

Why 59 Percent of Evangelical Pastors are Wrong About Islam

What pops into the mind of the average American if you ask him or her about Muslims?

Is it something like this? “Muslims are terrorists.” “I fear Muslims. They want to take over our country.” “I am very suspicious of all Muslims.”

If so, I fully understand. Many media outlets paint an ugly, distorted and inaccurate picture of Muslims.

According to Ed Stetzer of LifeWay Research, [59 percent of evangelical pastors](#) say Islam is dangerous and promotes violence. They agree with Franklin Graham’s characterization of Islam as “a very evil and a very wicked religion.”

Yes, there are a miniscule number of violent extremists who want to do us harm. But the vast majority of Muslims are just like you and me. They want to be faithful to God, love their families and be productive members of society.

So, how should followers of Jesus respond to the realities of terrorism and the exaggerations of media?

1. Pursue facts.

We need to love God with our minds and learn the facts about Islam. This means we practice the art of evaluation.

We don’t believe everything that comes across our computer screen or fills our inbox. We critically assess what we read or watch.

The Muslim world is radically diverse and pluralistic. There are more than 1.5 billion Muslims in the world representing more than 2,000 different ethnic groups.

There are two major sects (Sunni and Shia) and eight legal schools of Islam. In addition, there is a strong mystical movement within Islam called Sufism, which influences a large percentage of Muslims. There are Muslim secularists,

modernists, traditionalists, fundamentalists and terrorists.

So, when someone makes a comment that Muslims believe this or Islam is like that, you need to ask, "Which Islam?"

For example, "Does Islam oppress women?" I believe women are oppressed in Afghanistan. But the country next door, Pakistan, once had a female head of state - Benazir Bhutto.

With all of its problems, the country of Pakistan has, in some ways, been more progressive on women's issues than the United States.

I addressed how to use facts to overcome your fear of the other in [my book](#), "Grace & Truth: Toward Christlike Relationships with Muslims."

It is important that whenever someone makes a comment that Muslims believe this or Islam teaches this, you should ask yourself and the other person, "Which Muslims?" or "Which school of Islam?"

2. Live in faith rather than fear.

Christian faith teaches us that "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). We overcome fear when we submit to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible also teaches that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). In other words, we dislodge the crippling effects of fear by experiencing God's love (1 John 4:16) and obeying his commands to love (1 John 2:5).

Finally, the command to "fear not!" is one of the most frequent commands in the whole Bible. While the media says, "Fear lots!" the Bible responds with "fear nots!"

Here are two suggestions for how to fear not. First, memorize 2 Timothy 1:7. Second, practically demonstrate your faith by praying for Muslims, blessing them and doing good to them (See Romans 12:14-21).

3. Build friendships.

I often get criticized because I love Muslims and share positively about them. One of my favorite responses to an irate critic is this: "Do you have any Muslim

friends?" They usually don't.

A practical way to address our fears and prejudices is to actually get to know a Muslim. Nothing beats the personal touch. If you make friends with a Muslim, you will see things differently.

This is a huge part of what my organization, Peace Catalyst International, does. We organize loving initiatives that create safe spaces and foster authentic relationships between Christians and Muslims.

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