

# Spiritually Mismatched

Avoiding the Heartache of a  
Christian-Muslim Marriage

Two gold wedding rings are shown on a dark, textured wooden surface. One ring is in the foreground, slightly overlapping the other, which is behind it. The lighting is warm, highlighting the metallic sheen of the rings.

by Donna Hardee Krstulovich

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**GLOBAL INITIATIVE  
REACHING MUSLIM PEOPLES**

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# **Spiritually Mismatched**

## **Introduction**

The phenomenon produced by globalization, international travel, immigration, and online dating sites is a rise in cross-cultural, interfaith interactions. When two people fall in love and decide to marry, both partners bring their own worldviews, family backgrounds, and expectations into the relationship. The absence or presence of faith adds another dimension to any relationship.

This booklet examines key spiritual differences by comparing and contrasting Christian and Islamic views on dating, marriage, family relationships, divorce, and children. The scenarios are composites of statements, stories, and examples of real people and true-life situations known by the author.

## **Dating a Muslim**

### **Scenario 1**

*Your Christian friend tells you she has met an incredible guy. She is dating a charming, handsome Muslim man and they are planning to get married. He is polite and respectful. She*

*loves his accent and is enamored with his exotic, intriguing culture. He showers her with compliments, tells her she is beautiful, invites her out to meals, and gives her gifts. She says, "He is more respectful than the Christian guys I have dated." She is convinced that she has met the man of her dreams. What would you tell her?*

A Christian girl who follows Jesus should first ask, "Is it biblical?" In the letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul says not to be unequally yoked to unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). Mennonite missionary and author, David Shenk, grew up in Tanzania and served for over fifty years among Muslims in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States. In his most recent book, *Christian. Muslim. Friend.*, he writes a word of caution regarding romantic relationships between a Muslim man and a Christian woman. He cautions that children belong to the husband and he will raise them as Muslims: "These realities mean it is not wise for a Muslim and a Christian to become romantically involved" (p. 100-101).

Most conservative Muslims do not date. Many Muslim families prefer arranged marriages for their children. Muslim women represent the honor of the family, so they carefully guard their daughters and do not permit them to go out alone with a man. The Prophet Muhammad said that if a man and a woman are alone, the third person in the room is Satan. Muslim men who work or study in different countries, away from family pressures and responsibilities, do not always follow their own cultural norms. A Christian

woman needs to learn about his culture and his religion even if she lives far from his country of origin.

The Quran allows a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or Christian woman, but does not allow a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man. As a Jewish American, Phyllis Chesler (2014), in her fascinating book, *American Bride in Kabul*, recounts her college days romance with her Afghan husband. Fifty years later, she describes her hard-learned lessons:

As soon as we arrived in Kabul, my Westernized husband became another person—one whom I had never before met. Thus, I learned that even a well-read scholarship student can be easily fooled by the man she loves and that a man who can easily pass for a Westerner in the West can just as easily revert to Eastern ways when he returns home. ... My husband's betrayal was not personal. It was cultural. He merely treated me as an Afghan wife, not as an American college student with serious intellectual and artistic aspirations (p. 207).

## **Scenario 2**

*Your Christian friend tells you about a recent conversation with her intelligent and charming Muslim boyfriend she met online. She really likes him. She tells him she is a Christian and he tells her, "Muslims love Jesus. Jesus is in the Quran." He tells her that Muslims and*

*Christians worship the same God. They both believe in angels, holy books, prophets, and the last day. She says, "The religions don't seem so different after all." What would you tell her?*

Many people today refer to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as "Abrahamic Religions." However, Islam rejects the key defining issues of the Christian faith—the person and deity of Jesus Christ, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Muslims say that Isa in the Quran is Jesus, but Isa is not the Son of God, or the Savior of the world, as Christians believe, but only a prophet. Islam offers no assurance of salvation. Muslims believe that Isa did not die on the cross but was taken alive to heaven and will come back as a Muslim. Because many Christian women have never studied Islam and some do not know how to defend their faith, they accept what their Muslim boyfriends say without questioning. They are drawn in by spiritual deception.

When I taught a class in the Philippines for students from all over Asia, a bright young Pakistani Christian student shared a revealing conversation he had with a Catholic girl who was on a flight with him. She told him she had a Pakistani Muslim boyfriend and they planned to marry.

Surprised, he asked, "How can you marry him since you are a Christian?"

"It doesn't matter; we are the same," she responded. "In the Quran, God is called Allah,

and Jesus is called Isa. The names are different but we worship the same God.”

“Actually we are not the same. Jesus and Isa are two different personalities. In the Bible, Jesus is the Son of God. In the Quran, Isa is only a prophet. Isa never hung on the cross for your sins, but Jesus died and hung on the cross for your sins. Jesus rose again, but Isa never rose again. So, how can we be the same?” he answered.

After this conversation, my student realized that Muslim men deceive Christian girls into marrying them by falsely saying they both worship the same God.

A Muslim husband and his family often pressure a wife to convert to Islam. A Christian nurse and a Muslim doctor worked together in England, fell in love, and decided to marry. She knew nothing about Islam. They were married in an Islamic ceremony conducted in Arabic. Without knowing what she was saying, she repeated the *shahada* (the Islamic creed). Later she was told that she had converted to Islam. She felt deceived and betrayed. They moved to his country where she recommitted her life to Jesus. She had constant struggles with her husband’s family, and eventually they moved back to England. She said that her children really struggled with identity as they did not fit into either culture.

Some Christian women marry Muslim men convinced that they will lead their husbands to

Christ. However, there are no guarantees that this will happen. In fact, many wives pray for years without seeing any movement toward Christ in their Muslim husband's life. A widowed Christian woman received a phone call from a Muslim man, a long-time family friend whose wonderful wife had recently died. He asked this widow to marry him. She was flattered. He was such a fine man and she thought she would be able to lead him to Christ. He came to the United States for the marriage, got his green card, then went back to his country, and told her never to call him again. He broke her heart.

### **Scenario 3**

*A Christian friend loves joining international students on her campus for meals and conversations. She is interested in learning about different cultures and loves to experiment with different types of cooking. She meets a Muslim student. She is impressed with his devotion to Islam. He does not drink. He prays five times a day and fasts during the month of Ramadan. His culture sounds fascinating and she appreciates his sense of family and community. He wants to marry her. What would you tell her?*

The influence of culture and religion cannot be underestimated in a marriage relationship. Cross-cultural marriages between two Christians or two Muslims from different countries will encounter cultural differences, but by practicing the same faith, the couple can experience spiritual

compatibility. In a Christian/Muslim marriage, if the Muslim man and the Christian woman are more secular and nominal in their religious practice, they will still face cultural adjustments. For a Christian to marry a Muslim who has grown up in the West, the cultural adjustment may not be as great as with a Muslim who has grown up in a predominantly Islamic society. However, if either the non-practicing Muslim or Christian begins to seriously pursue their faith and obey the teachings of their respective holy book, the spiritual differences inevitably surface, revealing the stark incompatibilities of Islam and Christianity. They will be spiritually mismatched.

Couples who remain in the wife's home country after marriage, speak the same language, and have freedom of mobility, will experience less cultural stress. Wives who return to the husband's home country face challenges with language learning, living arrangements, gender segregation, and family expectations. If she does not learn the language, she will have a hard time becoming part of his family.

I met a North American lady who married a Muslim doctor and converted to Islam. While living in the West, the family went to the mosque together and fasted during Ramadan. Her husband decided to take her and their two children back to his home country. The family no longer attended the mosque together because only men in his country attend mosque. His extended family controlled her. She had to wear

clothes from his country in order to be modest and they gave her a Muslim name. Her children suffered. She said everything changed when they moved to his country. Eventually they moved back to North America.

### **Marrying a Muslim**

Marriage is God's idea. In the book of Genesis, God created men and women in His own image, both as male and female (Gen. 1:27). Marriage is a covenant relationship with God (Mal. 2:14) between one man and one woman. Husbands leave their parents and are joined to their wives to form a new family unit (Gen. 2:24). Through marital intimacy, the husband and wife become one (Matt. 19:6; Eph. 5:31). The marriage bed is not to be shared with anyone else (Heb. 13:4). Christ compares the marriage relationship with His sacrificial love for the church, "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).

My Iranian friend who met Jesus said that in Islam the husband buys the wife. Islamic marriage is a *contract* whereas a Christian marriage is a *covenant* before God. The Quran permits a Muslim man to marry four wives, provided he treats them equally: "Marry women of your choice, two, three or four. But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one" (Quran 4:3). Christian wives feel heart-broken and betrayed if they find out that their handsome, charming Muslim husband has another wife in his home country. Even Muslim

women fear that one day their husbands will take another wife. I talked with a Pakistani Muslim woman who is the first wife of a man she rarely sees. Sadly, she told me that her husband married a Dutch woman and lives with her in Holland.

A Muslim husband has authority over his wife sexually. The Quran tells him that “your wives are as a tilth (a place of sowing seed) unto you, so approach your tilth when and how you will” (Quran 2:223). She must be available to him any time he wants. In contrast, the Bible says that “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28). The Christian husband and wife have mutual authority over each other’s bodies (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

Domestic violence occurs in every country. Whereas the Quran condones it, the Bible does not. Christian husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them (Col. 3:19). The Quran permits a husband to punish his wife for disobedience (arrogance or rebellion) by first admonishing her, then refusing to share her bed, and finally, by beating her (Quran 4:34). Muslim husbands can be very over-protective by guarding their wives and monitoring their activity because wives’ actions can reflect negatively on his honor and reputation. A woman’s freedom of movement can be curtailed because she is not trusted to go out on her own without a chaperone or be in the company of other men.

## Divorce in Islam

In the case of divorce in the West, the mother usually receives legal custody of the children and the father has visiting rights. In Islam the children belong to the father. Divorce in majority Islamic countries is easy for a man and difficult for a woman. A Muslim man can easily divorce his wife by saying "I divorce you" three times. Some of the reasons a husband divorces his wife include not bearing sons, conversion to another religion, and aging. For women, divorce is more difficult and allowed only in the case of the husband's impotence or insanity.

## The Extended Family

Initially, a Christian wife may be enamored by her Muslim husband's tightly knit family, their hospitality, and regard for community. She may not see that she is marrying the whole family with all its expectations, financial and social responsibilities, and endless obligations. In the West, the nuclear family is the main family unit. Muslim family structure is very different. His extended family will greatly influence his decisions. A Christian woman who expects to have the primary relationship with her Muslim husband will experience sadness and disappointment when her husband listens to his mother instead of her. The husband finds himself caught between his wife and mother, who both compete for his attention.

The wife of a Muslim man will generally be expected to put his family first in every way—financially and otherwise. The oldest son is responsible for the other siblings. Wives who save money for their own family become discouraged to find their husband sent the money to his relatives. A wife will be expected to entertain her husband’s extended family who may come and stay any time.

### Children Belong to the Husband

One of my most heart-breaking memories happened while traveling back into the Islamic country where I lived. I sat down to wait for my early morning flight. My attention was drawn to a European woman who was inappropriately dressed and seemed uncomfortably out of place in the room of staring men. I sat down beside her and she began to pour out her heart. She had fallen in love with a Muslim man years earlier while studying together at a university. They married and had three children. Without warning her husband took the children back to his country. Desperate and determined to find them, she was traveling to her embassy in the capital city hoping they could help her. I volunteered to drive her there and she asked me to sit in on the meeting. A very gracious embassy official motioned for us to have a seat at his desk and he listened as she painfully poured out all the difficult details. He had a far-away look in his eyes. “These mixed marriages...” he said, as his voice trailed off. “There is very little we can do.

The children belong to the father.” She begged him to do something. As we drove away, past a playground, she suddenly screamed, “There are my children!” Could it be? I stopped for her to get a closer look and she broke down in hysterical sobs when she realized they were not hers. She returned to her country alone, dejected, and heart-broken.

### **Count the Cost**

- Know what Islam actually teaches about marriage.
- Men are allowed to marry four wives.
- Husbands can discipline their wives.
- The children belong to the husband. They will be raised Muslim.
- Marriage in Islam is a contract not a covenant before God like biblical marriage.
- Jesus and Muhammad treat women radically different.

### **Conclusion**

Many Christian women who marry Muslim men, often against the advice of their families and friends, believe that their marriage will be the exception but later express deep regrets due to being spiritually mismatched. The Bible clearly states in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that a Christian should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Seek the godly counsel of your pastor. Emotional entanglement, naive thinking and spiritual deception can blind one to the

realities of the situation. Encourage Christian women who are considering marrying a Muslim man to think biblically, consider the consequences, and count the costs to avoid entering into in a spiritually mismatched marriage.