Part 2 of 2: How to Build Relationships with Muslims
with Darrell L. Bock and Miriam
Release Date: June 2013
Darrell Bock: There's another dimension of what you raised – and I want to come back to in a second as well – and that is the whole issue of identity. There's a form of – it's not nationalism, but it's like nationalism.

Miriam: Pretty much, yeah.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, where if you attack my faith, you have –

Miriam: You've attacked me.

Darrell Bock: – you've attacked me. It's personal and it's deeply personal. And so some of the offense that is felt – that it tends not to register in the West, because we don't attach ourselves – most people don't – to religion in that kind of a way. We have trouble understanding that kind of a reaction.

Miriam: Yeah, and I think there is definitely a tension between the secular Muslims and the devout Muslims. And there's even tension between the devout Muslims themselves, because you know, one of the things – and it's the same thing, you know, throughout history. If you look at even Christianity in history, there is tension between, you know, the Catholics and the Protestants. And then there's tension between even – you know, there's tension between, you know, people that go to Bible churches and people that are Baptists.

Darrell Bock: Right.

Miriam: And so you see that even in the Middle East. It does exist in the Middle East. And, you know, one of the things that I think that binds Christians together is the issue of love, and loving one another, and that does not exist in Islam. There's the brotherly love, that exists, but brotherly love is not the same as unconditional love. You know, last night, I was reading 1 John, and I had to teach that in my Sunday school class, and I thought, "One of the marks of salvation is loving your brother, regardless of what they do and how they act."

But with Islam, there's a whole lot of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth mentality, and so there isn't that unconditional love. And so there isn't that unity and there is that tension, that constant tension between the sects and between the devout versus the secular. There's a lot of tension that goes on.
Darrell Bock: Okay, and you've raised a couple of things, and I want to make sure I come back to one of them. But I want to pursue one direction more, and this thing about the distinctions within Arab culture. We've talked about the secular and the devout. But even among the devout, you mention there are different sects within Islam. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that dimension – what are their names, what do they represent – that kind of thing.

Miriam: Sure. You know, obviously, the major ones are the Sunnis. And if I can compare Sunnis to any other – to a form of Christianity, I would say that they are the evangelicals, because they follow the Word of God. Evangelicals follow the Word of God and they try not to stray out of that. And so I would say Sunnis do that.

Shiites, I would compare them to Catholics, because they add a different dimension and culture and tradition into their faith. So that's who the Shiites are. And then there's a whole lot of other smaller sects like the Sufis, the Malikites – you know, there's just smaller versions of these different sects.

Darrell Bock: Now if we think about this in terms of countries, do certain sects dominate certain countries?

Miriam: Absolutely.

Darrell Bock: So, roughly, how does that work out?

Miriam: Well, the majority of Muslims – if you were to look at the Muslims as a whole, I would say about 80 percent of them would be Sunnis. So a lot of these Arab countries are dominated by the Sunni faith. Then you have a stricter sect of Sunnis like the Wahhabis that live in Saudi Arabia. And so you have that in Saudi Arabia, but the majority are Sunnis.

If you go to Iraq, the huge tension in Iraq is that there's a lot of Sunnis and a lot of Shiites, and they're the ones who are fighting against each other. You go to Iran, they're mostly Shiites. So it just really depends on, you know, what country you go to.

Darrell Bock: And so the particular type of Islam that you are related to then impacts the character of what Islam looks like in that country.

Miriam: Sure.
Darrell Bock: All right. Well, that's interesting. I've got two more topics I want to be sure and cover, but I want to come to one that's very, very important in understanding Islam. We have another podcast that we'd done where Dudley Woodberry takes us through Islam and he talks about the role of submission and that kind of thing. So I think we have that covered in the other podcast. But the thing I want to zoom in on here is to talk about – I'm going to ask a difficult question in some ways – the role of honesty in Islam.

Now here's what I'm raising. There's a sense that we have in the West that within Islam, in terms of the defense of Islam as a faith, there's a kind of ends justifies the means. And so there's the ability to, what we would say – lie, deceive, etcetera – that's acceptable. That's not only acceptable, it's almost honorable. Can I have you talk about that some?

Miriam: Could I mention a passage in the Old Testament where lying was blessed by God?

Darrell Bock: Absolutely.

Miriam: The midwives, you know, were commanded by Pharaoh to kill the children, the Hebrew children, and they wouldn't do that, and so Pharaoh brought them in and said, "Why haven't you done that?"

And they said, "Well, you know, these Hebrew women, they're just very rigorous. They have these kids and we don't even have time to go." And it says in the Old Testament that God blessed them, God blessed them.

So we have an example of that in the Old Testament where lying was not only honorable, but it was even blessed by God. So I think it's hard to – you know, one of the things that I've noticed about religion, or that you know, in the Bible and in the Qur'an, is that you can take just about anything and justify just about anything that you want to do.

We've justified slavery, because of the passages that are in the New Testament of, "Slaves, obey your masters." And so we justified a whole century, or two centuries of slavery just because that's written in the Bible.

And so does Islam allow you to lie in a situation where it protects Islam or protects you or protects your life? Yeah, absolutely; it does that, you know. But we have an example out of the Old Testament.
Darrell Bock: Okay. But if someone might come back and say, "Yeah, okay, that's one situation. I can see where you're protecting a lie for something like that," but then –

Miriam: What about Rahab?

Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Miriam: She lied too.

Darrell Bock: Exactly right. There are lots of –

Miriam: Lots of them.

Darrell Bock: There are some examples. But the issue that I'm raising has to do with how this then impacts the elements that are associated with terrorism and that kind of thing. Let me ask it this way. Is there a line in Islam between the kind of a lie given in self-defense to protect one's interests? Or, is what we would sometimes call terrorism, put under that umbrella as well, and yet at the same time, there's a sense of, "Well, that's stretching the category a little bit."

I know that even within some of the debate among Muslims about how some of the terrorism has been against other Muslims –

Miriam: It has been.

Darrell Bock: – and how that has shaken the Islamic community. Because although there's a defense for it at one level, there's another sense in which this is coming against another principle of Islam. So sort that out for us.

Miriam: Well, you know, obviously, these terrorists – you know, I'll give you an example. Osama bin Laden justified everything that he did by saying, "According to the Sharia law, you can't go into war unless somebody's attacking you. So you should do it in self-defense."

So he says, "I'm coming in self-defense, because look at the way America is supporting Israel, and look at how many Palestinian kids are being killed as a result of that." So he's justifying it.
And anybody, like I mentioned earlier, anybody can justify anything, at anytime, with any Bible verse, or any Qur'anic verse. And so he'll justify that, and these terrorists will justify what they do, because they thing that, you know, they're doing it in self-defense.

**Darrell Bock:** So is there no difference between the way Christianity talks about love and honesty and that kind of thing and the kind of emphasis you get in Islam? Is there no difference at all, or is there a difference in the tone and feel of the two faiths?

**Miriam:** Well, there's definitely a difference in the tone of the two faiths. Obviously, we are told not to lie and we are told not to – you know, in the Bible. And then, again, you know, we've got verses in the Old Testament where people did blatantly lie in order to protect certain people, or to protect themselves, or to protect a nation, or whatever it is.

So, obviously, honesty is God's heart. And the issue of not lying is definitely God's heart. Has that been used by man? Absolutely, it's been used by man.

In the Qur'an, it's permissible to lie in certain situations – when you're in a war, when there is a self-defense and situations like that. So the Qur'an particularly permits, or the Sharia law permits people to lie in those types of situations.

I don't know that there is a mandate in the Bible that says, "Yes, you can lie in a certain situation." But I think it has been used, and I think – I believe it's been blessed even.

**Darrell Bock:** Okay. Now I'm going to shift gears entirely.

**Miriam:** And you're probably going to call me a heretic after this.

[Laughter]

**Darrell Bock:** No-no-no-no-no-no, not at all, not at all. No, actually, part of the point of our conversation here is to have people appreciate the nature of the way people are thinking both within a faith and outside of a faith. And, you know, I mean even James talks about Rahab, you know. So we have these texts which Christian ethicists then spend a long time interacting and explaining what's going on. So, no, not a problem at all.
Let's shift gears. Let's talk about your own personal walk a little bit. And I'm going to do it this way. How you saw yourself when you were growing up in the context of Islam — and I'll give you the whole train of thought here so we can kind of segment it. And then how you encountered the Christian faith, and what struck you about it, as you were still in Islam. And then how you came to faith. And then on the other side, what are you doing now? So kind of in four parts.

Miriam:

I think when I was a Muslim, I believed that Islam was the true religion. And I believed that we all worshipped the same God. I believed that there was many ways to get to God, and I believed that if you were a good person, that eventually God was going to forgive you and send you into — that was my theology.

Then a friend of mine invited me to attend a church, and in my thought process, I thought, "Well, God created Islam and Judaism and Christianity, and he just wouldn't be too horribly upset if I attend a Christian church."

And so when I went to church, I was curious. And my impression of the pastor was he's a nice guy, but he's just confused and misled, because he doesn't know the truth about Islam.

Darrell Bock:

Now did that happen here in the States? Okay, so this is after you had come to the states.

Miriam:

Yeah, when I came to the States. And so when she invited me to church, I was curious, and so I began to read books. I don't know if this is a blessing or a curse. Sometimes it's a blessing, sometimes it's a curse. But God has given me an inquisitive mind, and so I was curious. And so I wanted to understand why Christians believed what they believed.

And so I began to read books and I began to question — you know, read the Qur'an and read the Bible — and that's when I was confronted with the fact that both religions could not be right. One says one thing about Jesus, and the other one says a completely different thing about him. Islam says that Jesus was never crucified, that God sent someone to look like him to be crucified. And Christians clearly believe that he was crucified and died on the cross for their sins.

Darrell Bock:

Yeah, that's a minor detail, isn't it?
The Table Podcast  Life as a Woman in the Context of Islam

Miriam: Just a little bit, yeah. And the way to get to heaven – one was God came down to you, and another way is you get to God. And so all of a sudden, my curiosity became the quest for knowing the truth. I believed that there had to be one way to get to God.

Darrell Bock: That's interesting, because you know, someone else who we're going to be interviewing on these podcasts – an Islamic man – had a very similar experience with his own curiosity about what he had heard about Christianity versus when he began to dig in, he realized, "What I had heard said about Christianity isn't quite what I'm hearing." And so that sent him on his own quest as well, and he eventually came to the Lord, it sounds like, in a very similar kind of way.

Miriam: Yeah. And so, for me, I didn't see any visions and dreams. A lot of Muslims see visions and dreams, and God chose to send me down a different path, which is study and research. And, you know, I had studied about the Dead Sea Scrolls and how the Bible had been preserved all these years, because as a Muslim, I believed that the Bible has been changed. And so just looking at the preservation of the Bible and how it could have been very easily that the Qur'an was changed.

And so there was a lot of doubt in my mind about Islam, and during that time, during my research, it just made me doubt Islam more and believe in Christianity more so. And so I thought to myself – you know, one question that I had was, "How could God deceive people?"

I couldn't reconcile in my mind how could God deceive people and send a double for him to be crucified. Why would he deceive people and then try to rectify the situation 600 years later?

Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Miriam: And so I believed that Jesus did die on the cross. And I was studying the book of Romans, and in Chapter 5, it says, "Through one man, all men have fallen, and through one man, all men have been saved, which is Christ." And that made sense to me that God would make a way rather than me try to climb an invisible ladder to reach him with my good works.

Darrell Bock: So is there no role for Adam in Islam?
Miriam: Yeah, he was just a prophet.

Darrell Bock: He was just a prophet. But there's no fall or sin or any condition that comes out of it as a result or anything like that?

Miriam: Well that's very interesting that you say that, because in Islam, I had believed that, you know, Adam sinned. And so God took him out of heaven – he had lived in heaven – and he brought him to earth, and God had a purpose for him to come down to earth so the earth can be populated and men can do good, and then get to heaven by their good works – by following Allah and praying five times a day. Whereas, with Christianity, the whole idea of the sacrifice where God committed the first sacrifice in the Garden of Eden and he committed the last sacrifice with his son, Jesus Christ, that just blew my mind away.

Darrell Bock: So – and if I can say it this way – in Christianity and in Judaism, you have the picture of Adam leading to the fall and putting the condition on man, whereas in Islam, it's almost like it's the ladder. We take Adam, put him on earth, and give him a chance to reclaim himself, we redo it by the ladder.

Miriam: Exactly.

Darrell Bock: Interesting.

Miriam: Yeah.

Darrell Bock: So what are you doing now?

Miriam: Well, I graduated from a Bible college and from seminary, and I'm currently serving to help people understand Muslims and how to reach out to Muslims. And I also help with people who come to the United States that need help who are Muslims. So that's what I'm currently doing.

Darrell Bock: So it's a combination outreach ministry really, both in terms of helping people get acclimated, and in terms of helping them understand the Christian faith.

Miriam: Yes, and equipping the church.
Darrell Bock: Okay. Well, let's talk about this last dimension of your current life in ministry. What advice would you give to people who say, "I have a Muslim neighbor," or, "I have a mosque down the street now I didn't used to have." What's the best way to interact with and relate to Muslim people? I realize this is a broad question, but I mean you do this as a ministry. So what would you say?

Miriam: You know, it has to begin with prayer, it has to begin with the Holy Spirit convicting them and opening the hearts of Muslims, and opening our hearts. I think one of the things that I start with as far as equipping churches is I say, "Pray for yourselves. Pray for your heart, if there's any misconceptions that you may have, because you're equipped with the Holy Spirit. They're not." They have misconceptions of us; we have misconceptions of them.

So start with prayer, start with a lot of prayer and bathe everything that you do with prayer. And ask the Lord to open doors, because the most amazing thing that happens is when you ask God to open doors, you know what happens? He opens them.

And it begins and ends with relationships. Just start a relationship. One of the things that I tell people is, "You build a relationship with a person, and along the way, you plant seeds about Christ and Christianity as the Lord opens the door for you."

Darrell Bock: Okay. You've already talked about some stereotypes, that not everyone is a terrorist. What other stereotypes do you think we should be aware of as we think about ministering to someone who comes out of an Islamic background?

Miriam: Well, I think that's a really big one. I think the whole issue of women and women are oppressed. I've seen all these – I don't know if you have, Dr. Bock – these ridiculous emails about how women are treated in the Middle East. And I have to just say, it doesn't matter.

What really matters is not – what I tell people is, "My rights in Christianity are not as important as my right in Christ." So don't look at what you think Islam says about women. I don't want people to focus on that. Focus on the fact that these people are lost souls and they need Jesus Christ.

Darrell Bock: Okay. So would a core level of advice be just interact and relate to someone out of the Islamic faith like you would try to relate to anybody?
Miriam: Absolutely. You know, when Paul went to Athens, the first thing that he did was he bridged the gap, he talked about some similarities. He didn't walk in there and say, "Well, you know, Allah and God are much different."

He didn't say that to them. He complimented their religiosity. He said, "I can tell that you're men of faith, or that you are very religious." And he says, "I've walked around, I've observed." So he studied what they believed.

So give them an opportunity to talk about their faith, they're happy to talk about that. And once you give them that opportunity, that will open a door for you and afford you the opportunity to share about your faith.

He says, "I've walked around and I've noticed this unknown God," and he builds a bridge and he says, "Let me tell you about this unknown God. Let me make this unknown God known to you."

Darrell Bock: Yeah, that's an interesting point that you're making in terms of both building a bridge and having a conversation where you let people talk about their faith. I often say in doing evangelism that sometimes Christians tend to want to talk too quickly and too much.

Miriam: Amen.

Darrell Bock: And that, basically, when you build that relationship, allowing someone to talk about their religious experience and how they feel about God, etcetera, is very important, because it's like you're being given a window into their heart. And when you get a window into someone's heart, that can help you know what needs they may be expressing, and where they place themselves, and what they value. And that may actually help you think about how to engage.

And so sometimes, I think, particularly initially, we need to be slow to talk and quick to listen, so that we give people a time to tell their story. And by getting to know them, then we put ourselves in a better place to know how to minister to them.

Miriam: Absolutely.
Darrell Bock: Well, Miriam, I want to thank you for coming in and helping us think through Islam and various aspects of life lived in the context of Islam. And I really appreciate the conversation we had an opportunity to have, and I trust that it has been helpful to those who have been listening today. Thank you very much.

Miriam: My pleasure. Thank you.