

INTERCEDE

VOL. XVI, NO. 2

MARCH/APRIL 2000

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT FOR A MUSLIM TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN?



WHY ARE
MUSLIMS
SO RESISTANT
TO THE
GOSPEL?

WHY THE
RESISTANCE?



by
Dale Fagerland

Let's follow the life of Abdullah* from birth to adulthood to determine the reasons why it becomes nearly impossible for Muslims to become Christians. The stumblingblocks in Abdullah's path accumulate until Christianity becomes a distorted religion and the gospel is foolishness to him. Then our Muslim friend will experience the grace of God in his life.

At the moment of Abdullah's birth, someone rushes to whisper in his ear, "*La ilaha illah Allah, wa Muhammad rasul Allah*" (There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is His messenger). The umbilical cord has not even been cut. The newborn is not yet physically separated from his mother, yet the Islamic indoctrination has already begun!

Abdullah's earliest memories are hearing the amplified sound of the call to prayer in Arabic from the minaret of the mosque echoing across the rooftops on his village. "*Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!*" (God is great!) The lad doesn't speak Arabic, but the message is understood as the cry continues. "Come to prayer, come to prayer..." Five times each day the call beckons the faithful to prostrate before God in humble submission. Before dawn, the first summons includes the exhortation, "Come to prayer, for prayer is better than sleep." By the time Abdullah is 50 years old, he has heard the piercing call to prayer over 90,000 times. He hears it in his sleep when it isn't even ringing!

The curious youngster watches carefully as older family members unroll their prayer mats, stand facing eastward and recite memorized prayers quietly in Arabic as they bow, kneel, then prostrate themselves completely with their hands and foreheads to the mat. Later his father says, "Son, that is how God is to be worshipped. The word Islam means 'submission' and your name means 'servant' or 'slave of God.' We must humbly prostrate ourselves before Him as a servant would bow before his master. *Allahu akbar!*"

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Speaking on Behalf of Muslims

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? (Romans 10:14)

Ron Peck, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



It is difficult for a Muslim to accept Jesus Christ as Savior for many reasons. The lead article in this *Intercede* traces the life of a Muslim to show some of the issues that make it so complicated for a follower of Islam to make this decision. We Christians who want to share our faith with Muslims need to think clearly and deeply about these factors.

For his entire life, a Muslim has been taught that to leave the Islamic faith is to choose the sure road to the fires of hell.

When we urge Westerners to turn from their sinful ways or from non-religious lifestyles and place their faith in Jesus, we are urging them to an action that many of them know in their hearts is right. I have often witnessed to an American and heard this response, "I know what you say is right." Or, "Someday I plan to commit my life to the Lord. I'm just not ready now."

These responses come from people who already believe that the "Jesus Way" is the correct way. They have had a Christian mother or a godly grandfather who has taught them Christian values. Usually those who have influenced them favorably toward Christian faith have not only taught them, but have "walked the talk" before them. Thus, the idea of sincere Christian faith and practice is something they believe to be right. Making a personal commitment to faith is a proper response to the best and highest values they believe in.

For a Muslim, on the other hand, none of these factors is true. The Muslim friend, neighbor or co-worker to whom we "witness" about Jesus has a totally different mindset. For his entire life, a Muslim has been taught that to leave the Islamic faith is to choose the sure road to the fires of hell.

Even secular-minded Muslims who do not faith-

fully practice their religious duties of prayer and fasting will likely have a family member who is deeply religious—someone who has taught them proper Islamic values.


They have been told from infancy that to be born a Muslim is to be a Muslim forever. After all, is not Islam the most up-to-date spiritual revelation of truth, having been brought to their religious community by Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, several hundred years after the revelation of the gospel by Jesus?

Muslims have also been taught that to forsake the religion of their birth brings the greatest shame and embarrassment to their family.

Therefore when a Muslim is invited to consider Christianity, it is an invitation to hardship, shame and disaster. A decision for Christ runs counter to all the values he has ever been taught by his family and the religious leaders of his community.

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Understanding these issues can help us see why a Muslim convert may be rejected and persecuted by his closest family members. Not only does the family feel shame and embarrassment because of the conversion, but they also may sincerely believe that the convert's decision will bring the judgment of God and the punishment of eternal hell.

Conversion for a Muslim is an extremely serious matter. It is not the decision of a moment. It needs to be considered very carefully and the high cost must be counted. The loving, patient and prayerful support of a caring Christian friend is vitally important. May God give us the Spirit's guidance to be wise in our witness and supportive in our friendship. 



Israel

Members of the Israeli Knesset are circulating the draft of a proposed bill that would criminalize missionary activity. Similar legislation was shelved last March due the retirement of its sponsor, Rabbi Raphael Pinchasi of the Orthodox Shas party.

—*Newsroom*

Indonesia

Many Indonesian Christians have professed "private delight" at the October 20 election of Dr. Abdurrahman Wahid (also known as Gus Dur) to the presidency. Although the ailing 59-year-old is a Muslim cleric, he has been a staunch advocate of religious toleration for many years, resisting calls for an Islamic government and favoring a democratic parity for all religions.

Wahid grew greatly in stature this year by becoming the only Muslim leader who dared to name the instigators of the religious war on Ambon Island. He has been untiring in his condemnation of the shadowy so-called "intellectual actors" behind the anti-Christian violence of recent years, especially of the spate of church burnings in 1997 and 1998.

—*Compass Direct*

Middle East

SAT-7, a Christian satellite television channel in the Middle East, recorded its 1,000th hour of broadcasting last summer. The ministry was launched in 1995 by 25 agencies and churches. The goal for this year is to have service seven days a week. About half of the programs are produced by Middle Easterners.

Safwat-al-Baiady, a Protestant church leader in Egypt, stated, "SAT-7 is the dream and hope of many Christians. It has opened its doors for all churches to work together."

—*Pulse*

Saudi Arabia

Two-thirds of Internet users in Saudi Arabia are women. They are doing business on it very successfully. Twenty-two years ago the first woman received a business license. Today, more than 3,000 women are working in the private sector. One organizes parties and special events. She has made \$65,000 in seven months. The Internet has made it possible for these women to experience progress. Someday, perhaps, the cultural rules will permit them to drive.

—*Pulse*

Tajikistan

The Korean-led Sonmin Grace Church fears it could lose its state registration. Christian sources in the region told *Compass* last November that the church has encountered opposition to its work from state officials and Islamists angered by its evangelistic outreach.

Church members were driven out of the town of Kulyab when they attempted to hold meetings there. Local authorities raided a service in the town of Shaartuz.

"During the raid, church members were beaten and Bibles were reportedly torn up and trampled underfoot," a source told *Compass*. "Quite by chance," the source continued, "the man who had organized the raid fell under a car later in the day and was seriously injured."

Four members of the church had previously been given administrative punishments for "illegal missionary propaganda."

Although Tajikistan is overwhelmingly Muslim, it has generally been more tolerant of Christians

than several other Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

—*Compass Direct*

Comoros Islands

Two citizens of the Comoros Islands were given months-long prison sentences last October for having videos of the documentary "Jesus" film in their possession.

The two were found guilty of "anti-Islamic activity and disturbing the peace." The judge declared the case "without precedent" in the strictly Muslim nation.

"Islam is here the state religion, and the freedom of worship is not recognized by any legal texts in this country," said a state prosecutor. Taki Islam was arrested for possessing multiple copies of the "Jesus" video in the local language. Ali Toibibou was apprehended in his own home, where he, his wife and friends were watching a video of the life of Christ.

Most of the 300 Christians in the Comoros Islands have converted to Christianity within the last five years. They routinely experience strong harassment by both government and religious authorities, including arrests, beatings, public threats and detentions aimed at forcing their return to Islam.

—*Compass Direct*

Chechnya

Religious and human rights groups are beginning to raise concerns about a growing humanitarian crisis in Chechnya, in the light of Russia's military offensive. Some 200,000 Chechen civilians have fled to neighboring Ingushetia where they are camped in squalid conditions and about 170,000 are displaced inside Chechnya with little access to relief aid as winter approaches.

—*Newsroom*



WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT FOR A MUSLIM TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

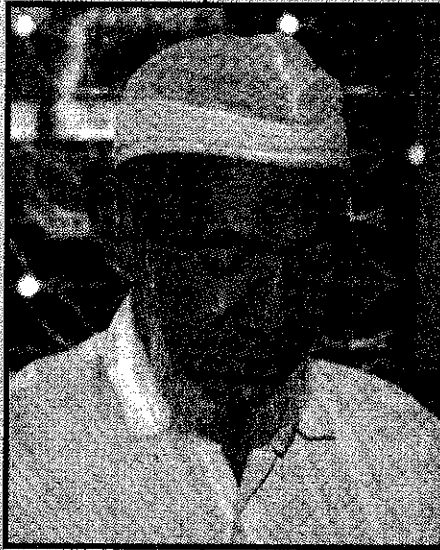
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Soon the lad is sent to the *madrasa*, Qur'anic school. By the age of 5 he can quote *surah* (chapter) after *surah* of the Qur'an in perfect Arabic, though he doesn't yet understand what he is saying. "Don't worry, Abdullah," his teacher says. "This is the Holy Qur'an, God's last and final revelation. As you recite the Word of God, great power and blessing will come to you and to those who hear His Word. *Allahu akbar!*"

Our young Muslim friend, continuing through elementary school, understands that his rights and concerns are unimportant compared to those of the family and the Muslim community. He learns he can get forgiveness for many childish misdeeds, but even without a formal lecture he understands there is one thing he should never do—bring shame to his family. It would be unforgivable to even think about following any other religion but Islam, thereby dishonoring his father's name. "Abdullah, you were born a Muslim, and you will die a Muslim. *Allahu akbar!*"

During secondary school, Abdullah's Christian friend begins to tell him of the claims of Christ. A war begins to rage in his mind, and the young Muslim schoolboy is gripped by fear at the very thought of leaving Islam. He fears being beaten and rejected by the family he loves so dearly. When he thinks about

becoming a Christian, the teenager is gripped by fear that someone might try to put a curse on him. He is told he will be sent to hell forever for believing in three Gods as Christians do. He fears the loss of his identity and the loss of his family inheritance. Then the chilling thought occurs to Abdullah, "If I become a Christian, I can't be buried with my family. Who will bury me when I die?"



Abdullah's university professors, past-oriented as most Muslims are, love to dwell on the so-called "Christian Crusades" that took place during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries to rescue the Holy Land. Sent by the

Roman Catholic Pope, these Christian soldiers with the cross stamped on their helmets, the cross stamped on their shields, and the cross stamped into the leather of their saddles plundered, raped and killed in the name of Christ. "Do you want to know what Christianity is?" the instructor loudly proclaims. "That's Christianity!"

The university geography teacher's favorite topic is colonialism. "Ninety percent of the Islamic countries of the world were once colonized by the Christian countries of the West," he declares. "These Christians plundered our resources and exploited our people. Do you want to know what Christianity is?"

That's Christianity!"

The religion teacher challenges the students to peek in the back door of a Sunday morning service to see how "corrupted" the Christian worship is. They see Bibles disgracefully placed on the floor, something they would never do with the Qur'an. "Their attitude toward the Word of God must represent their attitude toward God," Abdullah concludes.

Christians (with shoes on!) are sitting on benches and chairs. "Who do they think they are?" He muses. "Kings? Queens? Don't they know they should prostrate themselves before the Almighty?"

Electronic instruments amplify the music. Pretty young ladies with rather skimpy clothes hold microphones leading the bouncing and swaying bodies to the beat of pulsating rhythms. "They call this God's house?" Abdullah questions. "This is like a disco!"

What shocks Abdullah most is seeing men and women praying together and sitting together in God's house. "How can a man possibly concentrate on God while sitting by a woman?"

Christianity is made to sound foolish as the professor of religion questions the heart of the gospel message. "God doesn't need anyone to die for the sins of others," he lectures.

"God would never require an innocent person to die for the sins of the guilty. What kind of God would this be? He doesn't need the shedding of blood in order to forgive sins. It would represent a fundamental weakness in the character of God if He couldn't forgive sins without someone dying. *Allahu akbar!*"

"Students, are the pornographic movies and X-rated videos that are available on our streets produced in Islamic countries?" the professor asks the questions, then gives the answers. "No, they are made in the Christian countries of Europe and America.

"Those tourists who come to our country and sun bathe nearly naked, are they Muslims? No, they are Christians.

"Young people, do you want to know what Christianity is? That's Christianity!"

After completing university, Abdullah married and joined the military, soon becoming the most respected pilot in his country. He served his nation with distinction for many years.

When Abdullah's oldest of two sons became gravely ill, this loving father and mother tried everything to save his life, but the doctors could not cure him. Death snatched the teenager from their home. Sorrow was multiplied with sorrow as their remaining child now became ill with the same disease. He appeared to be following the same inevitable path.

In the midst of this threatening storm of grief, the local pastor and Christian worker knocked on Abdullah's door. "We have heard of the great sorrow that has come to your home," they said. "Could we come in and pray for your son?" This grief-stricken father turned them away, because he envisioned a priest sprinkling holy water and pronouncing the last rights just before someone dies. He didn't want to lose his only son, but rather was hoping against hope that he would somehow live.

Undaunted, the two followers of Jesus returned the next day. "Abdullah, we have heard of the great sorrow that has come to your home," they pleaded. "We believe God wants to do something special for your family. Could we come in and pray for your son?"

Then they began to ask this respected military officer a series of questions they knew would bring a quick and positive response from any Muslim. "Abdullah, do you believe in God?" He responded, "*Al-hamdulillah!*" (Meaning, "Of course!" Or lit-

erally, "Praise be to God!")

They followed that question with another, "Abdullah, do you believe God is all powerful?" "*Al-hamdulillah!*"

"Abdullah, do you believe that God is the author and creator of life?" "*Al-hamdulillah!*"

"Abdullah, do you believe that God has the power to heal someone?" "*Al-hamdulillah!*"

They encouraged this distressed father to believe that God not only *could* heal his son, but that God *would* heal him. "Abdullah, do you believe in prayer?" "*Al-hamdulillah!* Of course!"

Finally, with faith barely the size of a mustard seed, Abdullah invited the two concerned and persistent Christians to pray for the healing of his dying son. "We are going to pray in the name of Jesus," they stated.

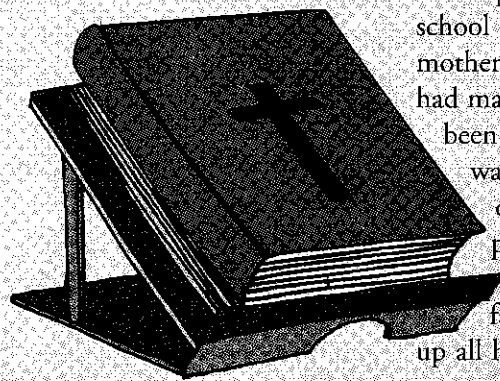
"Look, I've tried everything," he uttered. "I don't care what name you use."

The presence of God began to fill the room as these brothers fervently prayed that God would manifest His love and healing power. God answered their prayer and healed this gravely ill lad! Abdullah had never experienced anything like this in his life. He committed his life to Christ in spite of the mountain of barriers to Christianity that had been building since his birth.

Reflecting back upon that special moment when he witnessed the healing of his son, Abdullah stated, "As a pilot, I have been to Mecca more than 50 times. In Mecca, I felt nothing."

Then his eyes filled with tears as he recalled witnessing a marvelous miracle that day. "But when those brothers prayed, *I felt something!*"





THE MIRACLE OF CHANGED LIVES!



Ahmed's* parents were prominent Muslim figures in Southeast Asia. His father was a military man who made large contributions to Islamic activities, such as building a mosque or providing for the needs of the school of Qur'anic studies for children. His mother came from a long line of "hajjis" who had made pilgrimages to Mecca. Ahmed had been trained from childhood that Islam was the only true religion and the people of other religions were *kufirs* (infidels, pagans).

Then something happened in his family. His father became ill and used up all his wealth, but could not find anyone to provide him with medical help. When the money ran out, so did their friends. Out of desperation his father contemplated committing suicide.

A neighbor, knowing the plight of this family, came to visit and brought Ahmed's father a Bible. When his mother saw it, she spat on the neighbor and drove her out.

However, his father received the Bible. He began reading it and felt revived! His enthusiasm for living returned. In the Bible he found answers to some of his questions and eventually became a believer.

This resulted in opposition from other prominent Muslims, government leaders, as well as his own family. Many threatened him and threw stones at their house. It appeared that Ahmed's father would lose his family, including his wife.

But his father decided that his spiritual salvation was more important than anything.

When Ahmed's wife saw her husband's resolute disposition, she began to wonder about this source of strength in God he had found. She began to pray the *tahajjut* (optional midnight prayer) using the Bible and the Qur'an, asking God to show her the true God.

One night as she was praying, suddenly the room became very bright! She thought it must already be day time. When she looked at the wall, she saw the figure of Jesus. But she didn't yet know Him at that time. What she saw was just a man with a crown of thorns, extending His hands toward her and smiling at her. Then it became dark again. She thought she must be dreaming, but she

was sitting up, wide awake. She looked outside and it was still dark for it was just 2 a.m.

In the morning when she asked her husband about this, he told her that it was *Isa Al-Masih*. She believed.

Confused and disappointed, Ahmed wondered why his parents who had taught him to adhere to Islam had now become Christians. In fact, they were the first Muslims in their village to become believers. He decided that he too would have to look for the true God. He went to see some of his brothers who were *ustadz* (Islamic teachers). But their Islamic activities were just routine. He began asking questions about many of their teachings. Why should they do the *selawat nabi* (short prayer for Muhammad)? If the great prophet Muhammad needed prayer, then it meant he wasn't saved yet either. Then who was going to pray for the salvation of his followers? Why was *Isa Al-Masih* the one who would return to judge people, rather than Muhammad?

When Ahmed returned home, he sat and listened to the daily discussions in his home, comparing Christianity and Islam. One day, he picked up a New Testament where a marker highlighted John 15:16. That verse grabbed at his heart and he started reading the Bible.

By this time Ahmed's mother had become involved in a local church. He and some of his friends went to visit the church. However, he noticed that the majority of the people were Chinese and he had been taught to hate them. So he really didn't want to go back.

Ahmed was, however, drawn to the preacher's sermon on salvation, which he understood. He was attracted to the fact that Jesus came from heaven and not from earth to save. He thought that if they wanted to go to heaven, the best person to ask was somebody who had already been there. His friends enjoyed the music and this drew them back again and again. Eventually, Ahmed, as well as his older brothers, received Jesus into their hearts in spite of persecution and the many culturally distracting elements.

Praise the Lord for the miracle of changed lives! 
*pseudonym

Jumaa Prayer Fellowship...

Praying for Muslims Around the World!



Friday, March 3, 2000. Please pray

...for the CMM team member who is teaching an introductory course in Islamics at Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, next week. Pray that the students may be challenged and equipped to give themselves to evangelizing Muslims.

...that Christians in Saudi Arabia will persevere in evangelism even though it may mean persecution or extradition. Pray that families will come to Christ and start family worship.

...for the thousands of young Iraqi refugees scattered throughout the world because of the political situation in Iraq. Many are not equipped culturally or linguistically to live where they have been transplanted. Pray that Christians will wisely reach out to befriend them.

Friday, March 10, 2000. Please pray

...for the participants in a 3-week bloc session being taught by a CMM team member at Theological Institute of Belarus. Pray the students will apply the teaching they receive for effective ministry.

...for safety and fruitful ministry of participants of an 8-day prayer pilgrimage into a sensitive country. Pray that they will have opportunities to share the gospel with the local people as they prayer-walk.

...for the ministry of believers in Gaza. May they find the right opportunities to show the people of Gaza the truth of the gospel.

...for Muslim background believers in Egypt. Those who have decided to stay in the country face many problems in their daily lives.

Friday, March 17, 2000. Please pray

...for the desperate situation in Chechnya because of the continued fighting. Pray for the churches, from which Christians have been kidnapped and held for ransom. Several have been martyred.

...for the small groups of Christian believers who are emerging in places in Tunisia that have been populated only by Muslims for 13 centuries. These new believers need prayer for God's protection.

...for Chechen Christians who are being extremely pressured because of the political conflict between Russia and the Islamic rebels. Many have lost their lives and others have fled from the country.

Friday, March 24, 2000. Please pray

...for pastor Rabim Tashov in Turkmenistan. Arrested for holding meetings with an unregistered congregation, he was released in November 1999, but he, his family and the congregation need wisdom and encouragement to continue to persevere.

...for the 60,000 students from Islamic countries studying in London, sometimes called the capital of the Arab world. Some have radical political agendas.

...for Christians suffering from increased persecution since the hard-line Hindu government took power in India. Praise God for 18 believers from Islamic backgrounds in one small town. Pray for them.

...for the Jesus for Muslims Network which is drawing attention to the 700,000 Muslims living in the greater New York City area. Pray for wise and coordinated efforts to reach out to them.

Friday, March 31, 2000. Please pray

...for the Berber Evangelistic Association as it develops Berber-style videos, cassettes and music. The outreach potential is great as there are more satellite dishes in Morocco than telephones.

...for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games evangelistic outreach preparation. Pray for harmony as churches unite to reach out to third-world participants. Many have had no opportunity to hear the gospel in their homelands.

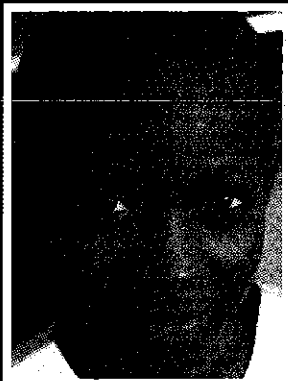
...for the successful transportation of Christian literature into Central Asia to meet the demand for these educational materials. Pray for protection for a shipment from Germany and for the drivers.

*I urge, then, first of all
that requests, prayers,
intercession and
thanksgiving be
made for everyone.*

—(1 Timothy 2:1, NIV)

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Praying for Muslims Around the World!



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Friday, April 7, 2000. Please pray

...for the 8-week Institute of Islamic Studies which begins next week at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines. Pray for safety in travel for all the participants, both students and faculty, and that they will be greatly impacted through the interaction with others involved in ministry among Muslims.

...for Christians in Central Asia. The governments of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have made it almost impossible for small Christian groups to remain legal. They repeatedly raid churches and imprison pastors.

...for CMM team members holding Muslim Awareness Seminars next week at Latin American Bible Institute and Vanguard University in Southern California. Pray that many of the students will catch the vision for ministry among Muslims.

...for the churches in Sudan that are struggling to maintain their property. Pray that church leadership will have wisdom in dealing with the government.

Friday, April 14, 2000. Please pray

...for God's continued intervention among those suffering because of the earthquakes in Turkey. Pray that the tangible love and concern expressed by Christian relief agencies and churches will cause many Muslims to realize their spiritual need. Pray for a new spirit of cooperation between Turkey and its neighbors.

...for Hasan, a believer in Germany, who has a zeal to witness for the Lord, even in mosques. Pray that the Lord will give him wisdom, protection and encouragement as he plants a Turkish fellowship in his area.

...for the non-Muslim minority in Pakistan. They continue to live under the threat of being accused of blasphemy with the accompanying police arrest and jail without bail. Their appeals remain frozen because judges are afraid to take these cases. If they are released, their lives are threatened.

Friday, April 21, 2000. Please pray

...that believers in Tunisia who are looking for jobs or trying to start businesses to sustain themselves will have wisdom from the Lord and find ways of supporting themselves in this time of great unemployment.

...for the Christians in Indonesia. Though hundreds of churches have been burned or destroyed in recent years, church attendance is on the rise. Pray especially for Ambon where over 500 Christians have been killed.

...that African churches will find opportunities to minister to families in crises situations due to the AIDS epidemic, especially among the orphans. May God grant them favor, especially in Muslim communities.

Friday, April 28, 2000. Please pray

...for the 1 million Muslims in Delhi, India's capital city. Of any place in the world, these Muslims are some of the most open to gospel.

...that we as Christians would have discernment as to where we should focus our relief efforts when we are continually being faced with so many overwhelming disasters.

...that the Korean Church will respond wisely to evangelize some 20,000 Korean Muslims living among them. Most of them were converted to Islam while working in Saudi Arabia. Korean Christians also serve as missionaries in Muslim countries.