

"This book offers vitally needed bridges of understanding and compassion between different worldviews, theologies, and historical experiences. As Dr. Jabbour states in his introductory remarks, this is a book intended to help Western Christian readers better comprehend Muslim perspectives and beliefs and thus dispel commonly held misunderstandings and dehumanizing stereotypes."

—DR. PHILIP ZIMBARDO, professor emeritus, Stanford University;
author of *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*;
also known for his 1971 Stanford Mock Prison experiment

"One of the finest and most insightful books on the beliefs and cultural context of Islam. Every Christian seeking to understand the Muslim worldview and the relationship between East and West must read this book."

—ALI ELHAJJ, director, The Bethlehem Christmas Project

"'Why do they hate us?' Nabeel Jabbour's timely book tells us why and what we can do about it."

—JAMES FOX, British film actor, *The Servant* ('63), *Remains of the Day* ('93),
and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* ('04)

"Awesome, excellent, well written, clear—what a gift! It is a must-read."

—CHUCK WENGER, Christian leader, Board Member -
Middle East Peace Initiative

"This book has brought me the greatest insight and understanding I have ever had into the ways in which Muslims see us as Christians. It is challenging and disturbing in the way attitudes are exposed. It is a must-read."

—SANDRA WHEATLEY, England

"Nabeel Jabbour's important new book will open your eyes to the real world of Islam, not the one so often caricatured in the media. Deeply biblical with study and discussion questions, the book is based on a lifetime of dialogue and witness among Muslims. This book will warm your heart and fire your soul to reach the 'other' children of Abraham for Jesus."

—REVEREND STEPHEN SIZER, author

DR. NABEEL T. JABBOUR

THE CRESCENT THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CROSS

Insights from an Arab Christian

NAVPRESS 

CHAPTER 11

SHAME, DEFILEMENT, AND FEAR

The facts of the gospel as they are summarized in booklets such as the "Four Spiritual Laws" should be sufficient for anyone around the world if they truly want to know the truth.

— A NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN

In presenting to me the Muslims' worldview, Ahmad said, *"When I talk with you it feels like you are laying a guilt trip on me. Does your message have anything to say to me about my shame, my defilement, and my fear?"*

On one of my trips to a third world Muslim country, I was invited to speak to a group of about forty Muslim villagers. Two-thirds of them were men and one-third women. They ranged from the age of twenty-seven to sixty-five. These people chose to come to the capital city in a bus in response to the invitation of the Christian development agency

that was doing microprojects to help them succeed in life. These people had heard very little about Christ and the Bible because of limited freedom by the development agency staff.

Because I am an Arab and have read the Qur'an in the original language, I had a platform with these people. When I arrived at the meeting room, it was filled with forty guests who were sitting on the floor in a U shape, the women on one side and the men on the other two sides. There were two chairs facing these people, one for me and the other for my interpreter. I had assumed that I would have one hour to speak, but when I got there I discovered that I was being given two full hours. I had mixed feelings. I felt honored for being given that privilege; at the same time I felt sad for these people sitting on the floor for two whole hours. If I had to sit on the floor like they did, I would be crippled because of my lower back problems.

Before coming to that meeting I had prayed and thought about how to present the good news of the gospel to them using their own paradigms. I decided not to use texts that I have used in the past. Instead, I decided to use Mark chapter 5 with its three very relevant stories.

THE FIRST STORY

The first story in Mark 5:1-20 is about a wild, demon-possessed man by the name of Legion — a reference to the many demons that possessed him. This man was very strong and lived among the tombs. We read that "no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. . . . No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones" (verses 3-5).

He became an outcast not only from his family and extended family but also from the people in the town. I can imagine the horror

stories that must have developed as part of the folklore that surrounded that man. It was quite a setting for these horror stories: the graveyard and the tombs at night, the breaking chains, a demon-possessed man crying out. Even the bravest of the brave must have avoided that area of town, especially at night.

As I got into this story I could sense that I was connecting well with these forty villagers. Folk Islam exists in every Muslim country in the world. It is the religion of the poor and the uneducated. The theology of folk Islam comes from three sources — a little from the Qur'an, a bit more from Muslim traditions, and a great deal from folk superstitions. According to Bill Musk in his book *The Unseen Face of Islam*, folk Islam considers the spirits (*jinn*) a separate species of beings. They are created out of fire (see Surah 55:15) and are somewhere between angels and men. They belong to the world of spirits, yet they live within the human domain. They form three categories: good *jinn*, evil *jinn*, and neutral *jinn*. Fear of *jinn*, or the desire to subdue them and use their services, is very big in folk Islam. *Jinn* exist in certain places, such as graveyards, and afflict people during certain activities, such as sexual intercourse or defecation.

As I got into the details of the story and as I reached its climax, the people's eyes were wide open when they saw Jesus' power over the demonic. They were amazed that the demons recognized who Jesus was and were afraid of Him. The demon-possessed man came to Jesus, and, as the Bible says, "He ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!'" (verses 6-7).

Everyone in that room knew that this demon-possessed man was worthless. He was a menace to the town and to the neighboring villages. Why did Jesus give him worth and cast the demons out and into the pigs? Why did He treat him with compassion and give him a

purpose for living? The source of menace became a bearer of the good news about Jesus in that town.

* Through this first story, I was able to present Jesus to them through their paradigm of fear/power. They saw Jesus having the authority and power over the jinn and the demonic in a visible manner when the demons went into the pigs. This story prepared them for the next powerful story in Mark chapter 5.

THE SECOND STORY

The second story in Mark 5:21-34 is about Jesus' willingness to heal a hemorrhaging woman. Jesus crossed over to the other side of the lake along with His disciples in a boat, and very soon a crowd gathered around him. A man by the name of Jairus came to him and fell at His feet. He pleaded to Jesus to go with him to his home to heal his twelve-year-old daughter, who was very sick. Jesus had compassion on this man and decided to go with him. So Jesus, along with the crowds gathered around him, started walking with Jairus toward his town. But Jesus was interrupted. We learn that "a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (verses 25-26).

What was the worth of a woman with this kind of disease in a Jewish town? To start with, she was in a very bad state physically, having an extraordinary menstruation—a nonstop period—for twelve years. Can you imagine her daily laundry? Furthermore, it seems that her doctors had given up on her after she spent all her wealth trying to get healed. So physically she was depleted, and financially she was bankrupt. In a nutshell, she was desperate. We go on to read, "When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed'" (verses 27-28).

How could she dare approach Jesus, penetrating the crowd around Him? I turned to the book of Leviticus and read to the forty villagers passages from chapters 12 and 15:

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. . . . Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.'" (12:1-5)

Even before I got into Leviticus 15, I could sense the presence of God in a special way in that room. The people were spellbound by the relevance of what was being read. I could sense how the women especially were identifying with this poor woman and her pain of being rejected because of her uncleanness. So I continued reading, this time in Leviticus 15:

When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening. Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. Whoever touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on,

when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening. (verses 19-23)

It felt as though I did not need to say anything. These villagers understood the challenge this woman had to face in order to reach out and touch Jesus. What if one of the men in the crowd knew who she was and confronted her in public because she defiled him? What if she was beaten by these men who were all around Jesus? What if Jesus Himself became defiled by her and rejected her as everybody else did?

Muslims practice ceremonial washings or ablutions, when possible, before they pray the ceremonial prayer. In a certain set manner, the Muslim washes his hands, face, feet, and other parts of his body. A man after doing the ablutions cannot shake hands with unclean people or he will lose the purity he has gained. If he approaches God in the ceremonial prayer while defiled, deep within his soul he knows that he is unclean and therefore God does not listen to his prayer.

I remember a good friend of mine, who comes from a Muslim background and loves Jesus, telling me how he felt sad for Muslim women. He told me that during the month of Ramadan, everybody in his family fasted, including his wife, even during her menstruation period. Deep in her soul she knew that during those days when she was "defiled," her fasting didn't count. So when the month of Ramadan was over and everybody was enjoying the celebration of good food that lasted for days, that poor woman could not celebrate. She was on her own, still fasting to make up for the days that didn't count because she had her period.

I sensed God was helping me connect with these villagers in a very deep way. The story of this woman in Mark 5 was addressing their felt need of longing to be clean so that they would be acceptable to God. In Mark 7 Jesus addressed this longing with these words: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from

within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (verses 20-23).

Jesus pointed out that it is not a matter of ceremonial washings and cleaning oneself on the outside. The big problem is not our *outer defilement* but our *inner depravity*. Does the good news of the gospel promise an assurance of complete and permanent cleansing? It does because God creates within us *new hearts*. In this story, the woman believed that this person, Jesus, could do what no other person could. It was enough for her to touch even His clothes to be healed. So with amazing courage she penetrated the crowds and touched the robe of Jesus. The story goes on to say, "Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'" (Mark 5:29-30).

Why did Jesus stop and ask this question, "Who touched my clothes?" There were people all around Him bumping into Him. The important thing is not geographical proximity to Jesus. What matters is faith and intimacy. Furthermore, why did Jesus embarrass this woman by exposing her in public? Jesus wanted to publicly give her the assurance of healing not only of her bleeding problem but also of her heart. The story concludes,

"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (verses 31-34)

I could have stopped at that point. People's hearts were moved in a deep way as the two stories touched their felt needs at the deepest level. But I had more time, so I continued with the third story.

THE THIRD STORY

I reminded the villagers that Jesus was on His way to the town where Jairus lived to heal his twelve-year-old daughter. But He had been interrupted by this woman and her need. So I asked them, "How would you feel if you were in the place of this desperate man?" Jairus must have been struggling with anxiety, and his heart must have dropped down in despair when one of his servants came to him with the message that it was too late; his daughter had died. Jesus turned to Jairus, the synagogue leader, and told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Mark 5:36).

Upon reaching the home of Jairus, Jesus went into the room where the dead girl lay and asked everyone to get out of the room, except for the father, the mother, and a few disciples. Then "he took her by the hand and said to her, '*Talitha koum!*' (which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He . . . told them to give her something to eat" (verses 41-43).

Muslims, and especially those who adhere to folk Islam, are terrified by death and the dying process. There is a well-known book among Muslims, written in Arabic, with the title *Torture of the Grave*. Fear of the unknown and uncertainty about what is behind the "door" bring about a great deal of anxiety. According to Bill Musk in his book *The Unseen Face of Islam*, death is believed to be a separation of the soul from the body. Two angels are appointed to interrogate the person who dies: *Naker* and *Munkar*. Preparing for death sometimes takes a lifetime. When the head of a family is dying, the family brings a practitioner to chant the Qur'an in the room of the dying person. They burn incense and observe certain restrictions about who should be allowed

to visit the dying man. A small Qur'an is placed under his pillow and, if possible, a few drops of holy Zamzam water are sprayed on his face.* The relatives of the dying man yearn that he might die on a Friday while lying on his right side, the more honorable side.**

The forty villagers who were listening to this final story in Mark chapter 5 had that background of Muslim beliefs, and they were gripped by Jesus and His power even to raise that little girl from the dead. As soon as I finished my presentation, there was a question-answer time. The first question was asked by one of the women. Politely she raised her index finger and made a statement followed by a question: "I want to believe in Jesus. How do I do it?" I almost fell out of my chair. I had not expected a question like that to be asked in public. Most likely her husband was sitting on the other side of the room.

SOME PRINCIPLES

In these last two chapters, we looked at paradigms. Here are a few principles:

1. There are several paradigms in the Bible. We Christians, especially in the West, tend to assume that the guilt/righteousness paradigm is the only one. In reality, there are other paradigms, such as shame/honor, defilement/clean, and fear/power. These three other paradigms are very important to Muslims. Of course, there are even more paradigms, and people who have a heart for postmodern people, for example, need to figure out what their paradigm is.

* When pilgrims return home after the pilgrimage, or the Hajj, they bring with them water from the well of Zamzam in Mecca for medicinal purposes and for blessings.

** Friday is the most blessed day of the week. The right hand is for eating and greeting people. The left hand is for ignoble use.

2. My friend Waldron Scott, who is a longtime missionary, and I interacted over the power of paradigms. He wrote,

The guilt/righteousness paradigm has become a central paradigm to Protestant Christianity. It did not formally appear in Christian theology until the Reformers (sixteenth century)—three-fourths of the way through Christian history. The prevailing paradigm before that was St. Anselm's (eleventh century) satisfaction paradigm, which is based on the shame/honor paradigm. It prevailed within Christianity for five centuries—equal to the Reformer's paradigm. Before either the Reformers or Anselm, there was the classical paradigm, which prevailed for a thousand years and is based on the fear/power paradigm and is still widely held today. I do not know whether the defilement/clean paradigm has ever been utilized in Christian history as the basis for a major paradigm of the Atonement.¹

3. We need to learn to present the gospel with all four paradigms, but we need always to *start* with the paradigm of the person we are connecting with.
4. As I listened to a lecture on postmodernity, I was struck by how much I can learn to connect with Muslims if I dare to come out of my traditional approach in my evangelism. The contrasts between modernity and postmodernity reminded me so much of the differences between the legal paradigm and the other paradigms. The contrasts between modernity and postmodernity parallel the various approaches used by Christians in their outreach to Muslims:

Modernism . . . leans heavily upon rationalism and material proofs in determining reality. In contrast the postmodern mind is no longer satisfied with evidence in answering its deepest questions. The heart and the emotions are now taking over. . . . Whereas the modern worldview tends toward optimism or eventual progress as humankind learns to conquer its environment, the postmodern is more pessimistic or fatalistic in its view of history. The postmodern is wary of science and thinks that it causes more problems for humanity than good. Moderns tended to believe in absolutes, universals, and objective truth claims. The postmodern shrugs at all this and operates as if belief is relative, truth is more created and therefore, subjective. The modern's emphasis on the autonomous individual focused on conquest runs smack dab against the postmodern's emphasis on community, focused on cooperation. Modernity's concern with purpose, design and hierarchical order stifles postmodernity's penchant for play and chance (chaos) in a world where everyone is an equal participant and gives input. The postmodern loves to engage the heart above the head, can actually go above the natural world to entertain the supernatural, and lives for a world that stresses diversity more than unified subjugation.²

5. The good news of the gospel addresses the deep felt needs of all humans.
 - a. To those with a guilt/righteousness paradigm, the good news is that we can be completely forgiven because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. He gave us His righteousness and took upon Himself our sin—past, present, and future.*

* Two chapters in my book *Unshackled and Growing* address this topic.

- great examples
- b. To those with a shame/honor paradigm, Christ covered the shame of our nakedness by wrapping us from our heads to our toes with His robe of righteousness (see Isaiah 61:10).
 - c. To those with a defilement/clean paradigm, Christ confronted the Jews for focusing on outward cleansing rather than their need for having new hearts (see Mark 7:20-23). Christ creates within us clean and new hearts (see Ezekiel 36:26).
 - d. To those with a fear/power paradigm, in the huge cosmic battle, Christ crushed Satan by taking his strongest weapon—fear of death—and transforming death into a gate that leads into eternal life.*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Go back to the beginning of the chapter. Is Ahmad justified in his statement? What do you think of the statement made by the Nigerian Christian?
2. What are some biblical passages that address other paradigms besides the familiar guilt/righteousness paradigm?
3. What components do you think make up the paradigm of post-moderns? What themes from the Bible address these?
4. In Western countries like the United States, New Zealand, and England, how much would a student struggle with guilt after cheating on an exam? Would it be more painful if he got caught? What does that tell us about the guilt/righteousness paradigm in the West?

* In *Unshackled and Growing*, I have a whole chapter on this paradigm.

CHAPTER 12

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

What a difference between the Bible and the Qur'an and between Jesus and Muhammad! Why are the Muslims so blind to the facts when it is so obvious?

— AN ARGENTINEAN CHRISTIAN

In his presentation, Ahmad said, "You start with wrong assumptions by comparing our prophet Muhammad to Christ and comparing the Qur'an to the Bible. You think that you have figured us out and understand our theology. I am sorry to say you have a skewed understanding of our religion."

Years ago I went to an American city to visit an acquaintance who was prejudiced against Muslims. As soon as I reached his house, he started sharing with me his excitement about a book he was reading—a book about Islam written by an evangelical American. The things he read