Muslims that many Americans maintain has been elucidated, it is important to determine how this perception has been formed and what factors have played a role in shaping this perception. Cesari suggests that perhaps the first incident that began to plant negative seeds about Muslims began with the "Iranian hostage crisis (1979-1981)."<sup>127</sup> This might be the case, but most Muslims remained in the background until the attacks on 9/11 brought American Muslims to the forefront. In truth, it would be naïve not to acknowledge that these ghastly attacks were significant in shaping the American perception of Muslims.

Moreover, 9/11 was an unfortunate introduction to Muslims because for the most part Muslims in America had cultivated a fairly quiet presence in the US. In fact, before 2001, polls indicated that the opinion about Islam was divided between positive and negative opinions. But, interestingly, Carl W. Ernst notes, "The *majority* of Americans [in these polls] registered no opinion at all because of lack of knowledge" (emphasis added).<sup>128</sup> Kambiz GhaneaBassiri suggests that it is difficult to even find polls about how Americans feel about Islam or Muslims that predate 2001. He explains,

In one of these rare surveys conducted a few days before the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, one can see that the general public for the most part had little knowledge and interest in Islam at this time. When asked to give their impression of Islam, the majority (62%) said that they 'haven't heard enough to say' or they are 'not sure.' 14% had favorable impressions and 22% had unfavorable impressions. When asked 'when you think of the religion of Islam, what comes to your mind?' The respondents gave widely disparate answers, with the largest group (36%) indicating either 'nothing' or 'not sure.' The second largest group (21%) indicated 'Mideast' or 'Arabs.' When asked if a second thing comes to mind about Islam, the overwhelming majority (80%) failed to mention anything.<sup>129</sup>

Therefore, it seems probable that the majority of Americans' opinions about Islam and Muslims were formed after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and even more so by the subsequent tragic events of 9/11. Prior to this, the American general public knew little about Muslims. Six months after the 9/11 tragedies, 2,652 attacks against Muslim Americans were reported, which

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<sup>127</sup> Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam*, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

<sup>129</sup> Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, "Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and Out-grouping of Muslims in the United States," in *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, ed. Carl W. Ernst (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 53-54.



was an unprecedented number.<sup>130</sup> These numbers seem to indicate the direction the general population's opinion was heading in regard to Muslims.

After 9/11, the media's role was significant in molding the opinion of the general population in regard to Muslims and cannot be understated. In fact, most Muslims in the West place blame on the media for their poor portrayal, which has resulted in backlash for Muslims.<sup>131</sup> Kerim See, in relation to the media coverage of 9/11, said, "Alternative voices, when heard, were brushed aside as interviewers sought confirmation for their pre-existing stereotypes of Islam."<sup>132</sup> Studies have found that even watching a small portion of the media stories that negatively portray Muslims can lead to prejudice.<sup>133</sup> Some of the news stories include portraying Islam as being "backwards," by associating it with oppression of women and honor killings.<sup>134</sup> One psychologist described the media's portrayal of Muslims as "dehumanizing."<sup>135</sup>

At times the stereotype is communicated in a more subtle form. For instance, TV news programs will feature a woman wearing Muslim attire such as a *hijab* or *niqab* while discussing a news story related to terrorism or violence.<sup>136</sup> Obviously, the result is a direct association of Islam to terrorism communicated through a silent image. At other times, the correlation is more blatant, such as the fact that "...most news about Muslims includes such terms as *terrorist*, *extremist*, and *radical*."<sup>137</sup> Obviously, the media is reinforcing these negative stereotypes. This is further evidenced by a study that examined editorials about the "'War on Terror' in the ten largest newspapers in the USA...Terms such as 'patriotic', 'heroic', 'tolerance' and 'generous' were frequently used to describe Americans and their allies (and later 'good' Arabs), whereas 'cowardly', 'vicious', 'jealous' and 'extremist' were terms used to describe everyone else."<sup>138</sup>

Unfortunately, these views are then conveniently piped into the average American's home via television, Internet, newspaper, and books. Even American popular culture propels this negative stereotype in TV shows and movies. This projection typically involves, "the presentation of Middle Eastern 'terrorist' caricatures in films such as *True Lies* and *The Siege*."<sup>139</sup> Other examples include the Denmark cartoons of Muhammad, which worsen the

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<sup>130</sup> Ghaffari, 16.

<sup>131</sup> Rane, 320-321.

<sup>132</sup> Rane, 313.

<sup>133</sup> Wade C. Rowatt and Marla Cotton, "Patterns and Personality Correlates of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes Toward Christians and Muslims," *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* 44, no 1 (March 2005): 30, *Academic Search Alumni Edition* (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>134</sup> Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam*, 10.

<sup>135</sup> Amer, 139.

<sup>136</sup> Ciftci, 295.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Rane, 312.

<sup>139</sup> Maleiha Malik, "Anti-Muslim prejudice in the West, past and present: an introduction," *Patterns of Prejudice* 43, no 3/4 (July 2009): 2011, Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed January 27, 2015).

predicament and spread animosity.<sup>140</sup> Carl W. Ernest reveals the devastating consequence of this when he describes,

For the many Americans who have no personal experience knowing Muslims as human beings, the overwhelmingly negative images of Islam circulated in the popular media amount to prejudice – defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience... Unreasoned dislike, hostility, or antagonism towards, or discrimination against, a race, sex, or other class of people.’<sup>141</sup>

Even journalists cannot seem to remain neutral and end up coloring the depiction of Muslims. Juan Williams, an American journalist, once said, “When I get on the plane...if I see people who are in Muslim garb and I think, you know, they are identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried. I get nervous.”<sup>142</sup>

Studies have found that the majority of Americans admit to not having a grasp on the teachings of Islam, yet it appears they are getting their education about Islam from the media.<sup>143</sup> Studies indicate that the strongest reason for negative attitudes about Muslims is “perceived symbolical and realistic threat.”<sup>144</sup> The media capitalizes on these fears, which only heightens prejudice. The media is inciting this fear because violence, terror, and fear attract viewers and make for a good story. Sherman A. Lee reveals, “Equating Islam with danger is so prevalent in media depictions of the religion that the stereotyped perspective is believed to be a part of mainstream American culture.”<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, peaceful attempts by Muslims seem to be largely ignored by the media. John Esposito cites an example,

This charge that Muslims do not condemn terrorism is made repeatedly in the media despite the fact that post 9/11 many, many statements have been issued by Muslim leaders and organizations from all over the world, including a major joint statement by global religious and intellectual leaders (Wiedemann message). Unfortunately major media outlets...do not seem to find them ‘newsworthy.’<sup>146</sup>

The impact of this unfair silencing of Muslims who are not extremists was demonstrated in the comments on the surveys received for this paper. One person commented, “[I] would like to know why the good Muslims are not taking a stand against the bad Muslims.” And, another person added, “I would like to see more Muslims...speak out about terror in the world and here in the USA. My perception is they don’t want to say anything.” Perhaps the better question that needs to be posed is in terms of why the media is not giving a fair platform for these Muslims who *are* speaking out against extremism.

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<sup>140</sup> Ciftci, 293-294.

<sup>141</sup> Ernst, 2.

<sup>142</sup> Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam*, 11.

<sup>143</sup> GhaneaBassiri, 54.

<sup>144</sup> Ciftci, 294.

<sup>145</sup> Lee, 100.

<sup>146</sup> Esposito, xxv.

One surprising source that feeds the negative perception of Muslims is actually the government. The USA Patriot Act is often cited as hindering the perception of Muslims in the US as it puts Muslims on the defense.<sup>147</sup> Jackleen Salem states,

Despite the US government's messages to the American public to not have animosity toward Muslims, the practices of the government have been quite the contrary, implementing and enforcing a great deal of institutional discrimination... Their ethnic and religious association turned them into second-class citizens.<sup>148</sup>

If the government is prejudiced toward Muslims and suspicious of them, then it logically follows that Americans would follow-suit in their attitudes and behavior. If the government does not behave as if it trusts Muslims, then neither will the general public.

In addition, politics also plays a role in how Americans form their opinions, and particularly when politics overlaps with the media. For example, Ann Coulter is a famous conservative Republican who has many books spouting her views, and she has conducted many interviews in the media. One of her quotes from the *National Review* has her proclaiming about Muslims, "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders, and convert them to Christianity. We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That's war, and this is war."<sup>149</sup> The perception of Muslim Americans also differs down partisan lines. The Pew Research Center found that "62% of Republicans say that Islam encourages violence more than other religions, compared with...29% of Democrats."<sup>150</sup> In fact, 48% of Muslims in American surveyed actually described Republicans as "unfriendly" toward Muslims.<sup>151</sup> Thus, when politics is partnered with the media, this negative perception potentially becomes contagious as it plays out in front of Americans.

In all actuality, it is difficult to pinpoint just one particular factor as the root issue, because it is a multifaceted problem. However, it does seem that the media contributes heavily to the frenzy of Islamophobia. In the end, it is important to determine where these ideas and attitudes are stemming from to try to be aware of them and curtail their influence.

### **Factors that Shape American Christians' Perception of Muslims**

Subsequently, the question still remains as to why Christians actually seem to possess an even more negative perception of Muslims than the general population. Obviously, the same factors that influence the American perception are also foundational in establishing the Christian perception, but since the Christian perception is more severe, there must be additional factors that are specifically geared toward Christians. While the general public deals primarily with the

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<sup>147</sup> Salem, 84.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Esposito, xxi.

<sup>150</sup> Pew Research Center, "After Boston, Little Change in Views of Islam and Violence," 1.

<sup>151</sup> Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism."

media, Christians have prophecy, Christian television programs, books, Muslim background believers, and preachers helping shape their perception. These factors can sometimes feed a negative depiction of Islam to Christians, which might convince Christians that Muslims are attacking their morals and values. This could potentially paint Islam as the enemy of Christianity and of a Judeo-Christian society. Consequently, these ideas can transform Christians from children of God into soldiers for Christ in a battle waging war from a good versus evil perspective.

One recent Reuters' story recently captured this idea,

Saint Michael, the archangel of battle, is tattooed across the back of a U.S. army veteran who recently returned to Iraq and joined a Christian militia fighting Islamic State in what he sees as a *biblical war between good and evil*. Brett, 28, carries the same thumb-worn pocket Bible he did while deployed to Iraq in 2006 - a picture of the Virgin Mary tucked inside its pages and his favorite verses highlighted. 'It's very different,' he said, asked how the experiences compared. 'Here I'm fighting for a people *and for a faith*, and the enemy is much bigger and more brutal' (emphasis added).<sup>152</sup>

This story seems to allude to the sentiment of many American Christians in viewing this as a religious war between good (Christianity) and evil (radical Islam). The issue is that many times Christians blur the distinction between Islam and Islamists and lump all Muslims into the same category, which results in *all* Muslims becoming the enemy. Unfortunately, many times the factors influencing Christians do not make a distinction between Muslims and extremists.

In addition, Christians have their own form of media targeted specifically toward them in the forms of Christian radio, television programs, movies, books, and blogs. Thomas S. Kidd reveals these typical themes when he describes, "Much of the popular Christian literature on Islam has replayed old familiar themes: the appeal of converted Muslims, apologetic attacks on Muslims' 'real' beliefs, the blending of political and theological opinions, and Islam's place in the last days."<sup>153</sup> Many books that vilify Islam have been marketed toward Christians.<sup>154</sup> Common themes in books for Christian audiences include casting Muhammad as a demon-possessed pedophile,<sup>155</sup> and warning Christians that millions of Muslims are trying to take over not just the United States, but the entire world. Hal Lindsey was quoted as writing, "Islam represents the greatest threat to the continued survival of the planet the world has ever seen."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Isabel Coles, "Westerners Join Iraqi Christian Militia to Fight Islamic State," Reuters, February 15, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/15/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-foreignfighters-idUSKBN0LJ0LI20150215>, (accessed February 15, 2015).

<sup>153</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 164.

<sup>154</sup> Bijlefeld, 90.

<sup>155</sup> Kidd, 150.

<sup>156</sup> Kidd, 151.

Popular Christian prophecy writer, Michael Fortner, purports that the millions of Muslims that have settled in the US and Europe are participating in a calculated invasion.<sup>157</sup>

Similarly, one Muslim background believer and self-proclaimed former terrorist, Walid Shoebat, has Christian bookstores stocked with his fear-inciting books. One depicts a masked man and the threatening title, *Why We Want to Kill You*, along with other titles such as *God's War on Terror*, and *The Case FOR Islamophobia: America's Final Warning*. In contrast, Warren Larson wrote an article for *Christianity Today* entitled, "Unveiling the Truth About Islam," where he examined several Christian titles that provided a hazardous portrayal of Islam and Muslims. In reference to books about Islam that are geared toward Christians, Dr. Larson said, "Unfortunately, too many of these evangelical polemics are historically inaccurate, theologically misinformed, and missiologically misguided. Apparently, a lot of us simply dislike Muslims (usually without knowing any)."<sup>158</sup> He later reminded readers, "When we write about Islam, we must remember that love is the greatest apologetic."<sup>159</sup> Kidd confirms Larson's assessment by revealing that these negative appraisals of Islam have actually worsened the situation. Kidd states, "As far as they have influenced their followers and readers, these Christians have made the continuation of violent conflict that much more likely."<sup>160</sup>

Other Christian outlets, such as television programs, have not always been helpful either. Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) actually pulled Hal Lindsey's program from its station in 2005 because they felt it would derail evangelism efforts to Muslims. The president of TBN, Paul Crouch, said that he was unaware of any instances where, "Making inflammatory, derogatory anti-Muslim statements has led a single follower of Islam to Christ."<sup>161</sup> It is also important for Christians to realize that these programs are not just directly damaging to Muslims, but they also taint Christians' perception as well. Christians might have very little, if any, interaction with Muslims, and therefore receive their only information about Muslims from these hosts who filter to them only negative dogma about Muslims. One Muslim leader, Suhail Khan, laments this fact. He describes that when he speaks at evangelical churches, "I'm having to undo all kinds of misinformation and very hateful misinformation."<sup>162</sup> Talk radio hosts, although not always Christian, still make comments that are aimed to appeal to Christians. One talk radio host, Michael Savage argued, "These people [Muslims] need to be forcibly converted to Christianity... It's the only thing that can probably turn them into human beings."<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Kidd, 117.

<sup>158</sup> Warren Larson, "Unveiling the Truth About Islam," *Christianity Today*. June 1, 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/june/29.38.html> (accessed February 22, 2015).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Kidd, 168.

<sup>161</sup> Kidd, 151.

<sup>162</sup> Adelle M. Banks, "Ill Will Toward Muslims Remains Ten Years Later," *Christian Century* 128, no 19 (September 20, 2011): 19, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>163</sup> Esposito, xxi.

Another surprising influence pertains to Muslim background believers. Many Christians and churches will attempt to acquire more information about Islam from those who previously practiced the religion. Unfortunately, many of these former Muslims are biased against their former religion and are perhaps not the best sources for information. Former Muslims typically feel deceived by Islam and its leaders, and they also might have suffered persecution at the hands of their Muslim family members or friends who are hurt by their decision to leave the Islamic faith.<sup>164</sup> Thus, Kidd explains, “Christian converts have often supplied the conservative American Protestant with inflammatory characterizations of Islam.”<sup>165</sup>

In addition, the power of the pulpit can also have sway with Christians who tend to trust clergy and view them as examples to follow. When considering the studies mentioned previously about Protestant pastors’ perception of Islam, it is not beyond reason to consider that these pastors are contributing to their congregation’s perceptions. For example, one church in Madison, Tennessee hosted a speaker, Geert Wilders, who espoused,

We must stop the Islamization of our countries. And now, Europe is looking slowly but gradually like Arabia...Islam is also coming to America, in fact Islam already is in America... We must repeat it over and over again, especially to our children, our Western values and culture based on Christianity and Judaism is better and superior to the Islamic culture.<sup>166</sup>

When these views are being proclaimed from the pulpit, Christians are being influenced. Some preachers have unfortunately led their flock down a path that has caused more division than love. For example, “Terry Jones, the Florida pastor who announced that he was going to burn Qurans on the 2010 anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, has said that Islam and the Qur’an only serve ‘violence, death, and terrorism.’”<sup>167</sup> Even well respected evangelist Franklin Graham, son of the great evangelist Billy Graham, was perhaps underestimating the power and influence of his words when he stated, “Islam has attacked us... The god of Islam is not the same God... Islam is a very evil religion... All the values that we as a nation hold dear, they don't share the same values at all, these countries that have the majority of Muslims.”<sup>168</sup> Even recently in 2015, Rev. Franklin Graham was continuing a similar rhetoric on *The 700 Club Interactive*. He was quoted as saying,

There are Muslims that have access to [President Obama] in the White House; our foreign policy has a lot of influence now from Muslims... We see the prime minister of Israel being snubbed by the President and by the White House... and it’s because of the influence of Islam... They hate Israel and they hate Christians, and so the storm is coming.<sup>169</sup>

Fear mongering only poisons the perception of Christians toward Muslims, because Christians typically trust Christian leaders as role models for Christ-like behavior. If their leaders are

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<sup>164</sup> Kidd, 147.

<sup>165</sup> Kidd, 147.

<sup>166</sup> Ciftci, 297.

<sup>167</sup> Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam*, 11.

<sup>168</sup> Esposito, xxii.

<sup>169</sup> Gordon Robertson, "Franklin Graham: A Storm Is Coming - 700 Club Interactive," Christian Broadcasting Network, February 1, 2015, <http://700clubinteractive.cbn.com/franklin-graham-storm-coming> (accessed February 22, 2015).

exemplifying that this type of thinking is acceptable and Christ-like, then Christians will perhaps mimic this way of thinking and speaking.

Another element that pertains to Christians in particular is in regard to Biblical prophecy and eschatology. An article by Waleed Nassar addresses ten stumbling blocks to reaching Muslims with the Gospel, and one of those stumbling blocks was in regard to prophecy. He described, “This is the kind of teaching that sees the Muslims as ‘fuel for Armageddon.’”<sup>170</sup> Several books carry this particular theme professing, “. . .that the antichrist will rise out of Islam, or specifically that the Muslim Mahdi was the antichrist.”<sup>171</sup> For example, Kidd reveals one of these books when he describes, “The author of *Antichrist: Islam's Awaited Messiah* [by] Joel Richardson. . . Claimed that ‘Islam is indeed the primary vehicle that will be used by Satan to fulfill the prophecies of the Bible about the future political / religious / military system of the antichrist.’”<sup>172</sup> Richardson felt that a “demonic and antichristian spirit” corrupted Islam.<sup>173</sup> While these views might be popular in Christian circles, they are not necessarily helpful in regard to facilitating relationships with Muslims.

Additionally, another surprising contributing factor is religion itself. Gordon Allport did a groundbreaking study in the 1940s and concluded with this powerful assessment of religion: “[Religion] makes prejudice and unmakes prejudice.”<sup>174</sup> Allport’s study found that college students who had little or no religious influence growing up had less prejudice than those who attended church. This conclusion was confirmed by a multitude of other studies over the years.<sup>175</sup> On the other hand, some students in Allport’s study explained, “The Church teaches that we are all equal and there should be no persecution, for any reason, of minority groups.”<sup>176</sup> Thus, Allport realized that religion could also unmake prejudice. It is well known in psychology fields that religiosity can increase prejudice.<sup>177</sup> Jong Hyun Jung revealed, “Particularly, it is argued that evangelical Protestants, when confronted with relevant outgroups, will rely on their evangelical tradition and strengthen their distinct commitment to Christian orthodoxy, creating boundaries between themselves and others.”<sup>178</sup> This is explained by social identity theory, which explains why people in an “in-group” tend to perceive outsiders or people in an “out-group” negatively.<sup>179</sup> This in-group versus out-group mindset was evident in some Christians’ reactions during the

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<sup>170</sup> Waleed Nassar, “Ten Stumbling Blocks to Reaching Muslims,” in *Encountering the World of Islam*, ed. Keith Swartley. 2nd ed. (Littleton, CO: BottomLine Media, 2014), 253.

<sup>171</sup> Kidd, 160.

<sup>172</sup> Kidd, 160.

<sup>173</sup> Kidd, 161.

<sup>174</sup> Gordon Willard Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 444.

<sup>175</sup> Ciftci, 306.

<sup>176</sup> Daniel C. Batson and E.L. Stock, “Religion and Prejudice” in *On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years after Allport* ed. John F. Dovidio (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 413.

<sup>177</sup> Heinz Streib and Constantin Klein, “Religious styles predict interreligious prejudice: a study of German adolescents with the religious schema scale,” *International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion* 24, no 2 (April 1, 2014): 151, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>178</sup> Jong Hyun Jung, “Islamophobia? Religion, contact with Muslims, and the respect for Islam,” *Review Of Religious Research* 54, no 1 (March 1, 2012): 116, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, (accessed January 26, 2015).

<sup>179</sup> Caiftci, 296; 300; Rowatt, 39.

participant observation portion of this study. At two of the churches, when the preacher would encourage the congregation to greet someone around them, a few of the Christians would greet fellow Christians but not greet or acknowledge the woman they perceived to be a Muslim. Even if they had turned around earlier and noticed her presence, they would intentionally keep their back to her or avert their gaze during the greeting portion of the service. In light of this, it will be important to examine later how Jesus addressed and handled outsiders during his ministry.

In the end, certain influential Christian leaders have painted a negative and even derogatory picture of Muslims, but other Christians have resisted this approach. When one Christian leader referred to Muhammad as a pedophile and demon-possessed, Kidd reports, “Southern Baptist missionaries in Muslim countries anonymously pleaded with American leaders to ‘concentrate on sharing Christ in love...instead of speaking in a degrading manner about [Islam or the] prophet.’”<sup>180</sup> Kidd also mentions other Christian leaders such as Samuel Zwemer, Kenneth Cragg, and J. Dudley Woodberry who championed a more peaceful and loving stance toward Muslims.<sup>181</sup>

### **Implications for Ministry**

All of these elements point toward several significant factors that contribute to barriers in Muslim ministry. These stumbling blocks that inhibit ministry to Muslims include fear, obtaining information from biased and sensationalized sources, and in-groups being prejudiced against out-groups. Fortunately, these hindrances can be addressed, and solutions exist that can move Christians toward being better prepared for outreach. Christians have been provided not only with Biblical mandates, but they have also been provided with the example of Jesus.

Some Christians have actually tried to move their congregations into a more loving direction toward Muslims, but this has sometimes been met with resistance and backlash. For example,

In a post-9/11 bid to better relations with Muslims, pastor Bob Roberts invited Muslims to his North Wood Church in Keller, TX, for Q&A sessions and a cooking club and to help on a few home remodeling projects. The result: Roberts lost ‘a bunch of church members,’ he said. In Denver, pastor Max Frost asked volunteers to help paint a local mosque. Friends and family told him it was a bad idea. And at Hillsboro Presbyterian Church in Nashville, TN, Nancy McCurley started an interfaith scripture study with Muslims, only to be told by a critic that ‘in a year’s time, this church will be a mosque.’<sup>182</sup>

As mentioned earlier, there are several reasons for this resistance among Christians.

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<sup>180</sup> Kidd, 147.

<sup>181</sup> Kidd, 168.

<sup>182</sup> Banks, 18.



In truth, the stumbling block that seems to be the most crippling for Christians is fear. One Christian woman, Esther, admitted the magnitude of this when she described, I told God, ‘I love Muslims,’ she says. ‘But he convicted me. He said to me, ‘You don’t love them. You don’t even like them.’ And we don’t. If we did, more... believers would be sharing with Muslims. We don’t love them. And we are afraid. Let’s be honest: We are afraid of this giant called Islam.<sup>183</sup>

The barrier of fear must be addressed and removed for Christian witness to be effective, because Sherman A. Lee shares, “Fear is a unique emotion in that it activates escape and avoidance motivated behavior... Research on post-9/11 sentiment has shown that fear is a significant predictor of support for policies designed to avoid or escape contact with Muslims.”<sup>184</sup> This was also clearly witnessed during the participant observation when, at first, some Christians in church were hesitant and uncertain as to how to respond to the perceived Muslim woman in their presence. After a few minutes of assessing the situation, some of them would gather their courage and reach out. For others, the fear was too overwhelming and they would simply avoid the participant.

For Christians, it is imperative that they receive their information and worldview not from slanted and exaggerated news stories, but from the Bible. Scripture reveals the way Christians should approach and handle fear. In specific response to the persecution the early Christians were facing, Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:7 that God has not given believers a spirit of fear, but one of love. Because of this, believers can be bold in their witness despite persecution. Furthermore, the most often repeated command in the Bible is “fear not” or “do not fear.” Many Christians view Muslims as the enemy, but Carl Medearis suggests Christians identify the real enemy, “The real enemy is fear. Fear is the devil’s workshop. Perfect fear drives out love. Did you catch that? Fear drives out love. It’s supposed to be the other way around, but it works both ways. Only one remains. Fear or love.”<sup>185</sup>

This battle between fear and love was clearly demonstrated in several experiences during the participant observation. An older gentleman at the first church visited, who was a greeter at the church, was not able to recover from his fear after seeing a woman wearing a *hijab* approaching the church. As a result, he blatantly ignored the participant, which came across as very unloving. In this instance, fear drove out love. On the other hand, at the second church visited, a woman was hesitant at first and kept her distance. She was uncertain as to how to react, but eventually she made the decision to allow love to triumph over fear. Although she initially sat at a distance from the participant, she eventually moved down to sit directly beside her, engaged her in conversation, and hugged her before leaving. In this case, love drove out fear. In another scenario, the participant walked into a large lobby and was clearly confused as to which

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<sup>183</sup> Erich Bridges, “Into the Hungry Heart of Islam,” in *Encountering the World of Islam*, ed. Keith Swartley. 2nd ed. (Littleton, CO: BottomLine Media, 2014), 446.

<sup>184</sup> Lee, 94.

<sup>185</sup> Carl Medearis, “What ISIS Wants,” *Christianity Today* (February 12, 2015) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/parse/2015/february/what-isis-wants.html?paging=off> (accessed February 15, 2015).

direction to go for the service. At least three greeters and volunteers stood around and watched the participant who was lost. Evidently the volunteers were scared or unsure of what to do, so they did not help, and instead let the participant wander around. In contrast, at the fourth church visited, the participant was once again lost, but this time a greeter overcame fear and helped her. He personally gave her a tour of the entire church so she would know how to find her way around. Lastly, at the first church, when instructed to greet those nearby, a woman half-turned toward the participant, but upon seeing the participant's *hijab* she hesitated and almost turned back around. Fortunately, she managed to overcome fear and made the decision to greet the participant despite her initial uncertainty.

Some Christians would like to set parameters as to how far love is required to extend, and use fear to justify not loving their enemies. In the research conducted for this paper, one survey respondent said, "I realize that all Muslims are not radical, but how do you tell? It's a little unsettling." Another survey respondent described, "I know my views are stereotypical, but I have fear of not knowing if a Muslim is a violent one or non-violent. I will be nervous until I find out [my] fears are unfounded." Jesus did not provide an exclusion clause for not loving those who are radical, violent, or considered enemies. Matthew 10:28 commands, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>186</sup> There is nothing in Scripture that says believers should prioritize self-preservation over the commands to love neighbors and enemies.

Furthermore, in Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus gives the mandate, "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..." Clearly, Jesus never attempted to conceal that believers would face persecution.<sup>187</sup> In fact, if Jesus wanted to change his stance about loving his enemies, an opportune time would have been while he was being tortured and dying on the cross.<sup>188</sup> Instead, his heart broke for his persecutors and he prayed in Luke 23:34 for those who were persecuting and killing him when he pleaded, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Wayne Gordon relays, "Jesus makes it very clear, in the Sermon on the Mount, that even if we do consider other people our enemies, it is still our responsibility to love them."<sup>189</sup> This was a consistent theme throughout his ministry, and Jesus did not waver from this even while on the cross. Because Christians are supposed to follow Jesus' example, they cannot conveniently designate someone an enemy and attempt to justify not loving them.

The Bible is full of radical commands, but love of enemy is one of the most neglected. Jesus and Paul instructed throughout the New Testament, "Do good to those who hate you. Bless

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<sup>186</sup> All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the *New International Version* of the Bible.

<sup>187</sup> Georges Houssney, *Engaging Islam* (Boulder, CO: Treeline Publishing, 2010), 168.

<sup>188</sup> Rick Love, "Grace and Truth: Towards Christlike Relationships with Muslims: An Exposition," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no 4 (2009): 194, [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/26\\_4\\_PDFs/grace and truth.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/26_4_PDFs/grace%20and%20truth.pdf) (accessed January 25, 2015).

<sup>189</sup> Wayne Gordon, *Who is my Neighbor?*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), Kindle location 1032.

those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. Overcome evil with good.”<sup>190</sup> There is an important reason for this radical peacemaking behavior, which is the hope that the persecutors will be perplexed by the believer’s loving response, which might provide a means for the believer to lead them toward the truth and love of Christ.

Therefore, neither fear nor danger are worthy excuses to justify not loving someone. Wayne Gordon reminds believers,

Sometimes I think that, in our American lifestyle and Western culture, we’ve become obsessed with safety, almost to a point where risk-taking has become a lost art...I challenge you to pay more attention to the situations that scare you and the people of whom you are afraid. Perhaps you fear for your physical safety...Perhaps your fears are well founded, perhaps not. Remember that the antidote to fear is faith...I believe that as we grow in our faith, we become less fearful and more bold—more able to face and overcome our fears. Look around you. Who are those people you are too afraid to help? Whom do you shy away from because you are afraid? Remember that they are God’s children and your neighbors... We need to come to terms with the fact that danger is a part of our faith. It comes with the territory. Our faith does not revolve around safety, nor does it grow if safety is our only concern. Rather, it is rooted in obedience and in sensitivity to God’s leading. Who are those people who might be dangerous to help? Remember, they are your neighbors.<sup>191</sup>

Bill Hybels recounted the story of how one man overcame fear by simply walking across a room, which changed another man’s life forever. This Christian man saw a Muslim man at a business meeting and went over and introduced himself. They began dialoguing and the Muslim man later accepted Christ.<sup>192</sup> Overcoming fear is the first step in Muslim ministry.

In the same vein, for the participant observation portion of this study, the participant encountered several Christians who were willing to step outside of their comfort zones and reach out. Many of them attempted to find commonality by initiating conversations with simple questions such as, “Do you like coffee?” or “Did you come here alone today, too?” Some started conversations with kind words such as, “I am so glad you are here,” or “Can I speak with you for a moment? I just wanted to tell you that I was admiring your outfit.” Others inquired where the participant was from, and mentioned that they had been to the Middle East before, or that they had Muslim friends. In truth, it did not really matter what they said, but that they took time to reach out and say *something*. Even though no one said anything unkind or derogatory, sometimes being deliberately ignored or being gawked at were just as hurtful and made a lasting negative impression.

Surprisingly, despite the fear that many Christians seem to possess toward Muslims, when asked if they would feel prepared and comfortable if they saw a Muslim woman wearing a head covering in their church, fifty-six indicated that they would. Only twenty-nine said they would feel “unprepared and uncomfortable.” This was actually in line with the participant

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<sup>190</sup> Love, 194.

<sup>191</sup> Gordon, Kindle location 1987-2000.

<sup>192</sup> Gordon, Kindle location 1052-1057.

observation portion of this study. Three out of four churches did remarkably well in their hospitality toward a woman they perceived to be a Muslim in their presence. Only one church consistently came across as unfriendly and cold. In contrast, three other churches had greeters and members who were welcoming, helpful, and friendly. One survey response comment for this study provided a potential explanation as to why this was the result despite the negative perception of Muslims, “Although I answered most of these questions negatively, I am open to learning more about Muslims and Islam. I deeply fear the growth of Islam and believe as Christians we should be willing to witness to ALL people.” Therefore, perhaps the Great Commission succeeded in trumping some Christians’ fears.

However, the participant observation revealed an area that could benefit from further exploration, because several factors might have contributed to the positive outcome. For example, the participant would typically arrive early and sit alone. Therefore, most people were given the option as to whether to choose to sit near the perceived Muslim woman, or to avoid her and sit elsewhere. As a result, the people sitting nearby intentionally sat there, and it was discovered that some of them were missionaries or had close friendships with Muslims. Thus, the participant tended to attract people who were comfortable with Muslims. Only one church was an exception where greeters and church members were relatively unfriendly and unhelpful. However, this was the one church where the participant did not arrive early and people were forced to sit nearby her if they arrived late.

Moving forward, the article “Grace and Truth” reminds believers that, “The commission to ‘make disciples of all nations’ has not been rescinded... There is no separate gospel for wartime and peacetime. The message of God’s love in Christ is for all times, places and peoples.”<sup>193</sup> If Christians are looking for a reason not to love Muslims, they might find it in the news, but they will not find it in the Bible. Christians’ only enemy should be Satan, not Muslims.<sup>194</sup> Georges Housney makes it clear that Satan’s plan is quite simple when it comes to Muslim ministry, “Satan would love for us to believe that Muslims are unreachable in order to discourage us and instill a spirit of defeat into God’s children. Until we have given Muslims the opportunity to hear the Gospel we cannot say that Muslims are resistant.”<sup>195</sup> Satan will use fear as a weapon to prevent Christians from reaching out to Muslims, but Christians can successfully wield faith to thwart this.

Another way that Christians can overcome fear and be better prepared for outreach is through education. Too many Christians are obtaining their information from biased and fear-eliciting news programs, but receiving fair and accurate information is crucial. The surveys received for this paper indicated that the news was the primary vehicle for how Christians obtain their information about Muslims. Fifty-seven respondents out of eighty-seven said that they

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<sup>193</sup> Love, 194.

<sup>194</sup> Kidd, 116.

<sup>195</sup> Housney, 205.

primarily learn about Muslims from television news programs, radio news, newspapers, or Internet news. One man who viewed Muslims positively wrote on his survey for this study, “Americans would be better informed about Muslims if they would turn off the news.”

The Pew Research Center revealed that fifty-eight percent of Americans acknowledge that they know nothing or only a minimal amount about Islam, and that number “has changed very little since 2001.”<sup>196</sup> This information is important to consider, because several studies have indicated that the roles education and knowledge play are significant in impacting prejudice. One study reveals, “Education and knowledge may disprove prejudicial beliefs...It can be argued that higher education will decrease Islamophobic attitudes.”<sup>197</sup>

Moreover, many Christians desire to know more about Muslims and Islam. When asked if they would be interested in learning more about Muslims and Islam in church, an overwhelming majority (seventy-five out of eighty-seven) said they would be interested in learning more. Yet, only four out of eighty-seven respondents indicated that church was a source for how they receive information about Muslims. Clearly, Christians desire to learn more about Muslims and Islam from their church leaders, so perhaps churches need to consider educating their members in a fair and loving way about Muslims. In addition, Christians were asked if they had more information about Muslims and Islam if it would increase or decrease their comfort level interacting with Muslims, and sixty-six said they believed it would increase their comfort level. Sixteen said they worried it would decrease their comfort level, but one person who selected “decrease” added a comment that might perhaps explain why. She shared, “I operate largely from wanting to trust all people and give them the benefit of the doubt, but *the news* suggests there could be much more danger than I want to think about” (emphasis added). Thus, it seems plausible that perhaps people have received so much negative rhetoric about Muslims already that they fear if they consume more information it will only increase their fears.

In contrast, most survey respondents agreed that more information would be beneficial, “I have...taken a class about Islam and Muslims which helped me to learn and understand a bit better.” Others were open to the idea and desired more education, “[I] would like to learn more about Muslims,” one responded. Another survey respondent mentioned, “I feel that I have not been educated in the Muslim religion and have only been fearful of the Middle East in general. When I think of Muslims, I think of the Middle East and the many bad things that have happened and continue to happen. I don’t think I am alone in this.” This is similar to what studies have indicated that, “...attitudes about different ethnic groups are more likely to be negative at low levels of education and knowledge.”<sup>198</sup> As was indicated earlier, typically the perception of

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<sup>196</sup> Pew Research Center, “Public Expresses Mixed Views on Islam, Mormonism,” (September 2007): 1, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2007/09/religionviews07.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2015).

<sup>197</sup> Ciftci, 297.

<sup>198</sup> Ciftci, 297.

Muslims in America does not align with the reality, and Christians need to be aware of this and obtain more accurate and fair information about Islam and Muslims.

Finally, this leads to the third means of being better prepared for ministry with Muslims. As a brief recap, the first step is overcoming fear and increasing faith, the second is acquiring more knowledge from fair and reasonable sources about Muslims and Islam, and the third is to follow Jesus' example in conquering barriers between groups by initiating direct contact with outsiders. At this third juncture, it is important to understand how Jesus intentionally broke down barriers to reach outsiders.

Previously, it was demonstrated that higher levels of religiosity actually create prejudice because it creates an "in-group" versus "out-group" mindset. As a result, Christians tend to be more prejudiced because of their in-group status. Interestingly, out-groups existed during Jesus' time as well, and he has provided an example for believers to follow as to how to treat outsiders. During Jesus' time, the Samaritans would have been considered an out-group. Three primary examples of Jesus' interactions with Samaritans are demonstrated in Scripture, which can be utilized as examples for the church.

To begin, it is important to understand the animosity between Samaritans and Judeans. Philip F. Esler explains, "For centuries Judeans had treated the Samaritans as a despised outgroup and subjected them to the processes of negative stereotypification....Stereotyping refers to the process of treating all members of an outgroup as if they were the same."<sup>199</sup> There were ethnic differences between Judeans and Samaritans, and there were also religious differences. Samaritans worshiped Yahweh, but they also worshiped other gods.<sup>200</sup> Wayne Gordon describes, "Samaritans, in essence, had taken certain Old Testament Scriptures and reinterpreted them in their own way."<sup>201</sup> Samaritans were also considered to be troublemakers at times. Thus, there was tremendous animosity between the two groups. Sirach 50:25-26 reveals this sentiment around the mid-second century BCE, as Esler relates, "Judean dislike of the Samaritans...extends so far as even to deny them a status as a group at all, since the author says he hates a nation (*ethnos*) which is 'not a nation at all', namely, 'the stupid people living at Shechem.'"<sup>202</sup>

In the eyes of the Judeans, the animosity was perhaps well warranted as the actions of some Samaritans seemed to instigate the volatile situation. Even back in the Old Testament, Samaritans were perhaps interfering with the Judeans' beliefs because it is demonstrated in Ezra 4:4-5 that they opposed the Temple being rebuilt in Jerusalem. Moreover, at one point it is recorded that some Samaritans surreptitiously snuck into Jerusalem and placed human bones

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<sup>199</sup> Philip F Esler, "JESUS AND THE REDUCTION OF INTERGROUP CONFLICT: THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN THE LIGHT OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no 4 (October 2000): 328-329, Academic Search Premier, (accessed February 20, 2015).

<sup>200</sup> Esler, 329.

<sup>201</sup> Gordon, Kindle location 1023.

<sup>202</sup> Esler, 330.

around the temple to initiate trouble. This antagonism even escalated to violence based on reports in 52 CE. Although this incident occurred after the time of Jesus, it was still significant because of its bearing on Luke. Esler explains, “Particularly revealing for the state of Judea/Samaritan relations, and...for Luke’s understanding of them, were the events of 52 CE.”<sup>203</sup> Apparently, a Judean man was on his way to a celebration in Jerusalem when some Samaritans killed him as he passed through one of their villages (Gema). This resulted in an onslaught of Judeans attacking and massacring some Samaritan villages. Suffice to say, the hostility between Judeans and Samaritans began in the Old Testament and extended even after the time of Jesus’ ministry on earth.

With this background in mind, it is important to examine how Jesus handled the Samaritans who were a notoriously despised out-group of his time. Esler describes one scenario and how Jesus responded,

In ch. 9 of [Luke’s] Gospel (vv. 51-56), not long before Jesus will tell the story of the compassionate Samaritan, he recounts a remarkable incident directly on point. Having resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem, he sent messengers ahead of him who went into a Samaritan village to make preparations. But the villagers would not receive him, because he was going to Jerusalem... Given the aversion Judeans and Samaritans had for one another and the enthusiasm of his disciples for their role, nothing could be less surprising than their response to this rejection: ‘James and John said, ‘Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?’ And nothing could be more surprising than Jesus’ brief and forceful reaction: ‘He turned and rebuked them.’ Here we have a revealing indication of his impatience with extreme forms of group differentiation.<sup>204</sup>

In fact, Jesus proclaims in Acts 1:8, “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.” Therefore, Jesus sent his disciples to bear testimony to the Samaritans despite it all.

Later, in Luke chapter 10, a man asks Jesus what he has to do to obtain eternal life. Jesus responds by telling him he must love his neighbor. On the surface, the man seems to genuinely want to discern whether he is fulfilling this requirement. Thus, he asks Jesus who he should consider to be his neighbor. Esler explains the man’s true intentions,

The lawyer now asks a second question, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ (10:29)... That the lawyer asks it wishing to justify himself (*dikaiosai heauton*) may also possibly suggest that he will be able to show that he has properly treated anyone that Jesus does nominate as ‘neighbour’ (Bailey 1980: 39). Although Fitzmyer correctly notes that the implication in the lawyer’s questions is, ‘Where does one draw the line?’... The legal issue posed is ‘who are we Judeans obligated to treat as neighbours and whom not?’ It is a boundary question of an exclusionary type... Whom does God require us to love as ourselves and whom not? Or, more specifically, what is the outer limit of the people we must treat as neighbours? A common answer at this period was that ‘neighbour’ meant fellow Israelite... As Fichtner notes, ‘There can be no doubt that the terms used here, including

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<sup>203</sup> Esler, 331.

<sup>204</sup> Esler, 332.

*re'ah*, denote fellow-members of the covenant or the community who share in the election of the covenant' (1968: 314-15)...Within the context of social identity theory, the lawyer's question raises a key indicator for determining who is a member of the ingroup, and thus deserving to be treated with the warmth and regard owed to ingroup members, and who is a member of the outgroup, and thus susceptible of the stereotypical and negative attitudes and behavior appropriate in relation to such a person.<sup>205</sup>

In response to the man, Jesus told a parable known as the Good Samaritan. In the parable, a man is traveling a treacherous road when he is robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. Several important details are often overlooked. First, Jesus described the man as “a certain man” without giving any identifiable details. Second, the man was naked, which means his attire could not disclose whether he was Judean or non-Judean.<sup>206</sup> Even being able to distinguish whether the man was circumcised would not help, because Egyptians and Samaritans were circumcised.<sup>207</sup> Third, he was unconscious, which means his language and accent could not disclose his “ethnic-linguistic identity.”<sup>208</sup> An Israelite priest passed by the man, and did not help him, which suggests that he had discerned that the man was not considered a neighbor in view of Mosaic law, or because he feared defilement if the man were deceased.<sup>209</sup> Subsequently, a Levite man also ignored the man on the road. Finally, Jesus says in Luke 10:33, “But a Samaritan traveling on the road came upon him and when he saw him he was moved with compassion.” Esler explains the power of this revelation when he reveals,

That a representative of one of the hated outgroups is brought along that road challenges the whole structure of group differentiation which the law functioned to maintain. Jesus has jerked the issue from the meaning of particular Israelite laws to one concerning far more fundamental notions of group differentiation and social identity.<sup>210</sup>

While the priest and the Levite had only considered their obligation to the Mosaic law, the Samaritan had only considered that there was a human being in need, and he had compassion on him regardless of whichever group the man belonged. Esler concludes, “‘Neighbour’ understood in this sense is someone who ignores group boundaries – of the sort erected by the law of Moses – to assist anyone who has need. Jesus thus calls for a movement from a group-oriented ethic to a universal one – and at the level of principle.”<sup>211</sup> Thus, love of neighbor clearly supersedes in-groups and out-groups.

Lastly, Jesus demonstrated reaching out to outsiders in John 4 when he initiated direct contact by speaking to a Samaritan woman at a well. By spending time with this woman, listening, and sharing with her, many in her town came to believe in Jesus. John 4:39-41 describes, “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s

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<sup>205</sup> Esler, 335-336.

<sup>206</sup> Esler, 337-338.

<sup>207</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 292.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Bailey, 293.

<sup>210</sup> Esler, 342.

<sup>211</sup> Esler, 343.



testimony... So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.” Michael Kuhn gives a clear explanation about the power of intentionally spending time with outsiders:

Linger by the well. Jesus did. He had time to listen to an immoral Samaritan woman. He even incited the dialogue and progressively moved this woman toward a fuller understanding of himself. We live in a world of walls... Walls dividing Christians from Muslims... There are linguistic barriers, political barriers, cultural barriers, educational barriers, race and gender barriers. One lesson that screams at us from Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman is that he felt it important to overcome the barriers separating him from that woman. In order to overcome the barriers, Jesus lingered for a while. He actually had a conversation [with her]... He just lingered. More and more of us will be encountering Muslims in the coming months and years. They are flocking to the West in search of education and employment. Many of them will be intimidated by their new surroundings and quite fearful that their Islamic faith will put them in jeopardy...perhaps you are anticipating that I am encouraging you to have these conversations with Muslims so you can share your faith. May I surprise you by saying that's not my intention; rather, I think it imperative that Muslims experience genuine concern and care from a Christ follower. The facts of Christ's death and resurrection are easy enough to rehearse. What is indeed rare in our day is an extended hand, a caring smile, someone who is willing to go the extra mile to help someone in need. When Muslims see these things, barriers are broken down and life is transformed. A true conversation can take place that will no doubt reinforce our faith, but not only that. Linger by the well.<sup>212</sup>

Jesus knew exactly what he was doing, because this idea of associating with people in out-groups, known as the contact hypothesis, has been studied and shown to be beneficial in reducing prejudice. Over fifty years of studies have indicated that intergroup interactions help ameliorate prejudice.<sup>213</sup> More frequent experience and contact with members of an out-group leads to a friendlier attitude toward that group and a more positive assessment.<sup>214</sup> The Pew Research Center conducted a study that demonstrated this. Based on the aforementioned thermometer assessment, the study concluded, “Knowing someone from a religious group is linked with having relatively more positive views of that group... Muslims get a neutral rating (49 on average) from those who know a Muslim, and a cooler rating (35) from those who do not know a Muslim.”<sup>215</sup> During the participant observation portion of this study, this became apparent as well. People who expressed that they had close Muslim friends, or had been to countries with a predominantly Muslim population and worked with Muslims, intentionally sought the participant out in the crowd. It became clear that people who had experience interacting with Muslims were more comfortable with the participant and were not afraid to initiate contact.

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<sup>212</sup> Michael F. Kuhn, *Fresh Vision for the Muslim World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Publishing, 2009), 258-259.

<sup>213</sup> Esler, 349.

<sup>214</sup> Rowatt, 39.

<sup>215</sup> Pew Research Center, “How Americans Feel About Religious Groups,” 10.

At some point, preferably after showing sincere love for Muslims and building a friendship, it is important for believers to share the Gospel with Muslims. Colossians 4:5 advises, “Be wise in how you treat outsiders, and make the most of every opportunity.” Jesus attracted people who were outsiders. Georges Housney described that the love of Jesus was “irresistible,” and “people gravitated to him.”<sup>216</sup> That same love should be in Christians and should be attracting outsiders to them. During the participant observation portion of this study, the participant received an unfriendly reception at the first church. But, upon entering the auditorium, one volunteer showed her kindness, which resulted in the participant being naturally drawn to that woman and she desired to stay near her. In the same vein, friendship is crucial as one former Muslim, Nabeel Qureshi, emphasizes. He revealed one of the barriers for him in accepting Christ when he described, “Since no Christian cared about me, I did not care about their message.”<sup>217</sup> But, the Gospel message partnered with love and friendship makes for a powerful witness. One missionary described a moving conversation he had with a Muslim man when he shared, “I’ll never forget explaining the Gospel to a man in Afghanistan who heard it for the first time. When he understood it, he said, ‘Why hasn’t anyone told me this before?’ That’s what over a billion Muslims can say. ‘Why hasn’t anyone told us before?’”<sup>218</sup>

Finally, it has been demonstrated that fear, lack of accurate information, and religiosity can be hindrances for reaching out to Muslims. But, seeing the examples of Jesus and reading the Scriptural mandates removes all excuses. Scripture does not include any exception clauses excusing Christians from reaching out to Muslims, regardless of whether they view them as a neighbor or as an enemy.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been established that the majority of Muslim immigration has been fairly recent, so there is still a learning curve among both Americans and Christians as they figure out how to navigate society with Muslims. Despite the general consensus, Muslims in America are actually integrating into American society rather well, and they live fairly normal lives akin to those of other Americans. Most Muslims are open to friendships with non-Muslims, and many even desire to learn from others of different faiths. Unfortunately, many Christians and the general population have been negatively impacted by various factors that feed a negative stereotype of Muslims. Regardless of the perception, Christians have Biblical mandates to fulfill such as loving their Muslim neighbors and sharing the Gospel. Three primary reasons seem to exist for why Christians are not engaging Muslims and that is fear, lack of education, and an in-group versus out-group mentality. These obstacles can be remedied by keeping a Jesus-centered mindset in life, by taking time to learn more about Muslims and Islam from fair and accurate sources, and by following Jesus’ example of how he treated outsiders and interacted with them.

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<sup>216</sup> Housney, 172.

<sup>217</sup> Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 121.

<sup>218</sup> Wilson, 133.

In addition to all of this, there is even further reason for Christians to love their Muslim neighbors in America, which could potentially have a direct impact on the one area that strikes at their hearts the most. The general population fears Muslims because they fear attacks, extremism, and Muslims not assimilating. But, when “out-groups” feel rejected and ostracized, this actually encourages them to pull away from society. Azadeh Ghaffari studied the harsh effects of discrimination on Muslim immigrants in the US and concluded, “When faced with discrimination, individuals have shown to ‘identify stronger with groups that have clear boundaries, internal homogeneity, social interaction, and common fate’ such as Muslim groups.”<sup>219</sup> When Muslims feel discriminated against it might cause them to turn to Islamic circles where they feel accepted instead of rejected and judged.<sup>220</sup> Thus, this creates a cycle because Christians fear that Muslims are isolating, yet prejudice might be what instigates Muslims’ to withdraw. As a result, the prejudice actually pushes them deeper into Islam as a coping mechanism. Therefore, Christians and the general population who are prejudiced against Muslims actually facilitate what they fear. Furthermore, Mohamed Nimer reveals another aspect of this vicious cycle:

A circular cause-and-effect relationship exists between Islamophobia and anti-Americanism. Consider the following sequence of events, starting arbitrarily with 9/11: the strike by Al-Qaeda left thousands of people dead and injured and triggered the most noticeable anti-Muslim violence in US history and the most vocal wave of anti-Islamic rhetoric in the West. The attack is then used to justify the invasion of two Muslim-majority countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, where hundreds of thousands of people have been killed or injured. This then unleashed a wave of terrorist attacks against vulnerable targets of US allies around the world. These attacks have been followed by increased US pressures on Muslims in the United States and abroad, including human rights abuses and the use of torture in the name of national security. Revelations about such practices at Abu-Ghraib and other US holding facilities in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay...have inflamed anti-American sentiments. So the pattern is clear: terrorist attacks against Americans are followed by anti-Muslim rhetoric and policy. This in turn reinforces anti-American sentiment and provokes a new round of terrorist attacks. For those who promote reconciliation, it is pointless to ask which of the two phenomena began first. What is more important is to recognize the symmetrical relationship between the two, namely, as Islamophobia increases, anti-Americanism is strengthened, and vice versa.<sup>221</sup> Thus, this should matter to Christians beyond just a spiritual scope, and also for practical reasons. By not treating Muslims well, loving them, or embracing them, Christians actually exacerbate the situation and end up helping contribute to what they fear. Muslims around the world believe that Muslims in America are not treated well or welcomed. Around 50% of Muslims surveyed in countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) feel that Muslims in the West are not treated equally.<sup>222</sup> A Gallup survey stated, “The notion that Muslims in these countries are treated unfairly supports the idea that Muslims in general believe that unfair

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<sup>219</sup> Ghaffari, 22.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Nimer, 84.

<sup>222</sup> GALLUP World, “Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West.”

treatment of Muslims - a component of Islamophobia - does exist in Western societies.”<sup>223</sup> The survey later added, “This is another example of Muslims globally seeing the West as mistreating Muslims in their countries. This belief adds to the perception of Muslims being excluded from social, political, and civic life in Western societies.”<sup>224</sup> This idea only intensifies the anti-American sentiment around the world. Therefore, Christians are actually adding fuel to the fire. In addition, well over 50% of Muslims in MENA perceived Westerners, including people in the U.S., to be “selfish, violent, greedy, immoral, arrogant and fanatical.”<sup>225</sup>

In this regard, Christians could actually be impacting the entire Muslim world by how they treat Muslims in the US. Many Muslims residing in the US have family members still living overseas. If Muslims in the US are welcomed, embraced, and treated well by Christians in America, they will probably share this information with their families overseas about how they are being treated. If they have been well received by Christians, this could significantly improve globally the perception many Muslims have of Americans and Christians. In fact, several scholars attest, “Muslim attitudes toward the Church have often been changed for the better when Muslims have seen Christians living out the humility and love commanded in verses such as Eph. 4:2, ‘Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love,’ and Eph. 5:2a, ‘Live a life of love.’”<sup>226</sup> Christians have the power to change this perception one Muslim at a time, and the implications could have a far-reaching global impact.

Finally, it is important to remember the past in an effort to illuminate the future. Since the very first Muslim immigrants came to the US, the relationship between American Christians and Muslims seems to have been strained. Edward Curtis paints the perception of how a Muslim slave viewed his Christian owner:

Abd al-Rahman was familiar with both Christian theology and scriptures, and according to reporter Cyrus Griffin of the *Natchez Southern Galaxy*, once said that the ‘New Testament [was] very good law; [but] you no follow it.’ He criticized the lack of piety that he observed: ‘You no pray often enough.’ He claimed that Christians used their religion to justify their greed and cruel use of slaves: ‘You greedy after money. You good man, you join the religion? See, you want more land, more niggers; you make nigger work hard, make more cotton. Where you find that in your law?’<sup>227</sup>

Even from the beginning, Muslims perceived a disparity between the actions and attitudes of Christians and what they believed the Bible actually proclaimed. Compare the words of the aforementioned Muslim slave to those of a Muslim curious about Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He wrote a preacher and asked, “Do you think I would find loving and open-minded friends in the church? Would it be fair to say some people would put their guards up and won’t

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Pew Research Center, “Muslim-Western Tensions Persist,” 4.

<sup>226</sup> Love, 190.

<sup>227</sup> Curtis, 9.

want anything to do with someone who belongs to some different Asian Indian race? Someone who has a different color of skin and speaks with an accent?”<sup>228</sup>

In one of the surveys for this study, a man answered all of the questions negatively about Muslims, and then described that he was *uninterested* in learning more about them from church. His comment at the end was, “Pray for God to put love in [Muslims’] hearts for all mankind.” Perhaps Christians are the ones who need the change of heart and for God to put love in their hearts for *all* mankind, which includes Muslims. It is easy to shift the responsibility to someone else, but Christians need to take responsibility for their own hearts. Kidd wisely surmises, “American Christians’...views of Islam generally tell us more about American Christians than any Muslims in particular.”<sup>229</sup> In the end, perhaps Christians should focus less on how they perceive Muslims, and instead should be more concerned with how Muslims perceive them.

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<sup>228</sup> Philip Yancey, “Letter from a Muslim Seeker,” in *Encountering the World of Islam*, ed. Keith Swartley. 2nd ed. (Littleton, CO: BottomLine Media, 2014), 445.

<sup>229</sup> Kidd, 165.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Survey Results**

**Surveys received:** 94  
**Did not meet criteria:** 7  
**Total viable surveys:** 87

**Gender:**

Women - 58  
Men – 29

**Age range:**

19-70

**When you hear the word *Muslim* what is the first word that comes to your mind?**

Positive: 6.

*(Hospitable, Medhat (Friend), Excited, Friend, Evangelism, Misrepresented).*

Neutral: 44.

*(Middle East, Arab, Islam, Clothing, Burqa, Covering, Religion).*

Negative: 32.

*(ISIS, Terrorist, Terrorism, Terror, Violence, Radical, Militant, 9/11, Hate, Hate-filled, Dislike, Anti-Christ, Oppressive).*

No response: 5.

**Do you feel fear/apprehension when you see a Muslim?**

Yes - 33

No –52

No response – 2

**Do you tend to have more POSITIVE or NEGATIVE feelings and thoughts about Muslims?**

Positive - 27

Negative - 57

No response- 3

**Do you tend to view Islam as a religion of PEACE or a religion of VIOLENCE?**

Peace -19

Violence – 65

No response: 3

**Do you worry about attacks in the US and around the world by Muslims?**

Yes - 70

No – 17

**Are you concerned about the influx of Muslims moving to the US?**

Yes- 57

No- 30

**Have you ever had a conversation with a Muslim?**

Yes - 62

No – 25

**If YES, was the experience POSITIVE or NEGATIVE? (If you have had multiple conversations, please respond if the conversations were primarily positive or negative experiences).**

Positive – 51

Negative – 7

Both – 4

**If you had more information about Muslims and Islam would that INCREASE or DECREASE your comfort level interacting with them?**

Increase – 66

Decrease – 16

No response – 5

**If your church offered more information about Muslims and Islam would you be INTERESTED or UNINTERESTED in learning more?**

Interested - 75

Uninterested – 10

No response – 2

**If a Muslim woman wearing a head covering came into your church, would you feel PREPARED & COMFORTABLE or UNPREPARED & UNCOMFORTABLE as to what to say and do?**

Prepared and Comfortable – 56

Unprepared and Uncomfortable - 29

No response - 2

**Would you be comfortable having Muslims as neighbors?**

Yes - 53  
No – 33  
No response – 1

**Do you have any Muslim friends?**

Yes - 29  
No – 58

**Would you be comfortable with a mosque being built near your house?**

Yes – 30  
No – 57

**Do you feel that most Muslims in America sympathize with or support ISIS?**

Yes – 21  
No – 61  
No Response – 5

**Where do you obtain most of your information about Muslims?**

MBBs- 1  
No Response – 2  
School / Classes about Muslims – 3  
Church – 4  
Friends / Family – 5  
Books – 5  
Muslims – 10  
News (Internet, Radio, TV, Newspaper): 57

**Is there anything you would like to add that you feel would be beneficial to this study?**

“I operate largely from wanting to trust all people and give them the benefit of the doubt, but the news suggests there could be more much danger than I want to think about.”

“Although I answered most of these questions negatively, I am open to learning more about Muslims and Islam. I deeply fear the growth of Islam and believe as Christians we should be willing to witness to ALL people.”

“I have taught children who are Muslims. They were different and did not socialize very well. Their mother demanded they be able to practice their traditions and we teach about their holidays.”



“Muslims have pretty much given themselves a bad name by not doing more to protect what they say is peaceful. They never show them helping anyone but Muslims.”

“Pray for God to put love in their hearts for all mankind.”

“Unfortunately, I have come to the belief that Muslims have been deceived by Satan in this religion and he had used it to destroy many lives inside and outside of their religion.”

“I realize that all Muslims are not radical, but how do you tell? It’s a little unsettling.”

“I know my views are stereotypical, but I have fear of not knowing if a Muslim is a violent one or non-violent. I will be nervous until I find out [my] fears are unfounded.”

“I feel that I have not been educated in the Muslim religion and have only been fearful of Middle East in general. When I think of Muslim [sic], I think of Middle East and the many bad things that have happened and continue to happen. I don’t think I am alone in this.”

“Would like to know why the good Muslims are not taking a stand against the bad Muslims.”

“I would like to see more Muslims and Islam speak out about terror in the world and here in the USA. My perception is they don’t want to say anything.”

“I don’t understand sharia law above our country’s law.”

“I know my own feelings are complex and complicated. I’ve never had any negative interaction directly with Muslim people, but I do feel worry about extremists, and I think the all-or-none faith, the opposition to all beliefs but Islam sometimes expressed by Muslims is a concern. Maybe if Christians were more interested in evangelizing the world, we wouldn’t be so threatened.”

“The questions regard all Muslims but a better answer for the fear questions would be if it addressed extremist vs. moderate Muslims. I only fear extremist Muslims living here, working here, attacking our country, etc.”

“Would like to learn more about Muslims.”

“I have spent some time in a mostly Islamic country and taken a class about Islam and Muslims which helped me to learn and understand a bit better.”

“My issue is what are CURRENT threats? Often times, people like to marginalize radical Islam by pointing to Christianity’s history of intolerance when responding to accusations about violence in Islam. However, the issue is not which religion is “good” or “bad”...the question should be which religion poses the most significant security threat? While Christianity may have housed threats in centuries past, their extremists have largely been neutered. However, with Islam, the threats from their extremists is alive and well...and they have capabilities to cause the

most widespread destruction. While people bring up history, we should also address the here and now.”

“ISIS is a radical group not truly reflecting Islam.”

“I have lost 343 friends to Islamic [sic] radicals [sic].”

“Jesus died to save them and I am drawn to love them into knowing Jesus. I reach out to every one I know. I am drawn to them with a love I cannot explain. I have many Muslim students. I would rather build more churches for them than mosques. I want them in heaven with me forever at the feet of Jesus.”

“Americans would be better informed about Muslims if they would turn off the news.”

“Would add either ‘no change’ or ‘neutral’ as a choice for some of the questions.” “I would be very, very interested in attending an event similar to the recent “Visit My Mosque” campaign in the U.K. that was talked about recently on NPR if they ever did something similar here.  
<http://www.npr.org/2015/02/09/384875895/-visit-my-mosque-campaign-builds-bridges-in-britain> “

“I know that God is working, within the Muslim community with dreams and visions, and I pray they hear the shepherds [sic] voice. When I see a Muslim I say a little prayer for them, this started when I was about 26, so over 30 years ago.”

“I lived and worked in the middle east and love muslims.” A couple of people returned their surveys with printed off articles attached about all of the terror acts committed by radical Muslims, newspaper clippings about Muslims causing problems for churches locally, and articles by Christian leaders saying why it was okay to fear Muslims.

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Observation Field Notes

**Week One:** 1/25/15

**Observer:** [Control/Observer S]

**Outsider Friendly?** No, 3 out of 10

**Highlight:** The woman offering people sodas

**Needs improvement:** Greeter outside, greeters/volunteers in the lobby at their various stations.

**Global Context:** American Sniper has just been released in theaters (1/16/15) and is topping the box office. ISIS is threatening to kill two Japanese hostages and is demanding a ransom or prisoner exchange. Haruna Yukawa is beheaded by ISIS 1/24/15.

**Would you go back to this church?** No.

**# of Volunteers who Greeted Me:** 1. Only one truly greeted me (the soda lady). But one handed me a bulletin, and one pointed me down a hallway toward the auditorium.

**# of Church Members who Greeted Me/Shook my Hand:** 3

**# of Conversations: 0**

**# of Hugs: 0**

I arrived at 5:53 p.m., which was later than I had hoped. The parking lot was packed so I had to park quite a distance away. As cars drove by, people blatantly stared. One car even stopped just so the passengers could gawk. I saw the greeter at the doors ahead spot me. He had around one minute to process before I would be at his door. As I was walking up, a mother and child were walking toward the doors. The curious child, around age four, kept craning his head back and staring at me. Finally, his Mom grabbed his hand to try to halt the awkward moment. At that point, all three of us were approaching the greeter, but the greeter's eyes were locked on the child. It was very obvious he was intentionally avoiding and ignoring me, as was the Mom with her child. I glanced at the greeter and smiled. Unfortunately, his eyes were deliberately fixated on the child, and they followed the child without ever looking elsewhere. He warmly greeted the child and Mom. I was deliberately ignored.

After we'd walked through the doors and my back was to him, I heard him say, "You all enjoy the service." I had no idea who he was talking to and did not know if "you all" included me as well. I glanced back to see...perhaps to verify or perhaps to give him a second chance. I looked over my shoulder, but he immediately looked down and scuffed his shoe against the pavement. His body language seemed to convey a sense of defeat -- of having an opportunity, being unprepared, and unsure as to what to do -- and then realizing he had missed the opportunity. But, still, a part of him had seemed almost angry. Angry that I was there making people uncomfortable. I felt like he was thinking, "How dare you?" I will never know for certain what he was thinking or feeling. I will only know how he made me feel.

I walked in and looked around -- there were three or four different entrances looming before me. Which one? Where to go? I turned around and behind me in the distance was a "First Time Here?" outpost. It had taken all of my strength to walk in to the church and now I was standing in the center of the lobby looking around like an idiot. I knew if I had to backtrack I would walk out the doors instead. I was not going backwards. Every step forward had been a battle. There were three people surrounding the booth. I looked at all three entrances multiple times, turning around in my confusion and clearly showing I was lost. No one helped me. No one walked over, and no one pointed me in the right direction. They all stood at their various posts and just stared, or after seeing me, pretended like they hadn't.

I started walking toward one entrance and then I saw the sign at the top for children. I walked toward the other and noticed another sign indicating it was for children. I saw a hallway and signs at the top, so I started making my way that way reading the signs, but I was still clearly lost. As I walked down the hallway, I saw a greeter in green so I smiled at her. She smiled back but made no offer to help. I arrived at the glass doors and saw a greeter woman standing there. "Excuse me, is this where I am supposed to go?" She was caught off guard. "I'm sorry, what?" I tried again, "Is this the place where everyone is supposed to go to? Am I going the right direction?" "Oh, yes, it's down that hallway." It turned out it was a back hallway away from the main entrance. The greeter handed me a bulletin. She smiled but wasn't overly friendly. I walked into the auditorium and the lights had been dimmed, as the service was about to start in a couple of minutes.

I walked toward the center section, but before I got there, an extremely friendly woman smiled widely at me. She indicated a refrigerator with sodas in it. "Can I get you a drink to enjoy during the service?" She was incredibly kind, warm, welcoming. Probably the first person who

looked at me without inhibition. She made me feel human. I smiled, “I am okay, but thank you.” She smiled back warmly. I decided I wanted to stay close to that woman. She was nice. I found a row near the “Soda Lady” and made my way around six chairs in and sat down. I saw a few glances, but nothing major. I saw [observer] out of the corner of my eye sit down three rows back. I pretended to read my bulletin and shut my phone off.

I looked around to take in the appearance of the church. It was then that I realized my row was empty. I was alone. I was sitting completely alone by myself. I felt like a pariah. A leper. Within a minute of this realization, I noticed a man walk slightly past my row, glance back and see me, and then stop. He then made a beeline for me. I decided he must have a lot of Muslim friends or be a missionary because he deliberately sought me out. He looked to be in his mid 30s and was gruff. He initially sat down a couple chairs from me but did not acknowledge me. When a married couple came and sat at the end of the row, he moved down and sat directly beside me. There were still several empty chairs on the row – he didn’t have to move down directly beside me. At this point, I didn’t know his intentions. All I knew was that he made me feel like I wasn’t a leper, and he clearly wasn’t afraid of me. He was relaxed, his body language shifted toward me instead of away from me. He was comfortable and at ease. They told us to stand up and worship began. But, immediately, I noticed the man beside me bow his head. I thought he was praying for me, but then his screen glowed and I realized he was looking down at his cell phone. Several times throughout the entire service he was looking at his phone and texting.

At the end of worship they told us to turn around and high-five someone. I turned toward the man beside me at the same moment he turned toward me. He did a full body turn toward me. He was not intimidated by me in the least bit. He didn’t really smile, but he looked me straight in the eyes and asked, “How are you?” He also let me make the first move, which was smart -- I extended my hand, smiled and said, “It’s nice to meet you.” The woman in front of me turned around halfway, but when she saw me I saw her hesitate, and she froze mid-turn. I could tell she was debating as to whether she should turn back around and ignore me. She made the decision to turn back toward me, and I extended my hand and greeted her. The guy with her kept his back to me, but he looked to be in his mid-to-late teens and I am sure he was uncomfortable with my presence. I turned around to face the people behind me, and I could tell I caught them off guard. One woman’s eyes got round, and the other person avoided my gaze and looked away. I extended my hand, “It’s nice to meet you.” She shook it and smiled a greeting back. Most of the people were initially caught off guard, but some were able to recover.

About halfway through the message I started to wonder if the guy beside me was a plain-clothes police officer or in the military. I had no idea if churches had plain-clothes police officers, or maybe he was a police officer who just happened to attend this church and was just off-duty. I had a weird gut feeling. He was far too comfortable. No one ever sits on the seat directly beside me. I really wanted my Chapstick and a piece of gum but I was afraid if I made any sudden movements toward my purse on the ground he might tackle me. He was *really* close to me. I had a gnawing feeling and a growing suspicion that things were not as they seemed. I began to think he was doing this not for my sake, but to give those around us some assurance that if anything went awry he was close at hand and could overpower me. Initially, though, I had just thought he was being friendly.

When offering time came they passed a plastic bucket. I hesitated and looked at it, unsure as to what to do. I looked down the row at the woman around six chairs away. I did not want to have to stand up and walk it all the way over to her in front of everyone. She stood up to come

get it and looked annoyed as she walked toward me. I stood up and walked two chair-length distances and handed it to her, and she gave a small smile, or perhaps it was more of a grimace, I'm not sure which, and said "thank you" even though she'd walked almost the entire distance.

The rest of the evening was uneventful. At the end of the service I grabbed my purse and opened it to get my phone to text [observer]. I noticed the man beside me standing up, but turned toward me (which was interesting, because he needed to turn the other direction to exit the row). I thought maybe he wanted to talk to me, so I stood up, but then he turned around and started to walk out of the row. I don't know where he went after that. I followed the crowd out and left. Afterward, I met up with [observer] to compare notes.

Honestly, I don't remember the message that day. In reality, the sermon for me was how I was treated and how I felt. That is all I remember about that day. I would give this experience a 50/50, although it's hard to assess since I have nothing to compare it to yet. The first part started off rough, but the "Soda Lady" helped save the day. Unfortunately, this was the lasting impression this church made on me: Why are you here? You don't belong here. That's how I felt.

I later told a friend of mine what I was doing and they recommended, "You should let the senior pastors of the churches know beforehand so they can let the plain-clothes police officers know you'll be there. We have several plain-clothes police officers at our church every Sunday." I texted a friend of mine who used to work at a similar mega-church in Georgia like the one I had just visited. "Do you know if [mega church she used to work for] has plain clothes officers in their services?" She texted back, "Yes, they have plain-clothes police officers on-duty every Sunday in the services." So much for the "friendly" man who I thought wanted to sit with me so I didn't have to sit alone. I obviously can't prove it, but I had no idea some churches had plain-clothes police officers in their services, and yet I still had a gut feeling that he was one for some reason.

### **Observer's notes:**

[My observer] asked me how it had gone from my perspective and I told her, "I thought that man was going to sit in my lap!" She laughed and told me, "I was watching him! I was trying not to laugh!" She said that no one was staring at me, no strange looks, no comments, etc. She said everyone acted as if it were completely normal. The only time she noticed someone giving me a strange look was when the offering was passed and the woman turned toward me and seemed irritated. I explained that I thought she was irritated because I didn't walk the bucket down to her. I stood around with [observer] in the church lobby for around 30 minutes. I wanted to see if people saw that one of their own – someone in their community – had embraced me, if it would encourage them to do the same, but there was no change. The *hijab* was my leprosy. It made me an outcast.

### **Ministry Lessons Learned:**

- 1) Ignore the *hijab*, not the person. Treat them normally.
- 2) A Muslim in a church is more terrified than you are. Reach out.
- 3) "Outsiders" want to be made to feel like insiders.
- 4) If you don't already have a game plan in your mind as to how you're going to respond, your default response will be inaction.
- 5) Focus on friendship initially -- not evangelism. If you're of the same gender, invite them to tea/coffee/dinner. Ask for their phone number and offer to meet up to sit together next

Sunday. Tell them you hope to see them again. If you are not of the same gender, connect them to one of your friends who is their gender.

6). YOU are the message. There is so much new and foreign stuff happening (music/worship, offering, communion) that they might shut down and stop processing before even getting to the message. In the end, they will probably forget the message -- the only thing they will remember that day is how you made them feel. You are their sermon.

### **Week Two**

**Week Two:** 2/7/15, 9 a.m. Service

**Observers:** [Control], [Observer D], [Observer J2], [Observer G]

**Outsider Friendly?** Yes, 10 out of 10

**Highlights:** Parking crew, greeters, the people sitting around me.

**Needs improvement:** First-time visitors area. Education for volunteers about not taking pictures of “Muslims.”

**Global Context:** ISIS has just beheaded Japanese hostages Haruna Yukawa and later Kenji Goto (1/31/15). Kayla Mueller is reportedly killed (2/7/15). Jordanian pilot has been burned to death by ISIS (2/3/15).

**Would you go back to this church?** YES.

**# of Volunteers who Greeted Me:** 6 (2 Parking Crew, 1 greeter at the outside doors, 1 at the inside doors, 2 at the “First-Time Visitor” area).

**# of Church Members who Greeted Me/Shook my Hand:** 3

**# of Conversations:** 1

**# of Hugs:** 1

If I were shocked last week, this week shocked me even more. We all met in the parking lot, but I never saw any of my observers because I hopped out and immediately started walking. I texted them that I was on my way in, and I hoped they were following behind me. I first encountered a parking crew member. He treated me normally and – shockingly – in a friendly manner! He stopped a car for me and told me, “Ma’am, come on over and cross here.” I thanked him, waved at the stopped car, and started the long walk to the front of the church (by long I mean they usually have shuttles that drop people off because I was that far away in a back parking lot). I didn’t notice anyone really looking at me, although later on, my observers behind me told me that an older gentleman walked past me, stopped, turned around and stared, as if he wasn’t sure he had seen things accurately, and then went on his way. On my walk, I encountered another parking crew member. There were other people ahead of me, but I didn’t hear him say anything to them. When he saw me, he said “Good morning.” I responded, “Good morning.” People were acknowledging me and treating me like I was human.

I finally made it to the front doors and walked in. There was a line of greeters, and one of them handed me a flier. She smiled at me and looked genuinely excited to see me. I looked around for a moment and hesitated, but then I saw that the doors to the auditorium were directly in front of me. Regardless, I saw the woman start to step forward as if she would help me, but I continued on through the doors. When I got in there I found an empty row in the middle section and walked to the center. I sat down by myself and waited to see if I’d sit by myself the entire time. I got a text from [Control] saying she was sitting behind me somewhere. The man in front of me, an older gentleman, turned around and noticed me, but he didn’t make a big deal or make me feel uncomfortable. He didn’t even act surprised.

The row was starting to fill up. Three people were sitting at the end of the row to my left, and then two more people sat there as well. A few minutes later an attractive blonde woman meticulously dressed in a sophisticated ivory coat came and walked down the aisle and sat beside the couple on the left, which left a seat inbetween us. She put her large purse in the empty seat between us. I assumed she knew the couple and was sitting by them. I had two empty chairs to my right as well. The closest person on that side was a girl. No one really seemed to notice me.

The service started and the guy doing introductions told us to turn around and greet someone. The nicely dressed woman directly to my left turned to me and reached out her hand. She smiled warmly, greeted me, and leaned toward me. Her hand lingered a couple seconds longer than a normal handshake and her fingers trailed off my hand -- like she didn't want to let go. She was a kind, warm person. The older gentleman in front of me who had noticed me earlier had already sat down, but he intentionally turned around, smiled at me with the kindest eyes, looked me in the eyes and gave me a firm handshake. So did the woman beside him.

I sat down and the woman beside me who had shaken my hand whispered, "I'm gonna come sit by you." I smiled at her and said, "okay," as she removed her purse from the seat beside us and sat down beside me placing her purse in the other chair on her other side. The worship started and I was moved by how in the Spirit everyone was. The man in front of me who had shaken my hand wiped away tears from the moving worship service. All of the people around me had their hands raised high. Although I was raised in a fairly conservative church, I felt very comfortable – touched even – by this church.

The preacher came out and told everyone to turn to the person beside them and say, "If you are a human, this message is for you." The woman beside me turned to me and we laughed and repeated the phrase to each other. I began to forget that I was wearing a hijab. I didn't feel like an outsider. I didn't feel alone. I felt like I belonged. No one was threatened by me. I felt...loved. I relaxed, I was able to listen to the message, and my stress left me. I actually enjoyed the service.

Toward the end of the service, the preacher asked people who were there with family members to move out into the aisles so he could pray over them. The message had been about family and he showed a clip of penguins. He explained that when the temperatures were so cold and almost impossible to survive, the penguins would congregate together as closely as possible to give each other warmth and help each other survive. The preacher told the families to be like penguins and crowd into the aisles together if they were family. The rows quickly became empty as the aisles filled up. I would have felt alone, but I had the woman beside me. She looked over at me and smiled, "Did you come here alone, too?" She whispered. I smiled back and responded, "Well, I have a friend here somewhere, but I'm not exactly sure where." She nodded and said, "My husband couldn't make it today, so I came alone." It was as if she was trying to establish commonality between us – we were both alone – but we had each other. We were there together. She asked, "Is this your first time here?" Although it was my first time coming there for church, it wasn't my first time ever having come to that building, so I couldn't lie. "A friend invited me to a candlelight gathering here back in December, but this is my first time coming for an actual service here on a Sunday. What about you? Is this your first time here?" She shook her head no. Then she came and put her arm around me. "Well, we're here together. Better together, right?" I put my arm around her and smiled, "Yes, like penguins." The preacher finished praying and I grabbed my coat. She turned to me and said she hoped I had a wonderful week and I wished her the same.

After church I did my usual “walk toward the doors as if I’m exiting and then at the last minute turn around and wait for my observer(s)” routine. At this point, I want to start making people around me get more comfortable at seeing a Muslim in their presence in church. I saw [Control] and we started chatting. The other observers came over as well and suggested, “You should go to the guests/first-time attending area and get your free gift.” [Control] started to steer me through the crowd and we wound up getting lost as we walked all over the church and couldn’t find the place. We finally found the first-time visitor area, which was the only moment where I felt uncomfortable. I walked in with [Control] and a man was standing there. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do,” I said. The man walked toward me, “Hi, is this your first time?” “Yes,” I said. “Where are you from?” “Here in [city].” “Here?” He seemed surprised that I was from the US. [Observer] said he was talking loud and slow as if I couldn’t understand him. At this point, the man asked if I’d filled out a card and I said no, so he took me to table and passed me off to two ladies there. They gave me a card and I filled it out. Apparently, as I was filling it out, [observer] said a guy for the church came over and took my picture. That’s the only thing I wasn’t thrilled about. Not a good idea to take a picture of a “Muslim” in a church especially without asking them for permission first. They handed me a gift for visiting for the first time (a devotional and a cup). The two ladies were nice, but it felt more like a business transaction: give us your info on a card and we’ll give you a gift.

#### **Observers’ notes:**

[Control] sat in the balcony so she could get a full view. She said that when she walked in they treated her normally, whereas I felt like I was given special treatment – like they were happy and excited to see me. [Observer D] had the same experience where he said they were “normal” with him. [Control] said that she tried to mimic everything I did by sitting by herself, etc. She said that a woman came and sat by her also and during the service told her that she had a word for her from the Lord, which [Control] had her write in her journal. She told me that during the whole penguin experience that the woman did a similar thing where she put her arm around her and said, “Well, we’re family today.” She even prayed over [Control]. My other observers [Observers J and D] also mentioned watching the woman beside me. They said she seemed cautious at first. That she “checked me out” a few times as if she was figuring out what to do, but then she became more comfortable. As I mentioned earlier, they said one person did a double-take on the sidewalk when I walked toward the church, but I never noticed it.

#### **Ministry Lessons Learned:**

It really only takes ONE PERSON to make a good impression. If ONE PERSON reaches out, breaks down barriers, then it will be a positive experience for the person. But, looking back on my previous experience, it only takes one person to make a really bad impression as well. Believers have the choice and the power to either make someone feel like they belong and are accepted, or make them feel like an outsider and rejected. Kindness is a universal language. I am learning that the best ways to break down barriers include: smiling at the person, speaking to the person, and reaching out to touch them (ie: a handshake especially if you are of the same gender). If you can do all three, then you have successfully removed a barrier. The parking crew, the people who greeted me at the door, the older gentleman with the kind eyes who shook my hand, and especially the blonde-haired woman in the white coat and black boots -- all showed me Jesus that day.

### **Week Three**



**Week Three:** 2/15/15

**Observer(s):** [Control] [Observer J]

**Outsider Friendly?** Yes, 9 out of 10

**Highlights:** People sitting around me, greeters, bathroom attendant.

**Needs improvement:** Parking crew

**Context:** ISIS hostage and 26 year old American aid worker Kayla Mueller has been confirmed killed; 21 Coptic Christians beheaded by ISIS (2/15/15). Three Muslims killed in the US in alleged hate crime (2/10/15).

**Would you go back to this church?** Yes.

**# of Volunteers who Greeted Me:** 5 (two ladies at the outside doors, one man directly inside – who also greeted me again upon leaving), bathroom attendant, and one at the doors going into the auditorium)

**# of Church Members who Greeted Me/Shook my Hand:** 10

**# of Conversations:** 4 (1 with the college aged girl behind me, and conversations with a woman, her husband, and her mom in the lobby) Plus I received a business card with contact information.

**# of Hugs:** 1

I set foot out of the car and immediately a parking crew guy around my age saw me. I looked up and made eye contact. Cold eyes looked back. I averted my eyes and headed toward the doors. A woman was on either side of the set of doors and I walked toward the one on the right side. Both ladies smiled and greeted me, but the woman on the right as I walked through the door was very intentional. “Hi! How are you doing today?” She looked like she genuinely cared and was interested. I smiled and she smiled back, “We’re so glad you’re here!” She seemed genuinely excited and happy. She leaned toward me, and I realized how much body language communicates. I walked through the doors and, again, more greeters. This time a tall man around my age stood to my left with a woman beside him. “Hi! Welcome! How are you?” he called out. Surprised he addressed me, I smiled, slowed down, and said, “Thank you.” His mouth went slightly agape and his eyes widened but just slightly. I think he had been on autopilot greeting and it hadn’t registered quite yet what he was seeing. His face registered slight surprise, but nothing disconcerting. I walked around the massive lobby trying to find the restroom.

There was a long line at the restroom, but no one seemed too uncomfortable as I stood with them and waited. When I walked into the bathroom, the bathroom attendant was a young, friendly woman. She greeted everyone with a similar phrase of “Hi, you’re beautiful! I’m so glad that you’re here!” She gave me the same greeting when she saw me that she gave to everyone else and it really made me feel welcome and loved. I took my coat off so everyone could see that I was not a threat. I also only carried my phone. Hopefully that would put people more at ease.

I walked out of the bathroom and there were tons of people. It’s a very large church. I felt some stares but nothing major. I walked into the auditorium and found an empty section where I sat down by myself. And I waited. Two girls came and started to walk down the aisle. I wasn’t certain if they wanted me to move down or if they wanted to walk past me so I asked if they wanted me to move. The girl in front treated me normally and said, “Oh no, you’re fine don’t worry,” But her friend was a little more uncertain. She spoke to her friend in a hushed tone, “Just keep moving, keep moving,” as if she wanted to get away as quickly as possible. I started to feel uneasy. The two girls sat two seats away from me and another family came and sat two chairs away from me in the same row. The auditorium was quickly filling up and it was becoming evident that no one really wanted to sit by me - I was sitting by myself. I felt very alone and

embarrassed. I was bookended by two empty seats on either side of me equaling four empty seats, while the rest of the rows filled up.

I noticed the people in front of me turned around and sort of checked me out. Eventually a woman and her husband came and sat down beside me. The woman who was with the man seemed kind of annoyed but she walked past me and had her husband sit beside me. Another couple came later, and at that point the entire row had filled up and there was only one empty seat on the row - one between me and the woman beside me. I was feeling very uncomfortable for some reason. I felt like the elephant in the room – no one really knew what to do with me.

It was so hard to stand still during the moving worship. I looked around at everyone and I saw the way they were worshipping. Hands raised, tears running down their faces, moving around to the music, swaying, eyes closed, just fully engulfed in the spirit. I stood there and thought, "It's so obvious that they love their God, but can they love me too?"

After worship was over, [the worship leader] told everyone in the audience to give someone a hug and say, "I'm glad that you are here." I didn't know what to do. The sweet girl beside me probably a little bit older than me turned towards me and gave me a side hug. It was very sweet. The people in front of me who had been checking me out turned around and smiled at me warmly and extended their hands to greet me. The man beside me turned to me and gave me a genuine and welcoming smile. They honestly and genuinely seemed to be friendly and welcoming and warm. I turned around and the woman behind me was incredibly kind she leaned over the back of my chair, clasped my hands, and said "I'm so glad that you're here." I could tell she really sincerely meant it. By the time it was over, I had been hugged by one person and been greeted by four other people. Apparently something was going on behind me that I didn't know about but one of my observers spotted. There were two girls who were college age and they were sitting in the row behind mine but a couple chairs down. Apparently they had come over and tried to greet me and were excited about it, but I had already turned around at that point. [Control] said that the disappointment was obvious. They had stuck their hands out to greet me, but I had turned around and didn't see it. [Control] said they didn't give up - they actually changed seats to come closer to me and sit right behind me. And one of the girls asked her friend to switch seats with her so that she could be closest to me.

A man came on stage and talked about how people are the message. The church is the message - that is how people find and see Christ is through the church. The man doing the welcoming message said the [worship leader] had stolen his line because he wanted to tell everyone to hug someone. So he told everyone that he wanted them to hug someone else - someone they hadn't greeted last time. I didn't know what to do because everyone around me had already greeted me. I looked around uncertain as to whom else to greet. But, when I turned around, those two girls were there leaning over the back of my chair trying to greet me. One of the girls looked at me, and she said excitedly, "Are you Muslim?" I didn't know what to say. I was so caught off guard. I couldn't lie, but I couldn't think of a response. While I was hesitating and trying to figure out how to respond, she filled the silence by saying, "One of my best friends is Muslim!" We shook hands. I took control of the conversation so that she couldn't ask me if I was Muslim again. I asked her if her Muslim friend was there today and she said no. I asked her how she knew her, and she said through school. Then she asked me for my name and I told her it, and she told me her name, [omitted]. She told me she was so glad that I was there today.

[The preacher's] message was a bit uncomfortable for me just because it was a "come to Jesus" sermon. I felt like everyone was staring at me and I could practically feel the people around me praying for me. I was so uncomfortable. I could even hear the two college girls

behind me praying although I didn't know what they were saying. After the message, the girl behind me came up to me again. She asked me what I thought about the service. I told her I thought it was beautiful and I had enjoyed it. She told me that she was really glad that I had been there today, and I thanked her. I could've pushed it and I could have engaged her in conversation. It was very clear that she was open to it and she was trying to draw conversation out with me, but I was thrown off by her bold questions earlier, and was concerned about getting into a deeper conversation. I didn't want to reveal my identity. If I had wanted her number or name she would've given it to me. She asked me how I heard about the church. I told her a friend of mine had told me about it, and I said she (my friend) was somewhere there right now but I wasn't sure where, which was true. I hadn't spotted either of my observers yet and didn't know where they were. She laughed and said, "It's a pretty big church. It can be kind of hard to find the people you know." I smiled and said yes and thanked her again. Once she realized that I had a friend there I think she felt like someone was reaching out to me already, and it took some of the pressure off of her. She didn't push it any further after that and so I exited.

As I was walking out of the auditorium, a woman came up and touched my arm. She asked, "Can I say something to you? Can I talk to you for a minute?" She told me, "I really like your outfit. I was admiring it today and it's really beautiful." I thanked her. She then engaged me in conversation along with her mom who was 85 years old, and a very spunky 85 year old. Her husband came over as well and introduced himself. The three of them were very friendly. They asked me a lot of questions, which made me uncomfortable but only because I was trying to conceal my identity. I would have felt fine if it hadn't been for that. They asked me where I was from and I said the US, but it came out later in the conversation that I had lived in the Middle East. It turns out they were involved in work in [omitted] and they actually knew people in [omitted] who were doing humanitarian work. Their son lived over in the same area and they wanted me to connect with him. They peppered me with tons of questions about [country] because they were very familiar with it and had been over there. I didn't know what to say so the conversation was challenging for me. I was nervous about revealing too much. All three of them gave a great effort and engaged me. The woman handed me a card with her information and contact information and wrote down her son's name. She said, "I don't know if you have any contact information..." But I pretended not to hear. I couldn't give out my information because it was just too dangerous and too risky especially since their son worked in [country]. I had to be careful. But, I felt very welcomed by them.

Walking out, I walked past the greeters. The same guy from the door who I'd caught off guard a little bit earlier, smiled at me and was very friendly and said he hoped I had a good day. The man holding the door as I walked out was friendly as well. I didn't see the same parking crew guy. Overall it was an excellent experience. [Control] said that the people had been a little bit awkward around me at first, as they were figuring things out.

The interesting aspect is that I am getting my surveys back this week and my experiences in the churches are not exactly lining up with the data in the survey results. My participant observation has been primarily a good experience. I can only come up with a couple of theories. First, the last two churches I arrived quite a bit early. So I sit in a section entirely by myself. This allows people to choose whether or not they want to sit with me. Thus, perhaps the people who are most comfortable with Muslims are actually coming to sit with me and around me, which is perhaps why I'm interacting with people who are familiar with Muslims and comfortable with them. It also allows those who are fearful of Muslims and don't want to be around Muslims to sit elsewhere. This would make sense because the first church I went to, where I had a bad

experience, I arrived one minute before the service started. Consequently, I had to sit in a row toward the back by myself, but people were forced to sit with me or around me (in front and behind) if they came in late also.

My other theory is that perhaps Christians hold a certain perception or prejudice in their hearts and minds in regard to Muslims, but when they are actually confronted with a Muslim in their presence they make a decision. People have a tendency to look at me, to notice that I'm there, and then they turn away and it gives them a few minutes to think. In that timeframe they have a moment to decide whether or not they are going to welcome me or ignore and reject me. I think in those moments when an outsider is actually there right in front of them, and they have the choice, regardless of their perception or prejudice, they decide to still reach out and welcome me. Another factor from the surveys is that Christians seem to be only fearful of large numbers of Muslims, so perhaps because I am a solitary woman, I am considered less threatening.

**Observers' notes:** After the service, I normally meet up with my observer(s) to see if anyone will join us in conversation as we stand around. This time, I didn't have that opportunity, because other people found me as soon as I walked out and engaged me in conversation. Thus, I met up with my observer(s) later. [Control] told me that the only time I had really gotten a look was when I was walking in the front doors entering the church. She said one man did a double take but it was a member and not someone who worked for the church or a volunteer. She said that the volunteers/greeters also noticed me and were exchanging looks, but not in a bad way.

**Ministry Lessons Learned:**

The first contact makes the biggest impression because it sets the stage for the remainder of the time. So that first initial experience with the parking crew person and him not responding in a friendly manner set the tone for the rest of the experience and it was difficult to overcome that uneasy feeling. Later when I talked to [Control] though, she told me that he had not greeted her as well, and had treated her the same way. I would have thought that it was directed just at me, but perhaps he was just in a bad mood that day and treated everyone that way whether they were wearing a hijab or not. But, the "first-contact" people at the church (parking crew, greeters) need to be super friendly as it sets the tone for the whole experience. Bathroom attendants can make a huge difference and impact. The college girls who sat behind me were fantastic at reaching out, finding commonality, taking an interest in me, introducing themselves, etc. The woman behind me didn't hug me – but the sincerity and warmth in her eyes and smile when she took my hand and told me, "I am so glad you are here," spoke even more volumes than a hug. Same for the woman holding the door when I entered. Eye contact plus a smile is everything.

**Week Four**

**Week Four:** 2/22/15, 9 a.m. service

**Observers:** [Control] [Observer N]

**Outsider Friendly?** Yes, 9 out of 10.

**Highlights:** The greeter S; Two gentlemen greeters outdoors.

**Context:** Not much going on in the world this week pertaining to ISIS or extremists.

**Would you go back to this church?** Yes.

**# of Volunteers who Greeted Me:** 6

**# of Church Members who Greeted Me/Shook my Hand:** 4

**# of Conversations:** 1

**# of Hugs:** 0

Not really sure why, but the building's presence was daunting as I started walking toward it. The weather outside might have been rainy and cold, but the two greeters outside were lighthearted and had smiles on their faces. The man in the cowboy hat greeted me, looked me confidently in the eyes, and treated me completely normally. Then the man beside him started to joke around with me and say that I should have made the man in the cowboy hat tip his hat to me when he greeted me. They wished me a good morning and welcomed me. I walked through the doors where I was once again greeted, but then I took a few steps in... and was lost. I wasn't sure where to go. I hesitated and looked to my left, and then my right... and that's when I saw the smiling face of Greeter S. "Hi! How are you?" he greeted me. "Is this your first time here?" "Yes," I responded somewhat relieved. "May I show you around a bit?" he inquired. I immediately felt myself relax knowing that someone would help me, and I wouldn't have to navigate another church again by myself.

Greeter S did not extend his hand when greeting me (nor did the greeters outside), which was wise, because many Muslim women are not comfortable shaking a man's hand. It is best to let the woman lead in that regard. If a woman extends her hand, then a man can shake it. I would wager that many Muslim women in the US are probably a fair bit more Westernized and have become comfortable with this practice as they assimilate and adapt to US culture. If a woman is so bold to show up to a church in a *hijab*, she is probably fairly westernized. Although, if she is wearing a hijab, perhaps not. Regardless, it is best to let the woman lead when it comes to initiating contact. Just as much warmth and friendliness can be communicated via a smile.

I was surprised mostly by how normal everyone was with me. No one stared and no one treated me any differently. Greeter S started a conversation with me by asking, "Do you like coffee?" He then showed me where there is free coffee, and then he showed me where there is a Starbucks if I wanted to buy specialty coffee. I noticed several tables with people sitting around. He then walked me down the hallway to the auditorium and showed me where the restrooms were. He showed me the auditorium but told me, "Please be sure to go and enjoy some coffee first!" I felt welcomed and loved. Both greeters at the auditorium doors welcomed me, smiled, and one handed me a bulletin. I went in and sat in the middle section in the center of the row.

I unintentionally made it hard on people because I was literally in the center of the row. I didn't know how crowded this campus would be, so I wanted to give people the opportunity to sit with me. I sat a row behind and a little to the right of a family of three, but no one else was around me. The father turned around and noticed me, but did not react. A few minutes passed and a couple came and sat around four chairs from me. This was an intentional move and they were intentionally sitting near me because there were empty seats and rows all around me, and they could have sat anywhere else. Suddenly the man scooted down around two or three of the chairs towards me, and his wife followed suit. I believe there was only one chair between us, but I can't remember. I glanced up and he smiled at me and greeted me. I think sometimes people see me and they aren't sure what to do. They have to take a couple seconds to collect themselves and then they decide to move closer. This has been a pattern at the churches so far where people sit down, and then after a few minutes they decide to move closer toward me and sit by me. I think people are taking time to assess the situation, and then they're deciding to make a loving choice to remove space and a barrier between us. A woman and a guy came and sat behind me, but there was no one directly in front of me, and no one to the left of me except a man who was sitting many chairs down. It felt like a very large chasm between us. I wish they had roped the sections off so it would have created a more intimate and closer feel. The service started and they told us to turn around and greet someone and tell the person that you're glad they were there.

They did this at [former church] and people actually embraced that, took it to heart, and sincerely re-stated it. [This church] was a little different in that people turned and shook my hand, and greeted me with a “hi, hello” or “how are you?” The man beside me shook my hand, looked me in the eyes and smiled kindly. Warmth just exuded from his smile and eyes. Love and kindness are compelling. There was no one in front of me except that family of three. The father had turned around a couple of times and seen me, but he did not turn around to greet me – he kept his back to me the entire time, which stung. All in all, I shook three people’s hands because that was all of the people around me (except the family who ignored me). That was the only moment my heart was saddened. When it came time to pass the offering basket, I passed it to the man on my right. He paused, again, looked me in the eyes, smiled, and thanked me. He was a very nice man who took every opportunity he could to be kind to me. After the service was over, I walked out and met up with [Control] and [Observer]. As I was walking out, Greeter S looked me in the eyes, smiled, and said the magic words I had been waiting for someone to say to me: “I’ll see you next Sunday.” It implies that they noticed you were there – someone took note of your presence – they were glad that you were there, and they hope you return. It speaks to the heart. It’s a warm invitation. It carries the sentiment that your visit mattered and you are anticipated and welcomed back. You are looking forward to the person’s return. It is friendly and personable.

I have had other churches where people were amazing and reached out to me, but they were members of the general public and not greeters. They were people who sat near me who made the biggest impression -- regular members of the body of Christ. What set [this church] apart was that Greeter S was not just a regular member of the body of Christ – he was a greeter. I guess I sort of have high expectations for greeters, because they have one job and that’s to make people feel welcome. All of the greeters at this church did just that. Whoever is training their greeters is doing a phenomenal job. Greeter S was the first greeter out of every church I have visited who got it right. He must know a thing or two about Muslims because he was friendly, helpful, did not shake my hand, and he was warm and welcoming – yet not over the top to the point I felt overwhelmed. It was the perfect balance. **Observers’ notes:** They both said everyone was normal around me. They saw me get a tour, and mentioned that no one was acting strange or staring at me. I asked them if they got a tour, too, and they said no.

**Ministry Lessons Learned:** Key phrases every church should remember: “I’m glad you’re here.” “I hope to see you next Sunday” or “I’ll see you next Sunday,” “What’s your name? If you want, we can sit together next week...” If they agree, ask for their phone number so you can text/call and meet up. The experience I am most grateful for was the first church because it taught me the most. Most of all, I learned how I never want to make someone feel – especially in church.

#### **Overall concluding thoughts:**

It is probably not fair or accurate to judge an entire church based on one Sunday just like it is not fair to judge all Muslims by the actions of a few extremists. On a different Sunday the results could have been different. My perception was shaped by those I came in direct contact with, which was only a handful of people. If I had attended a different Sunday and been surrounded by different people, the experience could have been different at any of these churches.

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