

Exercise 1

A. Instructions

Listen to the following story and then discuss the questions that follow.

She was hungry for truth and receptive to the gospel, Muhammad told me. She was also under strict rule by her male relatives. Muhammad and the other disciples knew that sharing the gospel with “Iman” would involve great risk, but they had to try.

Most of Muhammad’s people adhere to the Shafi’i school of Islamic law. In Muhammad’s mind, this translated as, “Our people are not very strict in their observance of Islam.” In other words, while most of his people would take swift, sometimes deadly, action against anyone defaming the name of Islam, getting them to put out their cigarettes and do their prayers was another matter.

While Muslim women from Muhammad’s people wear the full body covering, or *hijab*, they typically have more freedom to travel—to and from the market, for example—without their husbands. However, scattered among the majority Shafi’i population are pockets of Muslims who follow the more rigid Hanbali school of Islamic law. Many of these groups have come into being in recent years through the influence of radical Islamists from abroad. Perhaps the majority of Islamic terrorist groups in the world are Hanbali.

Muhammad told me that many of Iman’s male relatives were Hanbali, including the uncle with whom she lived. Along with a handful of other women in her household, Iman was under constant surveillance. Moments when she was left alone outside of the home were extremely rare. With some exceptions, she could only go to and from the market when accompanied by a male relative. When she sold goods in the market, usually the nearby relative would keep a close eye on her. Several times a day, Iman and the other women in her household were forced to say their prayers and endure long hours of the Qur’an being recited over them. Noncompliance could have brutal consequences. As I listened to Muhammad describe Iman’s situation in more and more detail, I could not imagine a more oppressive and controlling environment. Any attempt to share the gospel with her would prove dangerous.

However, the new believers saw Iman as worth the risk. One of Iman’s cousins had accepted Jesus through Muhammad’s witness. He told Muhammad and Muhammad’s wife, Fatima, about Iman, whom he thought would be open to the gospel for several reasons. Several years earlier, while living in another city, she had somehow come across a New Testament and the *Jesus* film. By the time she moved to live with her uncle in Muhammad’s town, she had been contemplating the message of Jesus on-and-off for several years. Though Iman had not yet confessed Jesus as the Messiah, because of the time she had spent thinking about the New Testament and the *Jesus* film, her heart was very receptive to the gospel. Iman was an extremely intelligent and thoughtful woman. She knew the ins-and-outs of Islam and the dynamics of her culture as well as any man. According to Muhammad, she was a thoughtful person

who also had incredible leadership gifts. Most important of all, she was *hungry for the truth*. One day, Fatima shared her testimony with Iman. Iman wanted to know more. Could it be true that there were actually more of her people interested in Jesus? What a contrast this man Jesus was to the men in her life! Though sharing the gospel with her would not be an easy task, Muhammad, Fatima, and the other believers concluded that Iman's leadership could be an important key to seeing the gospel advance among women in their people group.

Their first attempts to share the gospel in more depth with this hungry heart met with frustration. Though Iman's uncle and the other men in the house kept a close watch on her, at certain times they permitted her to host female visitors. On several occasions, Fatima and some of the other female disciples tried to visit Iman at home. However, they did not get to share much with her, because the men were listening and quickly became suspicious. After two or three visits, Fatima and some of the other believing women were threatened and told not to come back.

At this point, Muhammad decided to use the Hanbali sub-culture against itself. He knew that those who adhere to the school of Hanbal among Moravians never allow "their" women to meet with a man who is not a relative. However, there is one small loophole: if a man expresses interest in *marrying* a woman, he will be given a small amount of time to meet with her alone in a public place. The woman's Hanbali overseer still observes both of them from a distance, but he is usually not within hearing distance. Muhammad had no intention of taking another wife, although it was permissible in that culture. But with the support of the other believers, including his wife, he decided to take advantage of the "courtship loophole" for the sake of the gospel. On a couple of occasions, he met with Iman and shared parts of the gospel with her. In the meantime, her overseer looked on from a distance, thinking that Iman was being evaluated for marriage. However, even these times were too short. Iman still wanted to hear the gospel further explained before making a decision.

One day, Muhammad called me. "I need your help," he said. Iman had been working in her family's store and was getting ready to shut it down for an hour. As she did so, she noticed that there was no one watching her. Now was her chance. She immediately called Muhammad, and Muhammad called me.

"Can I bring Iman over to your house?" he asked. It was enclosed by a wall, which provided a small measure of security.

"I don't know if that's a good idea in broad daylight," I said. "Neighbors and passers-by are constantly watching my house."

Everyone knew everyone in this small town, and if Iman were seen coming into our compound, news of this would undoubtedly get back to her uncle and other relatives. She would be beaten for sure. We decided to meet elsewhere.

I jumped in my truck and drove to the meeting place: a vacant alley. Muhammad and Iman quickly got in and ducked down in the back seat. I drove some distance out of town to the countryside to an area with a lot of bushes and trees and stopped there. We went behind the trees, sat down, and began talking about Jesus.

We did not have much time. Together, Muhammad and I shared the gospel with Iman. Muhammad then took what I shared and went on to explain it at a much deeper level than I ever could have done in his own language. I was impressed. Iman's face radiated hunger, as Muhammad's had when he first heard the presentation. Something

was clearly moving in her heart as she listened. Her facial expressions and soft affirmations indicated that she understood everything.

After we finished the presentation, we told Iman that God wanted to confirm the truth of this message to her through his power.

“Since no other woman is with us, is it all right if we lay hands on your shoulder and pray for you?”

She said yes, and we laid hands on her and began to bless her with the love, joy, power, and peace of God through the authority of Jesus’ name. Immediately, a huge smile came over Iman’s face as the power of Holy Spirit swept through her body, manifesting his presence in the form of heat and fire. She told us that she felt immense joy and peace flooding her heart, and that fear was leaving her.

“Are you ready to follow Jesus?” we asked.

“Yes, I am,” she said, smiling. We led her through a confession of faith on the spot.

During the drive back, Iman said that she had never felt such overwhelming joy and happiness. She talked on and on about how happy she was. We just laughed and rejoiced with her. I dropped them off quickly on the edge of town and then went home. Iman later told Muhammad that during the night of her decision, the Lord began to speak to and encourage her through dreams. Though all of the men in her life had treated her like a slave, she now found comfort in the arms of this one called Jesus, whose thoughts were nothing but tenderness for her.

A few days later, Muhammad told me about a dream he had had before this event, but which he had forgotten about. In the dream, Muhammad, a woman, and myself were in a truck driving out to the countryside. When we stopped, we got out of the vehicle and crushed a snake under our feet. Muhammad made the interpretive connection: we had taken Iman out to the countryside and, through the gospel, had crushed Satan’s work in her life under our feet.

Several days after her conversion experience, Iman’s radical Islamist overseers proceeded with their usual routine of forcing her to do prayers and listen to the recitation of the Qur’an. One day, she simply refused to comply. When they began to reprimand and threaten her, a surge of boldness came over her and she cried out, “I know the truth better than you do!” Enraged, one man began to beat her. However, as he hit her, in Muhammad’s words, “a miracle happened.” The power of the Holy Spirit began to manifest his presence on Iman’s body in the form of intense fire and heat. When the man hit her, he immediately jumped back in panic because his hand began to burn. Terrified, he ran out of the room and came back with some of the other men in the house.

Betraying the tragic extent of their deception, these men told Iman that God was punishing her by “setting her on fire” because she had become an “infidel.” Now afraid to touch her, they began to beat her viciously with donkey whips while reciting the Qur’an over her with demonic fervor. They ordered her to deny her faith in Jesus. She later told Muhammad that during the reciting of the Qur’an, she began to feel confusion, intense oppression, and doubt about her faith. However, she still refused to deny Jesus and endured the beating.

Thankfully, Iman did not have to endure this trial alone. She now could turn to a growing number of brothers and sisters in Messiah. Over the next few days, the other

disciples rallied around her, nursed her wounds, and helped her through the trauma of this experience. They rebuked and renounced the demons that had attacked her during the Qur'anic reading, and she felt the confusion, doubt, and oppression lift. They then took her to live with one of her female relatives.

B. Discussion Questions:

1. What were some of the challenges that the believers faced in trying to share the gospel with Iman?
2. When Iman heard the gospel, what did the Holy Spirit do to confirm the message?
3. What did the Holy Spirit do as Iman accepted the gospel?
4. What kinds of persecution did Iman face in this story?
5. How did the Holy Spirit lead and strengthen Iman through these persecutions?

C. Lesson

Iman was only a few days old in her faith when she experienced violent persecution from her family. However, the Holy Spirit strengthened his daughter with power and fire through these persecutions. The Holy Spirit is an amazing leader. His incredible power is able to strengthen even brand new believers through difficult seasons of persecution.

Also, God was using Iman's persecution to let her family members see the cross of Christ in a very personal way. As believers bless and love their enemies in the midst of their suffering, not only do God's people become more like Jesus, but their persecutors see the cross of Messiah portrayed before their very eyes. By this, they are given more opportunities to submit to Jesus before they are punished at the Second Coming. When the Holy Spirit backs up the gospel with power, this provides a living testimony to the resurrection of the dead that will occur at the Second Coming. The persecution birthed by the same power and our loving responses to our persecutors provides a living testimony to love Christ displayed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

Exercise 2:

A. Instructions

Listen carefully to the following passages and discuss the questions that immediately follow each passage.

John 16:1-4

All this I have told you so that you will not go. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.

B. Discussion Questions

1. In this passage, what does Jesus tell his disciples will happen to them?
2. Why did Jesus warn them about these persecutions ahead of time?

Acts 14:21-22

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

C. Discussion Question

1. What did Paul and Barnabas say to the disciples in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in order to encourage them to remain true to the faith?
2. What did Paul and Barnabas tell the churches about hardships?

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

D. Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul tell the church in Thessalonica that followers of Jesus are destined for in this age before Jesus returns?
2. What did Paul keep telling the Thessalonians while he was with them?
3. Did the Thessalonians experience persecution as Paul had previously warned?

E. Lesson

Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever hid the reality of persecution from their disciples. They were up-front and frank about the implications of being a disciple of Jesus on this side of his return. When they were with their disciples, they warned them ahead of time about the persecutions they would later face as Jesus’ disciples. By doing this, they removed false expectations about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this age. Disciples would not be surprised when the persecutions came. Also, by warning new disciples up front about the cost of following Jesus, Paul was able to protect his integrity as a servant of Christ. Because Paul had never promised new disciples a pain free life, his integrity was not compromised when the persecutions actually came to the disciples he had warned.

When Jesus returns, all persecution against Jesus’ followers will cease. However, in this age, we are destined for persecutions and difficulties. In this age we must go through many persecutions to enter the kingdom of God.

Exercise 3

A. Instructions

Listen to the following story and then discuss the questions that follow.

Whenever I share the gospel with anyone, I typically make both the benefits and costs of following Jesus vividly clear to them before I even offer to lead them through a decision. I especially made this a priority when I share the gospel with Muslims, for whom a decision to follow Jesus is almost always met with swift and often violent persecution. When I shared the gospel with Muslims from Muhammad's people group, I always warned them up front about the cost of following Jesus. The way I did this was by concluding my gospel presentation with a song written by some believers from this people group who had died for their faith. Here are the words of the song:

Chorus: The Eternal God, who created the world, he has given a promise, and I am not going to miss out on it.

If I stay on the top of the mountains for a month, with the snow and ice pounding me, I will not deny my Savior.

If I stay in the wilderness a hundred years, and fail to find a garden, livestock, or a wife, I will not deny my Savior.

If I am slaughtered, and hurled into the ocean, and beaten with a club, I will not deny my Savior.

If I am in need, and fail to find money, I will not deny my Savior.

When I am injured and sick, he nurses me back to health and heals me, I will not deny my Savior.

When I first shared the gospel with Muhammad, I sang this song for him. Even before his decision to follow Jesus I warned Muhammad about the hardships he would face if he made such a decision. After singing this song and then warning Muhammad about the persecutions he would face for his decision, I then asked Muhammad if he still wanted to follow Jesus. When he said "yes," he knew what he was getting himself into.

B. Discussion Questions

1. What did the missionary do to warn potential disciples about the cost of following Jesus?
2. Why is it important to warn potential and new disciples about the persecutions they will face as a follower of Jesus?

C. Lesson

Like Jesus and the apostles did, from the beginning of a movement we must clearly warn new or potential disciples about the realities of persecution connected to

a decision to follow Jesus. To hide the biblical reality that persecution is part of our training in this age and will continue until Jesus' second coming is to set new disciples up for failure and disillusionment when they face difficulties. We do new disciples a disservice if we make the gospel seem more attractive by covering up the difficulties. From the beginning of their life in Christ, they must have no illusions about what they are getting themselves into. If we make clear both the benefits of the gospel and perils that await disciples of Jesus, potential disciples can then weigh the cost without illusions. The gospel is an invitation to death, so that we might truly find life.

By warning Muhammad and other potential disciples up-front about the cost of following Jesus, I was protecting my integrity. Should persecution actually come upon them as they had been warned, they would not feel deceived. Not only would my integrity be preserved and my conscience remain clear, but they would view their future trials as opportunities by which means their faith could be proved genuine, rather than as a surprise that they had not been warned about.

On another level, making the cost of following Jesus known up-front works as a kind of filter to sift the truly committed from the insincere in the beginning stages of a movement. When this happens, it is much more likely that the movement will continue to weed out nominal Christians as it grows and unfolds.

Exercise 4

A. Instructions

Memorize the following verse and then discuss the questions that follow.

Romans 1:11b

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong...

2 Timothy 1:6

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

B. Discussion Questions

1. Why did Paul long to visit the church in Rome?
2. According to this verse, for what purpose did Paul want the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit to be imparted to the believers in Rome?
3. Why do you think the disciples in Rome needed the strengthening of the Holy Spirit?
4. Paul tells Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God that was in him. How does Paul say this gift came to be in Timothy?
5. Do you remember the story of Iman? How did the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen her through persecution?

C. Lesson

According to the New Testament, one of the ways God imparts the power and gifts of his Spirit into his people is through the laying on of hands. One of the key purposes of this power is to give divine strength to remain faithful through hardships and persecution. While making the cost of following Jesus known to new disciples up-front plays a vital role in bracing them for persecution, an infinitely more significant factor is the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit himself.

Though Muhammad and I had warned Iman of the trials she would face as a disciple, it was the Holy Spirit who alloyed her faith with fire when the storm came just days later. When we lay hands on new disciples, like the apostles and the early church, we must ask God to release an impartation of the Spirit's fire and power that will sustain them through the persecutions and difficulties they will face as followers of Jesus.

I do not pretend to fully understand all of the complex spiritual dynamics involved in the act of impartation. But based on my experiences, I believe that when we fervently and persistently pray, fast, and cry out for God to birth a harvest by the Spirit, not by our own strength, as part of God's answer we can confidently expect him to release an impartation of strength and power that:

1. is transferable through the hands of every disciple participating in the movement
2. is sufficient to sustain new disciples through difficult trials early on in their faith journey
3. accelerates the rate of numerical expansion (increased grace for the gifts of the Spirit)
4. accelerates the maturation process (increased grace for the fruits of the Spirit)
5. Once the beginning of the harvest is actually birthed through prayer, from that point on the impartation of strength naturally flows from one person to the next as the gospel spreads. Do you remember the story of Ali? In that story, the impartation of the Spirit's strength that Muhammad had received was passed on to other disciples, until it reached Ali. The Holy Spirit's strength enabled Ali to stay faithful to Jesus through stoning, even though Ali was just a brand new believer.

Bible Memorization

A. Instructions

Repeat the following verse until memorized.

John 15:20

Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Memorization of Key Principles:

A. Instructions

Repeat the following principle until memorized.

- 1. We must warn potential and new disciples up-front about the costs of following Jesus and the persecution that will come with such a decision.*
- 2. When we lay hands on new disciples, we must ask the Holy Spirit to give them an impartation of strength to sustain them through persecution.*

Prayer Response

Break into groups and ask the Holy Spirit how He wants you to respond in prayer.