

INTERCEDE

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Ministering Christ to Muslims in Times of Grief

by *Lisa W.

Bereavement and loss are traumatic experiences, but especially so for Muslims. My first insight into this was with a woman I met while living in the Arabian Peninsula. This older Muslim Arab lady had lost one of her daughters in a car accident a few years previously. My friend and co-worker from North Africa told me that this same woman had once wanted to meet her. The Muslim Arab lady thought that my co-worker, as an African, had special spiritual powers. She further thought that my co-worker could help her contact her daughter in the afterlife to make sure she was not suffering. It became clear right away that this lady was still mired in grief over the loss of her daughter—years after it had happened. This occurrence prompted me to ask: How do Arab Muslim women—as well as Muslims in general—cope with grief and loss, and how might I minister Christ to them?

Funerary Practices in Islam

All cultures incorporate funeral rites as a societal structure to enable people to process the trauma caused by death. These rites provide an avenue for mourning and processing grief and sorrow. Generally speaking, Islam practices the following funerary rites. If at all possible, the body is buried the same day of death, but certainly within 24 hours. They carefully observe an elaborate washing and preparation process of the deceased person's body. Upon arrival at the gravesite, the carefully wrapped body is positioned to face

Mecca. Formal funeral prayers are offered over the body at the time of interment. Finally, all of this is followed by an elaborate opportunity for people to visit the bereaved and express their condolences. Forty days after the death of a Muslim person, friends and family will gather for an evening to recite the Quran and offer prayers for the deceased.

In North Africa, where we started out, our work focused on several villages in the mountains where we assisted in implementing an agricultural development project with local farmers. When someone in the village died, all work in the villages would stop for three days. We also learned the importance of visiting a family as soon as possible after their loss.

When we arrived in the Arabian Peninsula, we observed that Muslims there held an *Azza*, a three-day period when everyone who knows the family comes to express their condolences. *Azza* is an Arabic word meaning consolation or comfort. The men gather for this time of consolation or comfort in a community hall or a large tent pitched for the occasion, while the women meet separately in a nearby house.

Visiting the bereaved during these three days is a very important value in Arab Muslim culture, even a duty. One lady told us: "People are always together, whether in times

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



The *Intercede* articles and Jumaa Prayer Fellowship stand firmly on the reality that our God hears and answers prayer (1 John 5:14-15). Our Lord is attentive to the prayers of His people, especially prayers of intercession for the lost. Hebrews 11:1 declares, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is a substance, not merely a wish or a nebulous matter. It is confidence or assurance in the character and nature of our God. When we pray for the salvation of Muslims, it is not just a desire or words we are offering up. It is a substance (confidence) in our Savior and Lord.

Many times when we pray, we fail to realize what is happening in the spirit realm. We may wonder if our prayers are going past the walls of the room. We may get discouraged when we do not see immediate results from our intercession. But, rest assured, God is working! God is releasing angels, healing the sick, and opening doors for ministry. He is removing the veil from the eyes of Muslim people, and the strongholds of Islam are coming down. As we pray, things are beginning to move; things are beginning to change. People are being delivered. People are coming to Jesus as their Savior and Lord!

Faith is the assurance that God is working in the super-

natural realm—even when we do not see the results. Our assurance of answered prayer is based upon the presence of Jesus and the promises of God’s Word. The Scriptures tell us that God is a prayer-answering God—if we keep our eyes on Him. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were afraid, but Jesus called to Peter and bid him to come to Him on the water. Peter immediately jumped overboard and started walking, but when he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the wind, his faith wavered and he began to sink. Jesus rescued him and said, “Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (see Matt. 14:22-33). God hears our prayers when we stay in Christ’s presence and His Word.

We can have full assurance of answered prayer because we look to our source—Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Many times we lack assurance because we are not “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20), an aspect of effective intercession. We can pray with understanding as we allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us, but we can also pray in an unknown tongue as we intercede for the souls of Muslim men, women, boys, and girls. This requires sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s voice as we pray but, rest assured, God hears and answers prayer—even when we do not know the full scope of how He has answered. As we intercede for Muslim people, let us pray in faith believing that God will fulfill His Word.

Prayer Profile - Muslim Unreached People Group **The *Malay People of Malaysia - Population: 13.1 million – 99% Muslim**

The Malay people accepted Islam when Arab and Indian traders brought it to Malaysia between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Malay are the majority people in Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore. In Malaysia, with a total population of 34 million, people are classified as Malay if they speak Bahasa Malaysia, practice Malay customs, and are Muslims. Many Malays are educated urban businesspeople, while others are farmers, traders, or fishermen in rural areas. Malay families are closely connected. Three generations often live together in one household.

Less than 0.1% of Malays in Malaysia are Christian. Malay Bibles must be stamped “Not for Muslims” and conversion from Islam is not allowed.

Prayer Points

1. Wide distribution of the Scripture in three Bahasa Malaysian dialects
2. Christian Chinese families to live among the Malay people
3. Godly Christian businesspeople to work in Malay communities
4. Dreams and visions among open-hearted Malays
5. Breaking down of spiritual strongholds among the Malay

**For further information on the Malay people, see www.joshuaproject.net*



Saudi Arabia lifts limits on Hajj pilgrims

Saudi Arabia has announced that it will no longer impose limits on the number of pilgrims for this year's Hajj after three years of restrictions to curb the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The number of pilgrims will return to what it was before the pandemic, without any age limit," Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq al Rabiah told reporters in Riyadh on Monday.

The pilgrimage—one of five pillars of Islam, and which all able-bodied Muslims with the means are required to perform at least once—is scheduled for June.

Before the pandemic in 2019, about 2.5 million people took part in the rituals. For the next two years, numbers were drastically curtailed due to the pandemic. In 2022, nearly 900,000 pilgrims, including some 780,000 from abroad, were welcomed to Islam's holiest cities of Mecca and Medina.

At that time, they had to be aged under 65. They were also required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and to present a negative test. — *TRTWORLD.com*

Professor sues after firing for showing Muhammad images

St. Paul, Minnesota. — Attorneys for an adjunct art professor announced that Erika López Prater is suing Hamline University for dismissing her after a Muslim student objected to depictions of the Prophet Muhammad in a global art course. The university admitted to a "misstep" and plans to hold public conversations about academic freedom.

In her lawsuit, Prater alleges that Hamline University—a small, private school in St. Paul—subjected her to religious discrimination and defamation, and damaged her professional and personal reputation. — *The Associated Press*

Muslims warn LGBTQ bill could encroach on civil liberties

A Muslim advocacy group told Fox News Digital that an LGBTQ rights bill in Michigan is likely "unconstitutional" due to its encroachment on religious freedom.

The Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) launched a petition urging lawmakers to add religious protections to proposed amendments to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA), which seeks to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

The ELCRA has provided protections for Michiganders based on religion, race, sex, and other demographics since 1976. LGBTQ advocates have been pushing to be included in the bill for years to ensure they do not face discrimination. — *Fox News*

Malaysia distributing translated Qurans abroad to counter Islamophobia

Malaysia has set aside more than \$2 million in the 2023 budget to counter Islamophobia by translating and printing the Quran in several languages and distributing copies internationally.

Of the copies that will be printed under the plan, the first of its kind by the government, 20,000 will be sent to Sweden where a far-right politician recently burned the Muslims' holy book on at least two occasions.

The 10 million ringgit (\$2.2 million) plan is meant to create a better understanding of Islam, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told reporters after an event titled "International Forum on Islamophobia," which was held in the administrative capital, Putrajaya.

"We will print 20,000 in Swedish—and other languages too—for the purpose of better understanding," he told reporters. — *Benar News*

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of joy or in times of sadness. If someone in a family dies, they always visit the family and sit with them to ease the pain.”

It is also important to use appropriate phrases in expressing condolences. These are a few of the common phrases: *Allah yurahmuhu* (May Allah have mercy on him); *Ahsen Allah azzak* (May Allah increase your consolation); *Allah yusaberek* (May Allah give you patience); and *al-baqiyya fi hyattek* (May the remainder of the years the deceased was deprived of be added to your life).

Arab Muslim women who have lost a husband undergo a special period of mourning. It is called the *Idda*, and it lasts four months and ten days. In the Arabian Peninsula, women are not permitted to leave the house during this time and are only able to see other women or family members. Practices vary from country to country, but generally speaking women cannot wear perfume or jewelry, and can only leave the house for work and errands. They can visit friends and family, but are required to sleep at home. They are not permitted to remarry until the *Idda* is over. The practice originated as a means of determining whether the woman was pregnant and preventing confusion over the paternity of a child if she remarried immediately.

The Value of Patience

Bereaved Muslims often show remarkable resignation and submission to Allah when facing the loss of a family member or friend. The influence of predestination or fate is strongly felt, particularly by Muslim Arabs. A common expression is *maktuub ala rasu*, which means, “It was written on his forehead.” This means simply that “Allah foreordained his fate to be this way.” Coupled with a belief in fate, Muslims deeply value the virtue of patience.

The value of patience can be seen in the phrase used to announce a death: “To Allah we belong and to Him we will return,” based on Surah 2:156-157: “Give glad tidings to the patient, those who when affliction befalls them, say, ‘Truly we are Allah’s and to Him we return.’” For Muslims, this encourages them to patiently accept Allah’s will in the passing of their loved one. Look for the expression “To Allah we belong and to Him we will return,” in social media posts. If you see it, you will know there has almost certainly been a bereavement in the family. Expressions regarding the importance of exercising patience in social media posts may also indicate that the person is bereaved.

In Islam, the bereaved person is urged to accept with patience and resignation Allah’s decree in taking someone’s life, even when it was tragic or premature. Lamentation is discouraged because it suggests a lack of forbearance and that the person might be questioning Allah’s wisdom in decreeing the death. In the Hadith, Muhammad expands on this concept:

Listen well. Allah does not punish the shedding of tears or the grief of the heart, but punishes or forgives the utterances of this. And he pointed to his tongue and added, “The deceased is punished for the wailing of relatives over him.” (al-Bukhari, Gardens of the Righteous, 1657, chapter 302)

The eye sheds tears and the heart is sorrowful. But we



utter only that which should please our Lord. We are indeed grieved, Ibrahim, by thy parting. (al-Bukhari, Vol. 23, Hadith 61)

Weeping is permitted, but words questioning Allah are not. What is noteworthy about the second Hadith is that Muhammad said these words over the death of his own son.

The expressions of patience often cover up the pain of the bereaved. I have seen many women crying, often in secret, and in intense despair. One friend told me that her mother was *sboura* (patient) after the loss of her daughter, but her sister later told me that she often found her mother crying in bed after everyone else had gone to sleep.

Prayers for the Dead—An Outlet

Muslims often use prayers for the dead, called *d’ua*, as an outlet for grief. This type of prayer is distinct from *salat*,

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the ritual prayers offered five times daily in which the *Fatiha*, the opening *surah* (chapter) of the Quran, is recited. *Du'a* prayers may be viewed as a supplication or request to Allah for something specific. For example, a person might pray for rain or make a supplication on behalf of the dead.

Prayers for the dead are something that Islam encourages in place of lamentation. Muslim women will often post



on social media their prayers for the dead. Here is a famous prayer from Sunan Dawud, one of the six major collections of Hadith, containing the sayings and acts of Muhammad:

O Allah, have mercy on (so and so) and forgive him/her and make his/her grave a garden of the gardens of Paradise. O Allah, it is our dead in Your protection and the cords of Your vicinity. Guard them from the trial of the grave and the punishment/torment of the Fire. You are faithful and true. Have mercy on them. You are the Forgiving and the Merciful One. (Vol. 2, page 887, no. 301)

This prayer gives insight into what Muslims believe about the afterlife, namely that after death, the soul remains with the body in the grave. This can be a time of intense punishment and suffering—a foretaste of hell—or a time of rest and bliss—a foretaste of Paradise.

Among Muslims there is much uncertainty over whether their lot in the grave will be punishment or rest. For this reason, they fear the torment of the grave.

Du'a prayers for the dead are full of requests to protect the deceased from the torment of the grave and provide a way to express grief, elements evidenced in the following prayers:

O Allah, have mercy on those who have been separated from us and You know the suffering of their loss and the measure of our yearning/longing for them. O Allah forgive them and let them pass unpunished and cool their graves and make their graves the most beautiful dwellings their eyes have fallen asleep in. And provide them with the pleasure of looking at Your generous face. (Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 2, 3109)

O Allah, we ask you this day that from our loss You make for them to be on the banks of the river Kawthar (a river in Paradise), smiling in the highest levels of the gardens (of Paradise). O Allah, illuminate their resting place and perfume its view and make their bed pleasant, and relieve them of their loneliness and desolation, and relieve their anguish, suffering and distress, and protect them from the torment of the grave and its trial/ordeal. (Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 2, 3109)

O Allah, forgive the most precious ones who have disappeared from the world, have mercy on them and provide them with blissful gardens and make us to meet with them there, O Generous One. (Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 2, 3109)

O Lord, forgive those who shared with us our Festivals for years and are absent from us. O Allah, receive them and forgive them and make their graves a garden of the gardens of Paradise. (Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 2, 3109)

Prayers are often made (and posted) on Fridays or during Ramadan and Muslim festivals. These are seen as optimal times for obtaining a favorable response from Allah. Festivals also mark opportunities to remember someone who has passed away.

Ministry to the Bereaved

The Bible exhorts us “to weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). In the Arab Muslim world, visiting the bereaved in times of mourning, and especially during the *Azza*, is very important. We learned this first in North Africa. Presence was the most important way to bring comfort. Visiting grieving people is the first step in ministering to them. The *Azza* is important but usually very busy and limited only to expressing condolences. Later visits when you can have more time in private with the person may provide more op-

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portunity for ministering to the bereaved person or family.

In the early stages of a loss, the bereaved are not ready for theological teachings or sermons; they need comfort and consolation. One should simply focus on being with the person. It also helps for the person to talk about the loss in order to get the pain out of their hearts. Ask them to share their memories of the person they have lost.

Praying for Muslims who are bereaved is also important—both when you are with them and in messages sent through social media. Muslims value and appreciate it when you pray for them. It shows you care about them.

Select Resources for Sharing Christ with Bereaved Muslim Women

- *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help* by Harriet Hill and Pat Miersma. 2016. This book has an entire chapter that contains excellent practical guidelines for ministering to the bereaved. While not written specifically for Muslims, the suggestions and guidelines are valid, worthwhile, and culturally applicable.

- *Woman to Woman: Sharing Jesus with a Muslim Friend* by Joy Loewen. 2010. Loewen, who served for many years as a missionary among Muslims, shares how telling the stories of the death of her mother and father provoked great interest on the part of her Muslim friends. They were amazed at the peace and certainty of eternal life demonstrated by Joy's parents. Sharing about heaven also provoked the same reaction.

- *Grief Stories: Good News for Those with Stories of Misfortune and Grief* by J. O. Terry. 1999. In his introduction, the author points out that among Muslim women in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia there is a custom of sharing stories of misfortune, suffering, and grief that have befallen them. It is customary for the women to gather and begin to tell their stories. He notes that the more persistent ones and those stories possessing the greatest misfortune and suffering prevail. Those who have had no misfortunes happen to them simply have no story to tell and keep silent. There are exceptions to this custom; for example, in parts of the Arabian Peninsula, women seem more reserved and are afraid that practicing this custom would be casting doubt on Allah and his will.

Here is a particularly poignant observation contained in the introduction:

There is a strictly enforced protocol among the many groups about what kind of stories can be told and the manner in which the stories are told. For some, there is a rhythmic pattern to the stories. Practices and customs may vary, but the central thing remains in the telling of the misfortune or grief stories among a woman's peers. Since this is an area of intense interest to women of these religious backgrounds and among these cultures,

it should provoke some interest among the women to hear stories of other women who suffered in some way or another.

The author responded to this cultural framework by developing a series of stories from the Bible that are adapted and shaped for Muslim women who have suffered loss. The purpose is not to evangelize them, but rather to capture their attention and interest through stories of women from God's Word who faced loss. This not only allows God's Word to speak into their lives through the biblical examples, but it also stimulates a desire to hear more from God's Word.

- *You Know My Sorrows* by Greg W. 2021. My husband, Greg, wrote this book after observing three families we know who faced bereavement in 2019. It looks at a series of stories from God's Word that explore the issue of grief with the purpose of showing how we can find hope in the midst of loss. *You Know My Sorrows* is available as a digital download (English or English-Arabic digilot) at www.al-menara.org

The first chapter of Greg's book takes a closer look at Job. In the course of one day, Job receives four messages, each bearing separate news that his livestock, servants, and ten children have all died due to marauding invaders or natural causes. A large part of his suffering consisted of an extraordinary burden of bereavement. Initially, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing, even after his second test when he was struck with terrible sores. But after sitting in silence with his friends for seven days, he opens his mouth and curses the day of his birth. He cannot understand why all this was happening. Many words are spoken, and in the end, God steps in and speaks. He did not answer any of Job's questions, but just the fact that He spoke was enough to bring Job comfort. He now knows God has not forgotten him.

Muslims are familiar with Job, as he is one of Islam's easily recognizable prophets. Muslims know about his suffering and patience. In fact, Job (Ayoub) is a very common first name in the Arab world. Unlike the biblical account, Muslims believe Job was fully aware that Satan was causing his suffering. From the biblical account, we know from the first two chapters that Satan was responsible. However, Job was not privy to this information. All he saw was that in one day, he lost all his possessions and his sons and daughters, and on another day, he was struck with terrible sores.

The Job narrative provides a good connection for us to minister to Muslims who are experiencing grief. When Muslims are bereaved, pray that God will reveal himself to them just as God did to Job. We have always prayed for Jesus to reveal himself to Muslims through dreams and visions. Connecting dreams and visions with the story of Job and our Muslim friends who have suffered loss could render two positive outcomes: (1) comfort them through the appearance of Jesus, and (2) open them up to eventually hear the full truth about Jesus.

*Lisa W. is a pseudonym



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

Friday, May 5, 2023. Please pray for

...*Ilias in Hyderabad, India.* He reports: “We are seeing miracles. Last month, Jesus appeared in dreams to several Sufi Muslim brothers here and instructed them to approach Christian houses and ask for an Injil. Several of the Sufis read the Injil and are now followers of Christ.”

...*fresh Holy Spirit anointing on a Global Initiative team member* who is teaching a class on Islam and apologetics for an Asian seminary during May 8-12.

...*Abdul in Bangladesh,* who served as a Muslim imam for 25 years. Jesus came to him in a dream, after which he sought out a pastor and accepted Christ. His family insisted that he “kick Jesus out.” Abdul’s response was: “How can I kick Jesus out of my heart?”

Friday, May 12, 2023. Please pray for

...*many secret Iranian believers who have decided to return to Iran* after living for years in Europe and Turkiye. They feel they need to be in Iran and help with the house church ministries.

...*ongoing relief work in southeastern Turkiye and the Idlib province of northern Syria,* the epicenter of a February earthquake that left more than 40,000 people dead.

...*churches in Algeria.* In recent years, authorities have closed 20 churches. Only 11 churches remain open in the entire nation. Of Algeria’s population of 45 million, 97% are Muslim.

Friday, May 19, 2023. Please pray for

...*home cell groups in Tehran, Iran.* A leader says, “For security purposes, we limit each home church to 25 people. Last month we started five more groups in different parts of the city.”

...*the church in the Kaduna state of Nigeria.* In recent spates of violence, 44 Christians were killed by groups of Muslim militants. Of Nigeria’s population 218 million, 43% are Muslim.

...*the ministry of Alikhan, a convert from Islam in Kazakhstan.* Alikhan obtained a Bible in order to refute it. Upon reading the Word of God, he was convinced to follow Jesus. He said, “The Bible is living and active. When you read it, it is not uncommon to feel that it is reading you!”

Friday, May 26, 2023. Please pray for

...*the effectiveness of discipleship courses being offered to new Christians from a Muslim background* in the country of Georgia. A pastor in Tblisi has discipled new converts from Islam for the past 15 years.

...*believers to have witnessing opportunities in a Christian medical clinic in Cyprus* that assists the large number of displaced Muslim Afghans, Iraqis, and Kurds who await the opportunity to emigrate.

...*35 former Muslims from Afghanistan* who were recently baptized in their own bathtubs while awaiting visas in the country of Turkiye.

Friday, June 2, 2023. Please pray for

...*outreach ministries to Muslims in Serbia.* Most of Serbia’s 1 million Muslims are concentrated in the Sandzak region that borders Bosnia, Kosovo, and Montenegro.

...*spiritual growth for Ahmed, a former Muslim secret service policeman in North Africa.* In his testimony, he said, “I came to a house to arrest believers, but the Lord arrested me.”

...*the country of Syria.* The number of Christians in Syria has drastically dropped to an estimated 2% of the population today. Of Syria’s population of 22 million, 94% are Muslim.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Jumaa Prayer is now on
Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, June 9, 2023. Please pray for

...*Pastor Armando in northern Mozambique*. Islamic terrorists burned his home and kidnapped two of his children. Due to Islamic attacks, 700,000 people have been displaced.

...*the church in Ethiopia*. In the last few years, at least 500 Christians have been martyred by Islamic radicals. In spite of these atrocities, the Ethiopian church continues to grow.

...*a successful church plant in the Muslim area of Katantala, Uganda*. The pastor said: "I was badly beaten by the Muslims. They thought I died, but I am alive and the church is alive."

Friday, June 16, 2023. Please pray for

...*a Bible-printing ministry in the Middle East*. Their request is: "Please cover us in your prayers as we attempt to print 200,000 Bibles in Farsi, Turkish, and Arabic by the end of this year."

...*a cell group leader in Iran*, who says, "We live in both the greatest and worst of times. Thanks be to God, our house churches are packed with Muslims seekers."

...*an online twice-weekly Arabic prayer group for women in the Arabian Gulf*. Since launching a short time ago, 83 Muslim women have accepted Christ.

Friday, June 23, 2023. Please pray for

...*spiritual awakening among the world's 1.9 billion Muslims* who will celebrate the Islamic festival of Eid al-Adha—beginning on June 29 and lasting four days. The Festival of Sacrifice commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.

...*secret gatherings of believers from a Muslim background in Azerbaijan*. Hafiz says, "Muslims here actually want the gospel." Of Azerbaijan's population of 10 million, 86% are Muslim.

...*Osman, a new believer from a Muslim background in Brunei*. He says, "I was curious about the Bible. I finally got one—and after reading about Jesus, I was compelled to follow Him."

Friday, June 30, 2023. Please pray for

...*protection for Rojina in Bangladesh*. She leads evangelism teams to reach Muslims for Christ in slum areas of Dakka. She says, "Persecution is normal, so I cannot stop. Jesus is with me."

...*Bible distribution ministries in North Africa*. One leader says, "We need more Bibles. In our house churches, we don't have enough to give one to every Muslim who kneels before Christ."

...*Masyah in Afghanistan*. She says, "My life as a Muslim woman was a disaster. I went to a house meeting and heard how Jesus could change my life. He has made me into a new woman."

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*