



Full of Grace and Truth: Toward Christ-like Relationships with Muslims

by Peace Catalyst International

Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). As his followers, we aspire to walk in the fullness of grace and truth in our relationships with Muslims. We seek to be agents of peace in a polarized world.

Together Christians and Muslims make up over half of the human race. Thus, peaceful relations between these faith communities stand as one of the central challenges of this century. But the pathway to peace faces troublesome obstacles.

The relationship between Christians and Muslims is supercharged by the so-called “war on terror,” and exacerbated by the fact that Western countries are perceived as “Christian” by many Muslims. The threat of terrorism, negative stereotypes of Muslims, and ignorance have caused the church to shrink back from obeying the fundamental biblical commands to love and bear witness.

Moreover, just as there is significant theological, cultural and ideological diversity among Christians, so too is there among Muslims. The spectrum of Muslim perspectives and practices ranges from secularists, modernists, traditionalists, and fundamentalists to a miniscule minority of violent extremists.

It has been our privilege to enjoy warm hospitality and deep interaction with Muslims around the world. They are neighbors, friends and colleagues who have challenged, clarified and encouraged our thinking about peacemaking.

In honor of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, Peace Catalyst International affirms ten biblical guidelines that will enable Jesus' followers to serve as his representatives in relationship with Muslims of every persuasion. The following guidelines grow out of the Grace and Truth Project, reflecting Peace Catalyst's revised, personalized version of these affirmations (see <http://www.peace-catalyst.net/training/grace--truth>).

1. Be Jesus-Centered in our Interaction
2. Be Truthful and Gracious in our Words and Witness
3. Be Wise in our Words and Witness
4. Be Respectful and Bold in our Witness
5. Be Prudent in our Globalized World
6. Be Persistent in our Call for Religious Freedom
7. Be Peaceable and Uncompromising in our Dialogue
8. Be Loving toward All
9. Differentiate between the Role of Church and State
10. Support and Challenge the State

1. Be Jesus-Centered in our Interaction

Our focus is Jesus because he is the heart of the gospel. We say with Paul: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2 NIV). We affirm a Jesus-centered approach to Muslims because it highlights the treasure of the gospel. It does not confuse the good news with Christendom, patriotism or our civilization.



Therefore, we seek to keep Jesus at the center of our lives, conversations and relationships with Muslims.

2. Be Truthful and Gracious in our Words and Witness

We seek to be accurate when we speak about Muslims and their faith. Overstatement, exaggeration and words taken out of context should not be found among followers of Jesus, for he calls us to be careful about the words we speak (Matt 12:36). God commands us not to bear false witness against our neighbor (Ex 20:16) and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matt 7:12). Thus we strive to speak truthfully about Muslims, to respect Muslims' own interpretation of themselves, and not to compare the best interpretation and practice of our faith with the worst interpretation and practice of theirs.

The content of our message is important, and so is the manner in which we convey it. As those who have received grace, we are to convey grace (Eph 4:29 NASB). Paul says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace ...so that you may know how to answer everyone (Col 4:6 NIV). The Bible calls us to truthful accuracy and fullness of grace.

Therefore, we seek to be accurate and positive in our witness. We also seek to be gracious in our communication, using kind words, even when we need to speak "hard" truths.

3. Be Wise in our Words and Witness

God's Word calls us to walk in wisdom and to share our faith wisely. "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity" (Col 4:5). What does wisdom look like in practice?

According to James, “the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:17-18 NIV). Peace is the ruling idea in this passage. According to James, heavenly wisdom creates a peacemaking community.

Therefore, we seek to walk in God’s peace-producing wisdom.

4. Be Respectful and Bold in our Witness

In the spirit of the Prince of Peace, respectful witness focuses on giving a positive presentation of the gospel. It does not attack the other or avoid presenting truth. As the apostle Peter says: “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). Numerous biblical examples (i.e. Acts 4:31; 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 17:30-31; 19:8) invite us to emulate the boldness of early followers of Jesus in sharing the good news.

Therefore, in obedience to the Scripture, we seek to be both respectful and bold in our witness.

5. Be Prudent in our “Glocalized” World

In the past, what we said within our community stayed in our community. But due to the Internet today our words ricochet around the world, for good or for bad. When we try to explain who we are, what we believe, what we do, and why we do it, our words may reach beyond our primary audience and enter the global marketplace of ideas. After saying something hurtful, whether intentionally or not, we may try to clarify our statement. But the damage is already done. Conversely,

when we say something positive, the kindness of our words may extend way beyond the circle of our community. Words are powerful.

Therefore, we seek to be prudent in our communication. A truly wise person uses few words (Prov 17:27 NLT).

6. Be Persistent in our Call for Religious Freedom

We affirm the right of religious freedom for every person and community. We defend the right of Muslims to express their faith respectfully among Christians, and the right of Christians to express their faith respectfully among Muslims. Moreover, we affirm the right of Muslims and Christians alike to change religious beliefs, practices and/or affiliations according to their conscience (2 Cor 4:2). Thus we stand against all forms of religious persecution toward Muslims, Christians, or anyone else.

We concur with Pastor John Piper's incisive rationale for this perspective: Christians are tolerant of other faiths not because there is no absolute truth or that all faiths are equally valuable, but because the one who is Absolute Truth, Jesus Christ, forbids the spread of his truth by the sword. Christian tolerance is the commitment that keeps lovers of competing faiths from killing each other. Christian tolerance is the principle that puts freedom above forced conversion, because it's rooted in the conviction that forced conversion is no conversion at all. Freedom to preach, to teach, to publish, to assemble for worship—these convictions flow from the essence of the Christian faith. (see www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/subjection-to-god-and-subjection-to-the-state-part-4). Therefore, we strive to protect religious freedom for all.

7. Be Peaceable and Uncompromising in our Dialogue

Dialogue between Muslims and Christians provides us with opportunities to understand Muslims, build relationships, engage in peacemaking and share an accurate explanation of our faith . Through dialogue we seek to reframe the Muslim-Christian relationship so it is no longer perceived as a “clash of civilizations.”

But this does not mean we dissolve our distinctive, historic beliefs into an imaginary “one world religion.” Rather, it means each community seeks to be authentically faithful to their historic beliefs and finds within those beliefs the resources to reach out to one another in love.

Therefore, we strive to work toward mutual respect, graciously bearing witness to our faith, working toward religious freedom.

8. Be Loving toward All

The world’s Muslims are our neighbors, as Jesus used the term (Luke 10:29-37). The command of God to his people stands for all time: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18; Luke 10:27b). How can followers of Christ take seriously Jesus’ command to love our neighbor, and at the same time address the real threat of terrorism by those who position themselves as our enemies? Jesus’ teaching about love of enemy (Luke 6:35) is among the most radical and most ignored commands in the Bible. We do not want to engage in the “hermeneutics of evasion” – figuring out ways to interpret Jesus’ command so it doesn’t apply to our lives.

Both peacemakers and those who love their enemies are described as “sons [or daughters] of God” (Matt 5:9, 44; Luke 6:35). They are called children of

God because they are acting like their Father, the God of Peace (Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23). In other words, peacemakers and those who love their enemies demonstrate their authenticity as children of God by their words and acts of peace. Jesus modeled this by loving us and laying down his life for us, “while we were enemies” (Rom 5:10; cf. Col 1:21). After his enemies nailed him to the cross, he prayed, “Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Therefore, we aspire to demonstrate the gospel with self-giving, sacrificial love toward our Muslim neighbors and toward the small minority of Muslims who might position themselves as our enemies.

9. Differentiate between the Role of Church and State

In Romans 12:9-13:10, Paul describes a godly response to evil. He portrays a sharp contrast between how God’s people are to respond to evil versus how the government should respond.

Jesus’ followers are called to a peacemaking ethic of sacrificial love. Paul begins the section with an appeal to love (Rom 12:9-10) and closes the section by a repeated call to loving our neighbor (13:8-10). Moreover, he exhorts believers to bless their persecutors, respond non-violently to evil and seek peace with all.

By contrast, the state is called to implement justice. Governments stand accountable to God for supporting the good and punishing the evil. The state must address expressions of evil such as terrorism and torture.

Therefore, we distinguish between the role of church and the role of the state.

10. Support and Challenge the State

Followers of Christ should submit to their government, pray for their government (1 Tim 2:1-4) and support their government's struggle against various manifestations of evil. But exactly how this finds expression varies according to a person's conscience, especially when it comes to war. Some of us embrace pacifism, others "Just-War theory" and still others "Just Peacemaking".

Followers of Christ also play a prophetic role towards the government. Scripture affirms cases of civil disobedience by God's people (Ex 1:15-20; Daniel 3:9-18; 6:6-10); the most obvious case illustrated by the apostles who boldly affirmed before the religious authorities: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Therefore, we pray for our government and engage politically in accordance with our conscience. We also speak out against governmental policies and practices that we believe are unjust toward Muslims.

Conclusion

These ten affirmations describe how we can be agents of peace in a polarized world. They describe what it means for Peace Catalyst International to truly love Muslims and faithfully bear witness to Christ.

