**Linger by the Well:**

**Teaching the Muslim Child**

1. **Background Knowledge – Islam**
2. The foundation of a Muslim life is built on the five pillars of Islam:

• **Shahadah:** Declaring that there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet.

• **Salat:** The ritual of praying five times a day.

• **Zakat:** Giving to the poor and needy.

• **Sawm:** Fasting and self-control during the holy month of Ramadan.

• **Hajj:** The pilgrimage to Mecca - to be made at least once in a lifetime - if the person is able.

1. Important dates in Islam

• **570:** The birth of Muhammad

• **610:** Muhammad receives his first vision in a cave near Mecca.

• **610-22:** Muhammad preaches in Mecca.

• **632:** Death of Muhammad.

• **732:** The Muslim empire reaches its furthest extent. The battle of Tours prevents further advance northwards.

• **Late 900s:** West Africa begins to convert to Islam.

• **1099:** Christian Crusaders take Jerusalem.

• **1945-60s:** Islam spreads to the West with mass migrations from Asia, Africa, and India.

• **1960s:** Many families from SE Asia and North Africa emigrate to Europe   
and the US.

• **Late 1990s**: the Taliban comes to power in Afghanistan.

• **2001:** Muslim extremists attack the United States.

1. Sacred holidays in Islam

• Islam has only a few holidays but they are very important to Muslims.

• **Id Al-Adha:** The feast of the sacrifice to remember the faith of Ibrahim (Abraham).

• **Ramadan:** One month of day-time fasting ending with Eid Al-Fitr –   
a day of celebration.

• **Ashura:** One day of voluntary fasting (Shiite festival).

• **Mawlid an-Nabi:** The birthday of the prophet Muhammad.

1. Who is God/Allah according to Islam?

Allah is a name used by Muslims, Christians and is also found in the Arabic Bible. The one-ness of Allah is a very important attribute to Muslims and is the reason why so many of them condemn the Christian teaching of the Trinity. According to the Qur’an, Allah has 99 attributes but does not have the attribute of love.

1. Who is Muhammad according to Islam?

Muhammad lived from 570 to 632 AD in the Arabian Peninsula. After an extended time of meditation and prayer in a cave outside Mecca, he received various revelations and began preaching which gained him a few followers. After some hostility, he fled to Medina where he united the local tribes. After several years of fighting and wars he was able to conquer Mecca and beyond, making him the most influential leader of the Middle East.

1. Who is Jesus according to Islam?

Jesus is Issa the son of Myriam (Mary). He was born of a virgin. He never committed any sin because God protected him. He performed many miracles. Jesus did not die but ascended to heaven before the cross. One day, Jesus will return and rule the earth.

1. What is sin according to Islam?

Sins are actions that Allah does not permit such as eating pork, drinking wine, murdering, committing adultery or turning to another religion. Sin does not separate people from Allah eternally because works or Allah’s mercy can expiate it. Sin is not something you inherit but is something you commit by choice.

1. What is salvation according to Islam?

A Muslim must do many good deeds in order to attain salvation. He or she must also rely on the mercy of Allah. A Muslim will never have assurance of salvation.

1. What is Paradise according to Islam?

Paradise is not entering into the presence of a holy God but into a perfect place where all physical desires are gratified.

1. What is the Qur’an according to Islam?

The Qur’an is the “Word of God” received by Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. It is the only holy book, which God has protected from distortion.

**Note:** Up to 60% of the Qur’an originates from the Bible - directly quoted, summarized, interpreted or altered. For this reason, we as Christians can use appropriate quotes from the Qur’an helping to bridge the gap from our faith to that of a Muslim (How Can the Secret of the Unity of the Holy Spirit be Explained to a Muslim 2002).

1. **Being an Immigrant Muslim Child in America**

Of the USA population, 2.11% is Muslim (muslimpopulationcom). Many Muslim children grow up as second or third generation immigrants in Europe and the USA. Other Muslim children come as refugees. A total of 38,901 Muslim refugees entered the U.S. in fiscal year 2016, making up almost half (46%) of the nearly 85,000 refugees who entered the country in that period (PEW 2016) Some of these children have suffered emotional and physical traumas and others suffer from the traumas of their parents. Both immigrant and refugee children face special challenges as they try to respect their background culture while also trying to settle well into another culture.

According to *“A Worldview Approach to Ministry Amongst Muslim Women” s*ome of the most common challenges are:

1. Families become more protective than they were in their home culture. Children experience a gap between values inside and outside the home. Children often swing back and forth between these values. Children often lack roots in both the Muslim culture and the host culture and thus experience identity crisis from time to time.
2. Fathers are often away from home and the role of parenthood falls on the mothers.
3. The traditional extended family structure often changes in the new culture. Stay-at-home mothers feel alone and depend more on the children than they did in the home culture.
4. Children and adults interpret cultural and social practices from the home culture as religious norms.
5. Children feel a sense of injustice as they experience the host culture rejecting Islam. This can lead the boys especially towards more radical forms of Islam with quick-fix answers to difficult questions (Strong and Page 2006).
6. **Spiritual and Social Longings of the Muslim Child**
7. Love

In Islam God is not a loving God. It is important to show and teach the children that God is love and that He loves them very much, cares for each individual child and wishes to establish a personal relationship with everybody.

1. Jesus as the light

Due to the many occult practices of folk Islam, many Muslim children have a lot of fear – especially of darkness. It is very helpful to teach John 8:12 to these children and share how Jesus can light up the darkness (sin, sorrows and fears) in their hearts.

1. Shame

Most Muslims grow up with a group identity and the fear of social alienation or shame can be very strong. Muslims generally do not see themselves as sinners who need forgiveness but instead as dirty people who need cleansing (Nichols and Corwin 2010). It can be very useful to focus on these aspects in your teaching. Be aware that it takes time to help the children understand their need for a Savior.

1. True forgiveness

As many Muslims continually hold past sins against each other and do not know biblical forgiveness, it will be very useful when you can show and tell of true forgiveness. Many Muslims are often “behind” with their spiritual obligations of fasting, praying etc. and therefore it is important to teach about salvation by grace continually (Strong and Page 2006, 98).

1. Miracles

Many Muslims turn to folk religion and occult practices in times of sickness and other needs (Strong and Page 2006, 99) For this reason, the offer of prayer from a Christian can be a very useful and effective ministry while reaching out to Muslims.

1. A Sense of Belonging and Purpose

Many Muslim children in Europe experience a lack of belonging. As they grow older, a good number of them experience unemployment and poor future prospects which can lead to unhealthy radicalization of their faith (Chapman 2014). In order to counteract this, Christians can give Muslim children and youth an opportunity to belong to a community with offers attractive activities and a just, caring and loving fellowship. This can be a strong and important outreach for a local church and also help the Muslim children feel part of a community.

1. **Barriers and Bridges**

Many Muslims have barriers against Christians and Christianity – often caused by misunderstandings. The following is a list of the most common barriers and some initial explanations (bridges) that will help children’s workers contextualize the Gospel as they work with Muslim children. The goal is not to make your message Islamic but to present it in a way that makes sense to a Muslim audience. In the resource list at the end of these notes, you will find more help. As an overall principle, it is good to remember to never criticize or degrade Islam or Muhammad.

1. The Trinity

**Barrier:** Muslims learn that Christians believe in three gods (1+1+1 = 3).

**Bridge:** We must continually teach that we only believe in one God but it is God in three persons. It is difficult to illustrate the concept of the Trinity. Illustrations have been used, are insufficient if they stand on their own. The best illustration is the Triangle since without any one portion it would cease to be a triangle (Zacharias 2010). From time to time, it is also good to share that the Arabic names for God and Jesus are Allah and Issa. In this way, the stories from the Bible become more acceptable to the Muslim children.

1. Jesus as the Son of God

**Barrier:** Muslims take great offence when we call Jesus the son of God. The Qur’an states, “Cursed be anyone, who says, ‘Christ is the son of God!’” (Sura 9:30). Muslims learn that Christians believe God had sex with Mary in order   
to conceive Jesus.

**Bridge:** We must explain what the title “Son of God” means. Jesus had no earthly father. In the first meetings with Muslim children, it might be wise not to call Jesus the Son of God but instead emphasize that He was sent from God and He was God. In the Arabic language, there are two words for son. Arabic Christians call Jesus “Ibn Allah” (originated from God, adopted by God) and never “Walad Allah” (God’s physical son) (Mansoor 2017).

1. Jesus Dying on the Cross

**Barrier:** Many Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross because God is just and would never abandon Christ nor use him as a mediator. Many Muslims associate the cross with various religious and political crusades and hate it.

**Bridge:** Many Muslims believe in the predestination of all things. When we share certain stories from the Old Testament with the children, we can share how God used these stories in the Holy Book, The Bible, to point to the future sacrifice of Christ. It is also important to share how Jesus himself spoke beforehand of his death.

1. The Bible

**Barrier:** Muslims have learned that the Bible is corrupted (McLathchie 2014). Islam teaches that both the Torah (books of Moses) and the Injil (the Gospels) were corrupted or misinterpreted by Jews and Christians (Ankerburg and Burroughs 2008, 69). Initially the Bible was accepted

**Bridge:** The Qur’an states that the Bible originated from heaven and that it is impossible for God’s Word to change: ‘Nothing could ever alter God’s promises’ (Surah 10:64). Muhammad himself believed that the Bible that existed in his day was authentic. (Qu’ran, Surah 3:3, 4:162-163, 5:58-59, 6:154-157, 9:111, 21:7, 21:48-50, 35:31, 40:69-70, 46:12, 46:29-30) (Hicham 2013). More importantly: We must faithfully teach God’s Word and trust that God will use it to speak to the hearts of the children. It is also important to treat your Bible with great respect and for example, never leave it on the floor.

1. Israel

**Barrier:** Most Muslims hold a strong grudge against Jews and Israel due to the many conflicts between Israel and the surrounding countries.

**Bridge:** Try to avoid using the word Israel as it immediately sidetracks the children and they might leave the meeting. If asked where the story took place, you might want to say, ‘Some call it Palestine, others Israel.’ If asked for your opinion about the conflict, share how you know that many unjust things have happened in this area and that God is against killing and hatred. He wants peace amongst all people.   
As quickly as possible continue your story.

1. True Christians

**Barrier:** Many Muslims think that all westerners are Christians. They condemn the typical western life style as seen on TV and in movies.

**Bridge:** You must be sure to be a good example. Be careful of how you dress and how you interact with the opposite gender. The Muslim faith is a public faith and you must share how you pray and live your Christian life. From time to time, make sure to mention God’s Law and the Ten Commandments.

More information on barriers and bridges can be found on the webpage of Arab World Ministry of Pioneers: [*http://www.awm-pioneers.org/category/resources/be-inspired/thehicham-series/*](http://www.awm-pioneers.org/category/resources/be-inspired/thehicham-series/)

1. **Salvation of Muslim Children**

In most cases, it will be a long process for a Muslim child to make a decision for Christ. You will probably not see children coming to faith after hearing a single presentation of the Gospel. This is because the Gospel message is a completely new concept for a Muslim child and because the child has been taught the importance of being loyal to Islam and to his or her family.

The LIFE Scale (see appendix) developed by L. D. Waterman 10 might be a help and an encouragement for children’s workers because it emphasizes the process of following Christ and shows some important steps and developments along the way.

As we guide the children towards a decision for Christ, it will also be useful to keep in mind to communicate basic Biblical truths through Bible stories continually. These stories will serve as an anchor to keep the truths in the hearts of the children. In the stories, you should place great importance on the person and works of Jesus Christ and depend on the Holy Spirit to let these truths take root and grow in the lives of the children. Continue to share the authenticity of the Bible. Tell the children that believing is a personal choice. Help the children memorize key Bible verses so that they can take God’s Word with them everywhere. Remind the children that they can pray everywhere.

1. **Follow Up**

Be aware that it can be a big social challenge for a Muslim child to make a personal commitment to follow Christ. Do not force the child to share his or her newfound faith with others but trust that the Holy Spirit will guide the child to do so at the right time. Encourage the child to show his or her faith in actions and attitudes. Be sensitive about giving a New Testament to a believing child because it can cause a huge conflict in his family. Instead, you might want to encourage the children to memorize Scripture at the meetings or read the Bible in the library from time to time.

1. **Helpful Hints and Principles in the Outreach to Muslim Children**
2. Spiritual
3. Place great importance on telling Bible stories. Many Muslims come from an oral background. Find ways to contextualize these stories to the Muslim culture. Show great respect for your Bible and handle it with care. When you begin a new ministry, you might want to focus on Old Testament heroes, which the Muslim families are already familiar with such as Joseph, David and Daniel. After a while, you can continue with stories about Jesus.
4. Let prayer be a foundation in your work. Let the children see you pray and model a relationship with God. Tell them that it is important to show respect for God while we pray. Tell the children what you expect from them during prayer time even if they are not participating. Ask the children if they know of anyone who is in need of prayer and that you could pray for. Have a leader ready to share a friend’s prayer request in case nobody speaks. Depend on God to let the prayer time be more and more personal as time goes by. Muslims pray with their eyes open looking towards heaven and with hands open (as if receiving a gift). You might want to use the same body language in order to avoid the children feeling awkward about prayer time. Be ready to share many everyday stories about how God answered prayer. Muslims relate very well to stories.
5. Pray for wisdom, guidance and protection. Be sure to have a group of committed prayer partners. Send these prayer partners regular email updates with encouragements and prayer requests.
6. Social
7. Many Muslims place great value on relationships. When Jesus visited Samaria, he took time to linger by the well. By investing his time, he connected with a woman who later led her whole town to Jesus. You must be willing to invest your time as well and form relationships with the families of the children you meet. You might even want to visit the families at times of celebrations (Christian, Muslim or family events) and bring small gifts with you.
8. You must value both boys and girls equally. Teach how God is a loving father and what this means to us.
9. Continue to show love and forgiveness despite bad behavior. Many Muslims will be very impressed by this. Show warmth, care and encouragement. Many Muslim children long for someone to notice them.
10. Do not be afraid to set more rules and regulations than you would normally do. Many Muslim children are used to this way of discipline. Keep your word! Be fair! Keep order!
11. Male leaders are important if you want to attract Muslim boys to the meetings.
12. Be careful how you relate to the opposite gender. Be modest in your clothing.
13. Be aware that in many Muslim communities, people keep an eye on each other. It might be wise to “go under the radar” and widely publicize the children meetings. It might be wiser to have the location of the meetings on the outskirts of the area than in the center so that it will be easier for the children to participate more or less unnoticed.
14. Begin the children meetings with games where all children can join in. When you move on to snack time and the Bible story, make sure that only those children with parental permission stay.
15. Watch out for conflicts between the children – if you do not help solve the problems, it can ruin the work in a few weeks!

Appendix 1

The Life Scale

Developed by L. D. Watermann

Levels of Commitment to Christ

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5  Deep and primary love for Christ | 5  Solidly holding to orthodox and biblical beliefs | 5  Religious activities consistently aimed at glorying Christ | 5  Very intentional attempts to live all of life in conformity to Christ’s will | 5  Identity solidly rooted in personal relationship with Jesus | 5  Clear identification with Jesus in all on-going social groups | 5  Labeled by all as a group associated with Christ | 5  Functioning largely in the patterns of a culture other than one’s birth culture |
| 4  Real but mixed affection for Christ | 4  Generally holding to orthodox and biblical beliefs | 4  Religious activities generally aimed at glorifying Christ | 4  Tends to live in conformity to Christ’s will | 4  Identity generally found in personal relationship with Jesus | 4  Identification with Jesus in most social groups | 4  Labeled by some as a group associated with Christ | 4  Adopting many elements of another culture-multiple cultural functioning |
| 3  Significantly divided loyalty | 3  Fuzzy and confused on some major biblical beliefs | 3  Religious activities engaged in with little  or no  intentionality | 3  A mixture of genuine biblical and worldly/  Sinful lifestyle habits | 3  Spiritual identify fuzzy or unclear | 3  Identification with Jesus in some social groups | 3  Collective identity unclear | 3  Evaluating many aspects of birth culture as they become aware of other cultures |
| 2  General desires away from Christ and toward other things | 2  Tentatively holding to some major unorthodox/  unbiblical  beliefs | 2  Religious activities generally for conformity, merit or selfish gain | 2  Tends to follow lifestyle patterns of the world and sinful nature | 2  Identity general found in something other than following Jesus | 2  Identification with Jesus in few social groups | 2  Labeled by most as a group no associate with Christ | 2  Functioning largely in the patterns of own birth culture |
| 1  Enmity toward Christ and passion for false “gods” | 1  Staunchly holding to numerous unorthodox and unbiblical beliefs | 1  Religious activities very intentionally for conformity, merit or selfish gain | 1  Strongly ingrained in patterns of the world and sinful nature | 1  Identify solidly rooted in something other than following Jesus | 1  No known identification with Jesus in any social group | 1  Clearly labeled as not a group associate with Christ | 1  Functioning essentially in the patterns of own birth culture |
| **Heart**  Affections:  Toward Christ vs. away from Christ | **Beliefs**  **(doctrine)**  Biblical vs. unbiblical | **Religious activities**  To glorify Christ vs. human conformity, attempted merit or selfish gain | **Lifestyle**  Increasing conformity to Christ’s will vs. patterns of the world and sinful nature | **Core Identity**  “Who I am in my inner self” (identity privately experienced by the individual) | **Social identity**  “Who I am in relation to my group or groups” | **Collective identity**  “My group’s identity in the eyes of the world identity as defined by the group” | **Cultural embeddedness**  **(non-spiritual aspects)**  How much a person or group is connected with or functioning in their birth culture’s patterns vs. other cultures’ patterns |

Our goal is to help children move from point 1 to 5 on the first seven different dimensions of life. The last dimension does not necessarily relate to religion but it included because it can give you important information about an individual child or group. It will be helpful to try to locate individual children or groups on the chart from time to time and to ask ourselves and God how we can best help the children develop further and reach a point where they have made personal commitment to Christ.

Based on concepts from “LIFE Scale: Exploring Eight Dimensions of Life in Christ” by L. D. Waterman. International Journal of Frontier Missiology (31:3), Fall 2014, p. 149-157, [http://www.ljfm.org/PDFs­\_UFM/31\_3](http://www.ljfm.org/PDFs_UFM/31_3) PDFs/IJFM\_31\_3-Waterman.pdf

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