

Gedenkschrift

AHMED ALI HAILE



Mission Work
Among Somalis:
Essays in Honor of
Ahmed Ali Haile

Aweis A. Ali, Editor

GEDENKSCHRIFT

Ahmed Ali Haile

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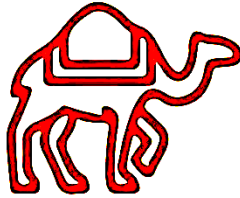
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Essays in Honor of Ahmed Ali Haile**

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Aweis A. Ali, Editor



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www.Somalibiblesociety.org
info@Somalibiblesociety.org

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GEDENKSCHRIFT

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AAli@AweisAli.com
<https://aweisali.com/>

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FOREWORD

“A clear case does not require clarification.”¹

A Somali Proverb

I was pleased to learn that Dr. Aweis Ali was working on editing a gedenkschrift in honor of Ahmed Haile. Aweis is recognized as the most prolific Somali Christian author in the history of the Somali church; his publications have been a vital resource for the Somali community, as well as for expatriate readers and researchers. I do not know anyone more qualified than Aweis to produce this gedenkschrift.

Ahmed Haile is widely recognized as one of the most prominent figures in the history of the Somali Protestant church. His keen scholarly acumen, profound expertise in Somali culture and linguistics, exemplification of kindness and generosity, impeccable sense of humor, and sustained influence within the Somali Muslim community collectively distinguish him as a significant and influential figure.

For many years, I have been aware of Ahmed Haile’s reputation, a figure recognized across Africa, North America, and beyond. He is notably remembered as a confident and cultured individual. His intellectual sharpness and wisdom earned admiration from various groups, including both Muslims and Christians. Notably, Ahmed was



Pastor Ahmed Ali Haile baptizing a Somali believer in Mogadishu, Somalia. Photo credit: Somalia Mennonite Mission

¹ In Somali, *Sadar muuqda su'aal ka dhan*.

known for fearlessly proclaiming his Christian faith to Somali Muslims, often despite the risk of persecution.

My first encounter with Ahmed was in 2003 while I was working as an evangelist in Djibouti. During our discussions about ministry issues, he emphasized the importance of proper discipleship for Somali believers. He expressed concern about Somali Christians relying on aid funded by missions and instead advocated for vocational training, income-generating projects, and formal education. His goal was for Somali Christians to live openly in Somalia without the threat of deadly persecution.

Many Somali Protestant Christians cut ties with Muslim family and friends due to fear of rejection or hostility because of their faith. These Christians often rely on financial support from churches or missionaries, which can unintentionally foster unhealthy reliance and potentially hinder their spiritual growth.

Contrasting with this reliance, Ahmed Haile demonstrated that a Somali Muslim can follow Jesus while upholding respectful relationships within their Muslim community.² This approach reflects the precedent established by Somali Roman Catholics over 140 years ago, when early missionaries arrived in the Somali Peninsula.

Ahmed's strong relationships with his Muslim family and acquaintances supported his ministry efforts, leading to many conversions and the establishment of Bible study groups, fellowships, and house churches in the Horn of Africa.

Throughout his life, Ahmed's home served as a gathering place for Muslim leaders, including clan elders, scholars, and politicians, reflecting his influence and respect within the community.

Furthermore, Ahmed is known for his unwavering generosity and Christlike humility, qualities that earn him admiration.

² For more on this subject, read Aweis A. Ali, *Understanding the Somali Church* (Nairobi, Kenya: KENPRO Publications, 2021), 83-88.

<https://www.somalibiblesociety.org/understanding-the-somali-church/>, accessed 10 July 20225.

Despite facing challenges stemming from jealousy and envy among some missionaries and local believers, Ahmed continued to demonstrate love and forgiveness, exemplifying Christian virtues in the face of adversity.

This foreword would be incomplete without recognizing the significant influence of Martha, Ahmed's wife, whose support had a profound impact on his life and ministry. Martha, a dedicated church historian and passionate advocate for mission work, was not only a loving partner but also a key figure in Ahmed's journey. Her steadfast encouragement, insightful guidance, and profound understanding of church history and ministry served as the primary forces behind Ahmed's success, inspiring him to reach new heights in his spiritual and pastoral work. As the Somali proverb says, a man's progress depends on his wife.³

Rev. Ali Adawe
Evangelist and Educator

³ In Somali, Rag dumar ayaa is dhaafiya.

INTRODUCTION

“If a man fails to notice you because you are sitting down, do not stand up so he can see you; he is not worth that honor.”⁴

A Somali Proverb

Shortly after Prof. Ahmed Ali Haile, a longtime lecturer at Day Star University, passed away in 2011, the heartfelt idea of creating a worthy gedenkschrift to honor this legendary church leader crossed my mind. His profound impact on the community and his enduring legacy as a scholar and minister inspired me to consider a fitting tribute. As time went on and no commemorative book was published in his name, I felt a growing sense of urgency to ensure his contributions would not be forgotten. In 2023, I approached some of Ahmed’s colleagues, friends, and admirers, requesting their contributions to the gedenkschrift I envisioned.



Listening to the sage in 1998 during a Somali Christian fellowship sightseeing outside Addis Ababa. From left to right: Aweis A. Ali, Horiyo Abdulkadir Ali Iidle and Ahmed A. Haile. Photo credit: YWAM Somali Christian Fellowship.

The idea of a gedenkschrift received a warm and enthusiastic reception, with many showing their eagerness to honor Ahmed this way. His influence on the Somali Christian community makes him the first Somali Christian minister to be honored in such a manner. This distinction not only emphasizes his significance but also highlights the importance of recognizing and preserving the contributions of Somali Christian scholars throughout history.

⁴ In somali, Nin fadhi kugu arki waayay looma sara joogsado.

Despite my busy schedule, I chose to take on the role of editor for this commemorative publication. It felt like a calling; after all, honoring Ahmed, who is arguably the most influential Somali church leader in history, was a responsibility I could not overlook. Failing to celebrate such an important figure with a *gedenkschrift* would have been an unthinkable betrayal of his memory and those whose lives he touched.

Prof. Ahmed was a respected scholar, an influential missionary, a dedicated family man, and an expert in Somali culture and language. His multifaceted life and deep understanding of faith and community inspired many people. Ahmed was best known for his remarkable courage, eloquence, and unmatched spirit of generosity. He devoted his life to bridging faith and culture; his presence was a source of comfort and inspiration for many.

Throughout his life, Ahmed consistently showed exceptional hospitality, reflecting the deeply rooted values of Somali culture and making him the most hospitable Somali Christian I have ever met. Whether hosting gatherings, offering words of encouragement, or lending a listening ear, his warmth and kindness left a lasting impact on everyone fortunate enough to know him.

As I gathered and organized contributions for this *gedenkschrift*, I was continually amazed by the stories and reflections shared by others. It became clear that Ahmed's legacy wasn't limited to his academic achievements and Somali ministry; it extended into the hearts and lives of those he served in Africa and beyond. This collection of chapters and insights from friends, colleagues, and mentees serves not only as a tribute to his life and work but also as a reminder of the profound impact one individual can have on the world around them. Through this publication, we aim to celebrate not just Ahmed's life but also the enduring spirit of hope and love he inspired in so many.

The Islamic ministry, particularly the mission work among Somali and other Muslim communities, held immense significance for Ahmed and his calling. Recognizing this, the authors and I made the thoughtful decision to fill this book with a wide array of topics that specifically aim

to promote and enhance the church's outreach to Muslims. Our hope is that this compilation not only serves as an informative resource but also inspires action and deeper understanding among Christians seeking to connect with their Muslim neighbors.

We pray that this book will be a source of blessing for all who have a heart for Muslims and the Muslim background church. Each chapter is crafted to illuminate the beauty and depth of cultural and spiritual exchanges, emphasizing the importance of love, respect, and empathy in our interactions. We believe that fostering these relationships is essential in building bridges and nurturing a deeper understanding of the Christian faith in the context of Islam.

Furthermore, we anticipate that this publication will be a cherished resource, not only for the present generation of believers but also for future generations of Christians. It is our desire that they recognize the immense significance of their role in making Christlike disciples in the Muslim world. By equipping themselves with knowledge and insights from this book, we hope that readers will be empowered to engage in meaningful conversations, develop compassionate outreach initiatives, and participate in prayerful support for the mission field.

In a world that's increasingly diverse and connected, understanding and compassion across faith boundaries are more important than ever. This book demonstrates our commitment to this goal, encouraging Christians to answer the call to love and serve people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Ultimately, we believe that through this work, many will experience the transformative power of love and grace in Christ, which goes beyond cultural differences and brings hope and healing to everyone.

Aweis A. Ali



CHAPTER 1

THE LEGACY OF AHMED ALI HAILE

Mark Leader

“An elder’s entire body is full of eyes.”⁵

A Somali Proverb

Introduction

Although I did not personally know Ahmed Ali Haile, I respect and am grateful to him because I have seen the gospel grow through his impact on the Muslims he befriended. The Christians he mentored here in Minnesota, in Sweden, and back in Somalia. I grew up just seventeen miles from Goshen College, the Mennonite school in Indiana where Ahmed graduated in 1979. Despite this proximity, I didn’t meet him until I moved to Minnesota and he visited the Somali fellowship here in Minneapolis, shortly before he passed away in 2011. Today, I want to share three stories that show how his life has left a lasting impact on many individuals and communities.

In the summer of 2010, an invitation from the sultan of a small Somali tribe brought me to a local café in Minneapolis for coffee. He held one of our Somali-English ABC books and said, “I appreciate the work you’ve done in the Somali language, but now, will you help us preserve our ethnic and linguistic heritage as indigenous people?” He specifically asked for my help in revising and expanding the dictionary for their tribal language. Recognizing the importance of his request, I replied, “Sir, I’m a servant of God, so I can’t say yes or no until I pray

⁵ In Somali, *Kor waayeel waa wada indho*.

about this.” I added, “If we work together on such an important project, I want you to know I’ve pledged my allegiance to Jesus. I believe that what the Qur’an says about Jesus is that he is the Messiah and that he came with the Injil.”

Reflection



Prof. Ahmed A. Haile. Credit: Ahmed Haile Blog

Reflecting on that moment, I’m struck by the unexpected boldness I felt. I truly believe that the Holy Spirit was guiding me to serve as a witness—a follow-up witness to Ahmed, as I learned later—before this dear man who so passionately cared for the preservation of his culture. I inquired, “Sir, do you read the Injil?” And then I showed him a passage in the book of Revelation, verses that speak of a new Jerusalem filled with light and glory. As he read aloud, “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.” Revelation 21:22-24. I could sense the weight of the moment.

With genuine warmth, I said, “Sir, this is talking about you. You are one of the world’s kings, and it’s your privilege to bring the glory of your tribe to honor this High King.” I mentioned how, just as he was anointed with camel’s milk to become the sultan of his tribe, Jesus is the Anointed Messiah, the King of kings. The conversation filled me with both enthusiasm and trepidation; what if he took offense? Thankfully, he reassured me, saying, “I appreciate what you’re telling me, and I respect you and your friends.” He even thanked me for my connection to Ahmed, whom he recognized as a friend and fellow leader.

A New Sultan Is Born

Later, when the sultan passed away that year, his son, whom I had also befriended, took on the mantle of leadership. In our conversations, he recounted fond memories of visiting Ahmed for teatime during his childhood. Indeed, Ahmed's legacy transcended generations, as this young leader learned about responsibilities, influence, and the importance of mentoring from his father and Ahmed's teachings. This ongoing connection highlights how ties across cultures and faith can lead to profound changes over time.

Speaking of that customary teatime gathering at the Haile home, where Martha served tea and Ahmed engaged Somali leaders in peacemaking and gospel storytelling, we have distributed many copies of his autobiography, *Teatime in Mogadishu*. Over the years, it has been recommended reading for all of our estimated 1,800 ESL volunteers.⁶ In addition, we've given away hundreds of Somali translations of the book *Jidkii Nabaddoonka* (*The Path of the Peacemaker*) to our Somali friends and neighbors here in Minnesota.

Humor In The Middle Of Pain

One of my favorite stories from Ahmed's autobiography illustrates both his practical side and his deep spirituality. In 1991, during a peacemaking mission, Ahmed was attacked and severely injured by a rocket, resulting in the amputation of his leg. The harrowing situation would bring most to despair, yet Ahmed's instinctual response was to pray and trust in the Lord. There's a humorous anecdote that revealed his resilient spirit—when he awoke on the operating table and saw his leg being disposed of, he couldn't resist calling out, "Hold on! Before you throw that leg away, take the shoe off and give me the money that's in my sock!" In an instant, he bridged the seriousness of his circumstance with humor, a testament to his character.

⁶ Ahmed Haile and David Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu, My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011).

The Power Of Networking

Although I missed the chance to build a personal bond with Ahmed, I cherish the relationships I have with those he mentored. On one occasion, I was invited to a linguistics conference in Sweden by a group of Somali scholars. While there, I met an older Somali man who happened to be one of the hosts. Upon learning I was from Minnesota, he exclaimed, “Oh, since you’re from Minneapolis, you must know my old friend!” He said a Somali name, and I initially thought to say, “Well, there are thousands of Somalis in Minnesota,” but then it dawned on me that he was referencing the Somali nickname for my American friend, who had been part of Ahmed’s hospital team in Bulo Burte. Elated, I responded, “Yes! I do know your friend. He’s my friend, too!”

I quickly sent a message from Sweden to our mutual friend in Minneapolis, and he eagerly remembered his old friend from Bulo Burte. He promptly sent me a photo of the two of them, arms linked in friendship when they were younger men in the late 1980s. This gesture melted the heart of the older gentleman in Sweden, who immediately invited me over for dinner, wanting to honor the bond created through Ahmed. I felt a profound sense of gratitude, knowing that the love and dedication Ahmed instilled in his hospital team remained alive and well across continents.

The Mennonite Legacy

In my third story, I want to honor Ahmed’s steadfast loyalty to his adopted Mennonite family, who not only nurtured him in faith but also greatly benefited from his ministry to them. As I mentioned, I hail from Indiana, near Goshen, where my own Mennonite heritage originates from my grandfather’s side. I’ve discovered that this background resonates positively with many of my Somali friends due to the commendable testimony of Mennonites in Somalia.

Once, I took a group of visiting college students on a mission trip to a local mosque to attend the Jummah Friday service. After the service, the custodian, Abdi Mo’alim, remarked to the college students, “You

guys remind me of my Christian family.” Surprised, I asked, “Abdi Mo’alin, what do you mean by your Christian family? You’re Somali. You’re Muslim, right?” He replied, “Yes, but I went to a Mennonite boarding school in Somalia, and they were like family to me.” Intrigued, I asked, “Can I come back next Friday? I have a gift for you.” Abdi warmly responded, “You are always welcome!”

The following week, I invited the local Mennonite pastor to join me. We decided to bring a gift book titled *Fifty Years, Fifty Stories: The Mennonite Mission in Somalia, 1953-2003*.⁷ When we arrived, Abdi Mo’alin and the Mennonite pastor instantly connected as they reminisced about Mennonite history. Abdi noted, “I remember the name of my teacher, Carl Wesselhoeft.” I quickly checked the index of our gift book and found a reference to Carl and his wife, Leota Wesselhoeft. Curious, I asked, “Do you remember Leota?” A tear formed in his eye as he recounted, “She was like a mother to us boys.”

Then, with mounting excitement, Abdi recalled his principal, David Shenk. I could hardly contain my joy at this connection—earlier that morning while preparing for our meeting, I had been drawn to a book on my shelf titled *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* by David Shenk.⁸ Feeling it was appropriate to bring, I had tucked it away for our visit. When Abdi received this gift from his former principal, his delight was palpable. Overall, we presented him with three books: David Shenk’s book, *Fifty Years, Fifty Stories*, and the “Good Book”, the *Kitaabka Qudduuska Ah* (the 2008 Somali Bible). When Abdi received the Bible, he kissed its cover, touched it to his forehead, and held it close to his heart. With deep emotion, he said, “Thank you. I used to read this book when I was a boy, but I never dreamed that I would have my own copy, especially in my language.” This heartwarming moment exemplifies the beautiful legacy left by Ahmed’s Mennonite family, not only enriching spiritual lives but also building bridges between communities.

⁷ Omar Eby, *Fifty Years, Fifty Stories: The Mennonite Mission in Somalia*, (Dreamseeker Books, 1953-2003, 2003).

⁸ David Shenk and Badru Kateregga, *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, (Herald Press, 1980).

Ahmed Has Blessed Me

I was blessed to attend Ahmed's funeral, which was rich in God's Word and filled with the heartfelt testimonies of his friends and family. It was a profound honor to meet his widow, Martha, and share moments of prayer with her and Grace Shenk, David's widow, during Zoom prayer meetings organized by former Mennonite missionaries. Engaging with Ahmed's loved ones is both a joy and a solemn honor. I continually pray for his children that they may succeed in their endeavors, bearing the seeds of the gospel that he nurtured in them and countless others. I hope they flourish and multiply in Jesus' name.

Ahmed's life example and teachings remain powerful influences that resonate deeply in Somalia. One year after his funeral, I received an unexpected phone call from a young leader in Mogadishu, who had known Ahmed personally. He made an urgent request for "one thousand missionaries" to be mobilized in Somalia. When pressed for clarification, we asked if he meant relief and development workers, but he insisted, "I want true Christians who are born-again believers." When we inquired why he desired this, he responded earnestly, "Because I trust them. Their love is sincere."

Conclusion

As we reflect on Ahmed's life and the remarkable connections he fostered, I invite you to join me in honoring his legacy through prayer. Let's pray earnestly that his dreams for Somalia come to fruition and that the Lord answers the heartfelt request of this young leader influenced by Ahmed. May Somalia be filled with trustworthy Christians embodying the sincere love that Ahmed exemplified because they know the One who first loved them—Jesus Christ. Through these stories, we see that Ahmed's impact continues to flourish, transcending boundaries and cultures and leaving an indelible mark on many lives.

The lasting impact of Ahmed Ali Haile demonstrates how one person can profoundly influence various cultures and communities. His strong dedication to building relationships, nurturing faith, and

preserving cultural heritage underscores the profound impact of love and mentorship. As we reflect on the stories shared, let's not only honor Ahmed's memory but also commit to embodying the values he championed. By responding to the call to be ambassadors of peace and understanding, we can continue spreading the seeds of hope and change that Ahmed passionately fostered. May his vision for a united and thriving Somalia inspire us all to help create a world where love crosses boundaries and faith unites us.

About The Author

Mark Leader has been working with the Somali community since 1999. It all began when he asked the Lord where he and his wife should go to fulfill the Great Commission. The Lord responded, "Look across the street." Directly across from Mark's house is a restaurant called Praise in Somali, which reminds him that God deserves praise from Somalis everywhere in the world. For eighteen years, Mark led the ESL ministry, mobilizing 1,800 volunteers to share Jesus with their Somali neighbors through literacy and friendship. He holds a Master's degree in Organizational Management and another Master's degree in Language and Culture. He also published a dictionary in one of Somalia's indigenous languages. Currently, he is focused on Bible translation.



CHAPTER 2

REMEMBERING AHMED ALI HAILE

Sal Owens

*“Listening to an elder keeps the
she-camel safe from the hyena.”⁹*

A Somali Proverb

Introduction

As I sit here, I can hear the call to prayer from multiple minarets. It is about 3:30 in the afternoon, and everyone in this city is reminded of the need to worship Allah and honor the prophethood of Muhammad, the last prophet according to Islamic tradition.

I cannot say for sure how much Ahmed Haile inspired me as a young missionary in the late 1990s. However, I know he left a profound impression on me just from observing him during fellowship meetings in Nairobi, Kenya. Even now, having been invited to write a chapter for this book, memories flood back, and I can see Ahmed vividly in my mind as someone who truly embodied the transformative power of the gospel.

Let me share a few memories from over 25 years ago when we first met in Westlands, Nairobi. Ahmed and his family dedicated everything they had to building up the Somali Church. They transformed the entire lawn of their compound into a gathering space filled with plastic chairs and mats, where the word of God was shared generously. Discussions arose during and after the message, often loud and enthusiastic. One

⁹ In Somali, *Hal waayee! haddii la yeelo, waraabe hal ma cuneen.*

could hardly tell whether people were arguing or merely engaging in spirited conversation. Especially for someone unaccustomed to the Somali debate style, things could easily appear as a full-blown fight, though that was rarely the case. At that time, as a young missionary, I needed mentorship in ministry more than anyone.



Prof. Ahmed A. Haile. Credit: Ahmed Haile Blog

I watched in awe and wonder as this humble yet powerful man of God demonstrated leadership that I now realize, in hindsight, resembles that of our servant leader, Jesus Christ. Ahmed served tea, returned the dirty cups to the kitchen, and helped his lovely wife, Martha, wash the dishes. He even took the time to explain to his friends and fellow believers why he did what he did: he viewed it as a service to Jesus. He was secure in his identity as a servant of Christ, which meant that insults and ridicule from other Somalis—both believers and non-believers—did not diminish his sense of self.

On the other hand, he was a formidable leader. It was difficult for others to grow in his shadow. It wasn't until Ahmed relocated to the United States that others began to emerge from that shadow and vie for leadership. Struggles to fill his large shoes soon followed. This is my observation of the leadership challenges that arose after his departure, albeit from a distance, as I no longer lived in Nairobi. My occasional visits to the city provided only a superficial look into the emerging leadership crisis.

I feel privileged to remember this exemplary leader after all these years. I am grateful to recall how he led by example and became a role model not only for fellow believers but also for those who respected him—perhaps not for his faith but for his character and personality.

The Hardest Place Is Softening

In this Gedenkschrift, I want to highlight a topic that may be beneficial for this generation of missionaries and those to come.

First, I want to express my deep appreciation for the many generations of workers who came before me. Some I personally remember, while others I have only read about. It is essential to mention the Modrickers by name,¹⁰ along with countless others who followed them, some of whom even gave their lives for the calling. Helen Miller aptly referred to it as “the hardest place” in her book on the Modrickers. Serving in Somalia during the 1950s and 1960s—and during the subsequent years when Somalia closed its doors to mission work—was incredibly challenging. After that, only regions surrounding Somalia could be accessed, such as Eastern Ethiopia and Northeastern Kenya. In those areas, ministries were established, and I can only say that I stand on the shoulders of those who ventured into these hostile lands before me. The ground became a little softer and less unwelcoming through much prayer and hard work. The opposition from the evil one who holds an entire people group hostage is astounding. Yet today, we are witnessing a growing number of Somalis who are increasingly dissatisfied with their native religion and are searching for a God who can bring them peace, hope, and love. Their search seems more urgent than ever.

Today, I belong to a group of veterans still actively engaged in ministry, and with immense joy and enthusiasm, I see young people coming in from all corners of the world to join the harvest. Some are brave enough to push boundaries and pioneer into areas deemed hostile and inaccessible, yet they dare to go. I am immensely proud of them. May the Lord remove barriers and help us enter the land to possess it for Him, so that His name may be known among all nations.

¹⁰ Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*. (Guardian Books, 2006).

Clannish Ideologies

Once again, I want to thank the Lord for the emergence of new leaders, even after some power struggles. While these struggles are common in any culture or country, there may be dissatisfaction with certain leadership styles, attitudes, or behaviors, which is to be expected in a young and emerging church. A particular issue that left me speechless during my early years was the persistence of clan loyalty that continued to affect young believers even after they came to know the saving work of Jesus Christ through His blood. In my naivety, I imagined that their loyalty would shift from allegiance to clan and subclan to the one who tore down the barriers of division among people.¹¹ Unfortunately, that was not the case in the young church.

I am confident that the transforming power of the Holy Spirit was at work then, as it is now, bringing a newness of life to many young believers. However, as is often true in our human experience, the old self is not entirely dead, even after being crucified and cleansed by His blood. Old structures and a lifetime of following a particular way of life cannot be shed instantly. Instead, this transformation is a gradual process that unfolds over the years, culminating in our seeing Jesus in His glory.

Having said all this, it is neither surprising nor shocking that the issue of the clan has had a profound influence on the young church. This influence has often been subtle, but it was always present—a deep-seated sense of belonging to one’s own clan. The belief that someone from a different or rival clan cannot be a good person merely because they belong to that clan, which may have been at odds with ours for centuries, complicates how we perceive fellow believers. Accepting a believer from another clan as a brother, or even closer than a brother, is indeed a challenging task. I am sure Ahmed grappled with this issue, striving against it at the same time. I hope the younger generation is

¹¹ Editor’s note: For more information on the clan and the church, read: “Your Clan and Your Shoes: How the Somali Church Harnesses a Time-Tested Social Safety Net” in Aweis A. Ali, “Understanding the Somali Church.” Nairobi, Kenya: KENPRO Publications, 2021, 83-88.

<https://www.somalibiblesociety.org/understanding-the-somali-church/>, accessed 04 July 2025.

extremely careful about this and continually searches their hearts to ensure they are not falling into the traps of division. I pray they do not fail to love their neighbors and fellow believers as Jesus taught us. This challenge is not unique to any specific group; it applies to all believers worldwide, regardless of culture.

Learning From Ahmed

When I was initiated into the ministry while Ahmed was still the undisputed leader of the Somali fellowship in Nairobi, I sensed that the relationship between Somali believers and foreign workers, especially those from the West, was not always without tension. I took to heart Ahmed's recurring words and warnings, aiming to learn from him and those who came before me.

One thing I distinctly remember him saying is that missionaries often view local believers as projects. Initially, I thought that was an outrageous accusation. Why would he think that? I certainly didn't see it that way. Yet, it prompted me to examine my own heart: Am I truly viewing local believers as my brothers and sisters? Honestly, that warning has stayed with me until today. I strive to think the best of my brothers, even when the occasional disappointment arises and pierces my heart. I need to only look at my own life and my struggles with faith to recognize that I am the worst of sinners, in constant need of transformation and deliverance.

Disappointments are inevitable in this work, especially when one becomes deeply involved in the lives of believers and issues of resources arise. I often question whether our relationship genuinely matters or if we are seen merely as a source of income and a potential pathway to the West. In a way, this dynamic goes both ways, and I believe that every foreign worker has faced a series of challenges while trying to disciple believers. I know that Ahmed, in his journey as a disciple, has confronted similar challenges and fought for sincerity and genuine discipleship.

How To Help Believers Grow

Today, the challenge of discipleship remains a top priority, leading to questions about who is best suited to carry out this important task. Can it be effectively done by foreigners, or is it better approached in an indigenous manner? I'm not sure if there is a right or wrong answer, as only the Lord Jesus truly knows the heart of man. Our perceptions may be clouded by self-importance or fear of damaging young disciples. Personally, I worry that I have spoiled young disciples of Christ by assisting them financially, even though my intentions were good. For instance, having a young believer live with my family for over five years resulted in him leaving for a different country without ever reaching out to me. This has been painful; I find myself asking, What did I do wrong? I don't have the answer and may never know.

Was I right to send a young man to trade school so he could learn to fend for himself, even though it ultimately led to his struggle with alcoholism? We made countless attempts to help him, but we failed. There were many painful moments, yet we didn't feel it was time to give up and go home. My wife and I persisted, partly because of Ahmed's testimony and encouragement. He believed, deep down, that the Church of Christ would endure because the Lord builds His Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Ahmed was dedicated to this cause until the day he passed away. His legacy is striking, especially considering how many of us grow weary and leave when things don't unfold as expected. I learned from Ahmed to keep my focus on Jesus in this work. He even reshaped my understanding of success; it may not be about the number of people coming to faith but rather about the one person I invest my life in, who can then change the lives of many others.

Equipping The Next Generation

I have also realized that my work extends far beyond evangelism and discipleship of Somalis in the Horn of Africa. As I grow older and gain more experience in ministry, I've come to see that it's increasingly about encouraging and discipling younger workers from around the world

who feel called to the field. The current workforce is made up of Millennials and members of Gen Z or Gen X; however, these generations are categorized. The crucial point is that we are now working with a new generation of missionaries who bring different attitudes and expectations of leadership in the field. There is a significant need for mentorship and discipleship within this group, as many sending churches neglect this aspect. It can be surprising to see the lack of basic understanding some workers have about prayer and the Word of God. We've learned that we cannot take anything for granted; we must be willing to heavily invest in the lives of these workers.

Teams have become an essential support system for any worker to thrive in a challenging environment, much more so than in the past when a missionary would take their Land Cruiser and live alone in the bush, learning the language and raising their family in an unfriendly setting. However, this doesn't mean that all past approaches were successful or that they should be replicated today. The team approach is often the most effective method. For instance, from where I am writing, I lead a team that can only function through constant alignment, prayer for one another, and forming a community that even outsiders can recognize as having something in common. In this way, we demonstrate the community of Christ in an area where Christ is not known at all.

One People Group, Two Backgrounds

When I think of Ahmed Haile, I often reflect on the transient community we worked with in Nairobi. Many members of the Somali fellowship belonged to his family, either closely or distantly. This connection presented challenges, especially given the existing clan issues that alienated those not part of these networks. However, the transient nature of the community of believers in Nairobi introduced a dynamic I hadn't initially recognized.

There was a group from Bula Burte or Mogadishu who knew each other from the days when Somalia had a functioning government and some semblance of order. When the time came to escape their country, they sought safety, but Nairobi was a temporary stop for many of them. They lived with uncertainty about how long they would remain there before gaining passage to the United States or other Western countries. While they were present with us in Kenya, their minds were already elsewhere. They busied themselves with various jobs to make ends meet, but they had not put down roots in Kenya. This made sense, as they were refugees and often felt unwelcome in Kenyan society.

In contrast, there were other groups of Somalis who had established their lives in Kenya, particularly in Northeastern Kenya or Nairobi. This segment did not necessarily wish to leave their homeland. Many had received a decent education through the Kenyan education system, spoke English well, and possessed legal papers that the refugee population lacked. The indigenous clan differences were also significant. Ahmed Haile faced a daunting challenge in bridging the gap between these two groups. He worked tirelessly to negotiate between them, strive for peace where disagreements arose, and alleviate feelings of inequality regarding resource sharing. My observations come from years of living in this environment, which has helped me grasp the deep-rooted clan allegiances and the struggle for resources.

Personal Reflection And Observation

Reflecting on my upbringing in a rural area of a European country—not impoverished, but influenced by frugality—I realize I grew up under a mentality of scarcity. Even though there was never a time when we missed a meal, a deep-seated fear lingered: Would there be enough for all of us? I can only imagine the challenges faced by new believers who experience ostracism from their families and clans, sometimes even losing spouses and children or being disowned entirely. This has, unfortunately, been the reality for many of our brothers and sisters. Discipleship cannot flourish in a healthy way when it is met with hostility. This creates layers of fear for those trying to approach the

gospel. Additionally, the concern over finding a life partner who shares similar values and beliefs poses a significant barrier to remaining steadfast in their faith.

There is much to be said about the tragedy that hostility toward the gospel brings to new believers in this context—it's heartbreaking, and there are no easy answers. The gospel does address the reality of persecution in this world, a concept that is often unfathomable for many in the West. The sense of injustice we feel for our suffering brothers and sisters can sometimes overwhelm us emotionally and spiritually. It requires immense wisdom and discernment to act judiciously when confronted with stories of persecution. We must remain cautious and level-headed, ensuring we verify the accounts we hear, particularly those relayed to us from the West. We want to avoid being gullible or being misled, as has occurred in the past.

Walking this fine line requires prayer for wisdom. One practical approach to gaining insight is to corroborate testimonies through the perspective of a local friend who knows the individual facing difficulties. Perceptions can vary significantly, which is why the body of Christ across cultures must collaborate. Addressing someone's immediate predicament might not always be the best course of action; sometimes, enduring the harsh winds of opposition can lead to greater strength. While this sounds simpler in theory, I recognize the complexity. Discernment should be a key prayer request, along with the collaboration of trusted friends who prioritize the individual's well-being, not just physically but especially spiritually. We need to nurture the growth of mature, wise leaders in the community who understand their beliefs and the reasons behind them.

I appreciate the emergence of mature leadership within the Somali Church that can address issues of persecution based on their long-standing experience and suffering over the decades. However, this does not mean they have to face these challenges alone. Partnerships with organizations and individuals supporting the growing church are not only needed but also, hopefully, desired. The body of Christ comprises

many tribes and tongues, and one day, we will all worship together before the throne of God.

Conclusion

I want to honor our late brother, teacher, and Pastor, Ahmed Haile, through these few lines. While I may have only glimpsed his influence locally and globally in ministry to his people, that glimpse illuminated my path and instilled hope in a dark world for a people group that has resisted the influence of the gospel for over a hundred years. In contrast, neighboring countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and especially Ethiopia have embraced the gospel, with the church established there for hundreds of years.

Our prayer is that efforts to reach Somali people continue through various means, whether it involves living within Somali communities in countries far from the Horn of Africa, playing soccer with neighborhood children, training doctors, or conducting outreach in remote villages across Somalia. Wherever these efforts take place, may the Lord prepare the hearts of Somalis to receive the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and become catalysts for change within their communities. We hope that the message of forgiveness will penetrate homes and families for lasting transformation.

Ahmed Haile had a significant impact on my life and work as a missionary. His commitment and dedication to the cause of Christ taught me to keep my focus on Jesus during my mission, even when things do not go as expected. Ahmed's life exemplified perseverance amid challenges and disappointments in discipleship and mission work. His ability to build bridges between different Somali communities, along with his commitment to integration and peace among believers, has deeply inspired me. He demonstrated that the number of converts does not solely define mission success but is also characterized by a sincere investment in the lives of individuals. His wisdom, experience, and capacity to spread hope during difficult times have motivated me to

continue my work and develop new approaches to supporting and disciplining missionaries in challenging environments.

About The Author

Sal Owens grew up in Central Europe and relocated to Africa around the age of 30. Since childhood, he had been fascinated by missionary stories and always felt that one day he would move and work in Africa. This year marks 25 years since he and his family relocated to East Africa. During their time in East Africa, Sal and his family have visited various locations, ranging from remote, semi-arid regions to bustling urban areas where nomadic refugees from the Horn of Africa gather, hoping to move to the greener pastures of America and Europe eventually. This has been a perfect opportunity for Sal to share hope in desperate situations. They have worked in big cities and also in places where they provided hope to war victims through medical care in hospitals and community outreach in refugee camps and urban centers. Currently, Sal and his wife are living and working in a closed country, sharing the love of Christ. They have two children who finished high school in Kenya and pursued their studies in their parents' home country. Both work in the medical field, and one is married. Sal holds a Master of Arts in Spiritual Leadership and is currently pursuing his Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree.



CHAPTER 3

A SOMALI PORTRAIT OF A FAITHFUL BMB LEADER

Abdi Walalo

“An elder’s advice keeps you on the right path.”¹²

A Somali Proverb

Introduction

We long to see an abundant supply of faithful BMB leaders. We understand the scars from being under the leadership of unfaithful BMB leaders. Do we truly understand what a faithful BMB leader represents? Do we have a clear image of one? In this chapter, we will draw from the life of Ahmed Haile to highlight some qualities of a faithful BMB leader. The purpose of this reflection is not to present Ahmed as a standard but to use what we know of his life as a foundation to depict a faithful BMB leader. This reflection aims to illustrate what a faithful BMB leader looks like. The insights shared here will focus on three main areas: marriage, children, navigating the identity challenge, and leadership in adversity.

Family - Marriage And Children

We will evaluate a faithful BMB leader by examining his family and children. What are his views on marriage? What legacy does he leave behind as we look at his children? John C. Maxwell tells us leadership is

¹² In Somali, *Waayeel baa war toosan loogu tagaa*.

influence.¹³ A faithful BMB leader's impact must be seen and felt at home.

Worldview On Marriage



Prof. Ahmed A. Haile. Credit: Ahmed Haile Blog

A faithful BMB leader's view of marriage must be based on the truth, the scriptures. Like other significant life events, marriage is highly influenced by social dynamics. Navigating these dynamics and letting God's voice be the voice one listens to over all other voices is a sign of discernment. Our perspectives on marriage are revealed through our choices leading up to the wedding.

For many BMBs, our Islamic background has quite a significant influence on us; it affects us in multiple ways. Primarily, one area that influences us is our views of marriage. A famous Islamic hadith¹⁴, which many of us have internalized, teaches Muslims factors to consider in picking a spouse. It states four factors: beauty, ancestry, wealth, and religion. "The Prophet said, "A woman is married for four things, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty and her religion. So you should marry the religious woman (otherwise) you will be a loser."¹⁵

Any of these factors can be a reasonable basis for picking a spouse, but using religion as a basis is highly encouraged. For many BMBs these factors are still being considered in their present lives.

Ahmed not only comes from a Muslim background, but he is also a Somali. A Somali proverb states, "Naag been baa lagu soo xero galshaa, runna waa lagu dhaqaa." A woman is wooed into marriage with

¹³ John C. Maxwell, 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, (HarperCollins Leadership, 2007)

¹⁴ Sahih Bukhari 4802, Sahih Muslim 1466. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5090>, accessed 12 June 2025.

¹⁵ Reference: Sahih al-Bukhari 5090. In-book reference: Book 67, Hadith 28 USC-MSA web (English) reference: Vol. 7, Book 62, Hadith 27. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5090>, accessed 12 June 2025.

lies, but is kept in marriage by truth. The Islamic worldview and Somali worldview could have set him up to pick his spouse based on these stated values. However, a casual look at his choice of Martha would reveal the following factors:

1. A common call from God – a shared vision
2. Prayer
3. Deep love and attraction
4. Much prayer and counselling.¹⁶

Ahmed modeled prioritizing God's voice over all other voices in his life. His frequent prayers demonstrated this and focused on God's call on His life. He did not revert to his default settings but was intentional in letting God be his guide in this process. If we were to glean from Ahmed's view of marriage, we would see that he valued having a spouse joining him in the ministry God called him to. We can see that he invested in prayer when he made this choice. We will also see a mutual attraction between him and Martha. We can see that he valued and incorporated godly counsel as he walked towards marriage. Our brother Ahmed valued godliness; he valued being aligned with the vision God had given him at the expense of looking at what his community valued. He was willing to be a misfit.

A faithful BMB leader takes the marriage institution seriously and walks towards it with clear intentions as he seeks God's guidance. Sociologists tell us that the most basic unit of society is the family. A faithful BMB leader invests in laying good foundations for his family. By God's grace, Ahmed Haile laid a good foundation for his family.

¹⁶ Ahmed Haile and David Shenk, *Tea Time In Mogadishu*, 75.

Children: The Heritage We Leave Behind

The Bible records a chilling statement on the generation after Joshua, “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.” (Judges 2:10b ESV). Despite the tremendous and mind-blowing experiences the people of Israel had as they related with God, they raised a generation that did not know God. The attitude of the people, as recorded in Judges, is primarily a result of not being taught of God.

A casual read of the Torah (Exodus 12:26, Deuteronomy 6:20) and Joshua (Joshua 4:6-7) will clearly reveal the emphasis of raising children in the knowledge of Yahweh. The old man Moses urged Israel to be diligent in teaching children God’s word (Deuteronomy 6:7). A faithful leader, a faithful first-generation believer from a Muslim background, will teach his children God’s word, will raise his children in the word will ensure his children know about Jesus. It is worth noting here, in my opinion, that we are not tasked to ensure our children obey and walk with God; they have free will. We are tasked to be diligent in teaching our children about God to ensure they know God.

Somalia has had 128 years of continuous Christian presence, which started in 1881.¹⁷ The Somali Church has had multiple leaders in our more than one hundred years of history. The Somali people are still considered unreached a century later. One of the things that we see lacking in many ways is a heritage of faith. When one looks at the leaders within the community of believers among Somalis, one would see parents who are influential leaders of the gospel, who God has used to take the gospel far and wide, but whose children know nothing about the faith. This is mainly because of security reasons, such as fear of persecution, and because children do not have filters. We may also see children of these influential leaders who are nominal in their faith and not rooted, established, or built up in Christ. Worst yet, we see children

¹⁷ Aweis A. Ali: A Brief History of Christian Missions in Somalia, (ARJESS, 7(1), 2020)

of these influential leaders who may be called unreached even though the gospel is present in the very homes in which they grew up.

A recent census of the Somali Church has revealed that children represent 73% of the Somali church today.¹⁸ What would it take to see these children be raised in the faith, even in Somalia today?

Only a small number of leaders, particularly within the Somali Church and likely in the broader BMB community, can witness the faith being passed down to the next generation. When we reflect on the life of our brother Ahmed, we see that his children follow Christ; a true portrait of a faithful BMB leader must include a legacy of faith.

A genealogy of faith is best depicted in the life of Timothy. The Bible tells us that Timothy had known the scriptures from infancy (2 Timothy 3:15) and that his sincere faith can be traced back to his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. I believe this heritage is significant. Timothy is a model disciple; we all long to raise Timothies in our discipleship. We want to see this young man who does not let people look down on him because he is young; we long to see a young person who will set an example to other young people; we long to see this young person who will also mentor others.... Could we miss the significant fact that Timothy had a heritage of faith?

One key quality of a faithful BMB leader is establishing a heritage of faith among his own children. May what was said about Timothy be told of our brother Ahmed's children and grandchildren.

In summary, as we paint a portrait of a faithful BMB leader, the first layer depicts his family. We have highlighted the need to adopt a Biblical worldview in choosing a spouse amid the many loud voices of culture and our Islamic heritage. We have also highlighted the privilege and responsibility of raising children in the faith. A faithful BMB leader will teach his children about Christ.

¹⁸ Bureau of Statistics, Somali Bible Society. Census of Somali Christians 2023, SBS Journal, Vol. IV, Issue 2, Dec 2023, <https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/census-of-somali-christians-2023.pdf>, accessed 12 May 2025.

Navigating Multiple Identities

The second layer in our portrait is identity. BMBs find themselves in a constant tug-of-war between their former identities and their new identities in Christ. A faithful BMB leader models wisdom as he navigates these stormy waters.

Don Little writes about a believer's tension: "On one side is his new Christian faith, and on the other side are his old religion, family, and community."¹⁹ This tension produces one of these five outcomes:

Reverting Back To Islam

The first challenge emerges when the tension becomes overwhelming as individuals attempt to navigate their dual identities: their identity in Christ versus their previous identity as Muslims and how society perceives them. A significant number of believers and seekers from Muslim backgrounds revert to Islam, with attrition rates for those from Muslim backgrounds reaching as high as 90%.

Reject Their Islamic Community

The second option that some BMBs (Believers from a Muslim Background) choose is to distance themselves as much as possible from their community. They may reject everything associated with their heritage, changing their names and cultural practices, and even relocating far from their original environment. This drastic transformation often leads to them becoming complete misfits both in their new surroundings and within their former community. While they may feel a sense of freedom in this separation, it ultimately limits their ability to positively impact their own community and share their faith effectively. The challenge lies in finding a balance between embracing their new beliefs and staying connected to their roots in a way that allows for meaningful engagement and influence.

¹⁹ Don Little. *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities*, (InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition, IVP Academic. 2015), 325.

Be A Secret Follower Of Christ

The third option is that believers choose to be secretive. They live in their community but completely hide their faith from it. Nicodemus and the Pharisees, who believed in Jesus, exercised this option.²⁰ Secret followers of Christ may keep their faith hidden even from their spouses and children. This is a complicated way of life and one that is detrimental to family dynamics and witnessing. Ripken defines persecution in its essence as denying others access to Jesus.²¹

Mental Breakdown

The distress brought forth by the identity tension may lead to mental health issues. The BMB mind may break, unable to deal with this tension. They may show signs of being confused and may begin acting out. The distress brought forth by the identity crisis may lead to mental health issues.

Uniting The Two Phases

The BMB reconciles and navigates the two aspects of his identity with the help of the Holy Spirit. He is able to remain in his community without denying his faith or his heritage, which is the ideal outcome. As we disciple BMBs, we desire to see a disciple who boldly identifies with Christ and is passionate about being a blessing to his community.

Our brother Ahmed's life serves as an exemplary model of someone who has successfully navigated multiple identities. Ahmed readily acknowledged his Islamic roots, his rural Somali background, and his faith in Christ. He strived to remain included as a member of his clan. Inspired by this aspect of his life, some of us have adopted the philosophy of refusing to be rejected. We encourage one another to pursue relationships with our families, even in the face of threats and denunciation.

²⁰ John 12:42-43.

²¹ Woodberry, J. Dudley (ed.) *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Second Edition), (William Carey Library, 2011), 542.

The process of navigating and uniting the various facets of our identity can be challenging and painful. It can take years to transition from rejection to acceptance. These years are filled with tears. It requires blood, sweat, hard work, patience, and grace. Indeed, it is grace—grace that only God can provide. It is not a small feat in a society that values social identity to become a social outcast. It is not easy to endure the pains of being a social outcast while refusing to let them shape or define you. It is only the work of God in our lives that enables us not to allow our experiences to become the lens through which we engage with our community.

A faithful BMB leader is not only rooted and established in faith but is also a large tree under which his community can find shade. Like a tree, to grow and provide shade, it takes time. Time to grow in Christ. Time to maintain a faithful walk with Christ. Brother Ahmed's life, impact, and outcomes demonstrate that he indeed was a strong tree among his people.

Leading In Adversity

In the parable of the weeds and the wheat, the good seed shares its space and resources with the weeds planted by the enemy. The only distinguishing factor between wheat and weeds is the fruit they produce. The good seed yields good fruit.

A good tree that shares space with impostors thrives in an adversarial environment. To survive, it must remain vigilant. Vigilance should not be mistaken for a license to attack perceived weeds or to adopt their characteristics. Instead, vigilance means ensuring they are truly wheat and producing the expected fruit of their kind.

The Somali BMBs are always vigilant. Many infiltrators have caused significant harm to the body. Within the Somali Church, trust is scarce. Out of necessity, the body is slow to build trust. Trust can be easily lost and extremely difficult to restore. Suspensions can arise quickly, and relationships among believers require tremendous effort to sustain. Research among BMBs elsewhere has indicated that a lack of trust is a

major obstacle to both individual and corporate growth, a reality also true in the Somali Church.

Within the Somali BMB body of Christ, many get hurt by friendly fire from brothers and sisters who have been wounded in the past. The first casualties of such friendly fire are the leaders of this growing body. These wounded leaders are expected to lead as if they are not hurting.

Some who experience pain from fellow believers choose to retreat and isolate themselves. This becomes their survival response in these adversarial environments. They feel overwhelmed by the weeds, the wolf in sheep's clothing, and the ferocious hurt of fellow sheep. This reflection demonstrates that at face value, it can be challenging to distinguish faithful servants of God from those exploiting God's people because they appear alike: wheat and weeds, sheep and wolves in sheep's clothing.

A portrait of a faithful BMB leader is not painted on a smooth canvas, but rather on a thorny and rough surface. This adversarial environment urgently seeks faithful leaders. Sometimes this urgency does not allow emerging leaders to have the ample time necessary to become deeply rooted and connected to the author and sustainer of their faith. Perhaps the familiar depictions of BMB leaders that are less than desirable result from a rushed process, forcing a less-than-fully-formed tree to produce fruit.

A faithful BMB leader is one who has been allowed time to grow. A faithful BMB leader can navigate the tricky terrain of associating with weeds while maintaining the qualities of wheat. He or she has the space to process and seek healing from the friendly fire directed toward them. The life of such a faithful leader is necessarily marked by regular times of retreating and being nourished by the chief shepherd.

A faithful BMB leader produces fruit. You will recognize them by their fruit. Just as one can recognize the wolf hiding among the sheep by its impact on the sheep, a good tree produces good fruit.

Our brother, Ahmed, served and modeled Godly leadership in adversity. He was the aroma of Christ in a community that desperately needed the scent of Christ.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the life of Ahmed Haile, we can discern essential characteristics that define a faithful BMB leader. His commitment to prioritizing God's voice in all aspects of life—including his marriage and family—serves as a powerful reminder of the profound impact that personal faith can have on leadership. By valuing godly counsel, prayer, and a shared spiritual vision with his spouse, Ahmed exemplifies the intentionality that nurtures a strong family unit and a thriving ministry. Moreover, the responsibility of raising the next generation in the knowledge of God is pivotal.

A faithful BMB leader recognizes that the foundation laid at home directly influences the future of the faith community. By deliberately teaching his children about Jesus and instilling in them a passion for God's word, Ahmed secures a legacy of faith and contributes to the spread of the gospel beyond his immediate surroundings.

In conclusion, the portrait of a faithful BMB leader navigates the complexities of life with discernment and integrity, understanding that leadership begins at home and is reflected through the lives of those they influence. As we aspire to cultivate more leaders like Ahmed, let us commit ourselves to embodying these principles and striving for faithfulness in our own journeys. In doing so, we can trust that the fruits of our labor will honor God and impact many generations to come.

About The Author

Rev. Abdi Walalo is a recognized expert in the fields of evangelism and discipleship, with a particular focus on Muslim communities. His work primarily centers on Somali populations both within Africa and in the diaspora. Driven by a strong missional orientation, he actively engages in outreach efforts targeting both Muslims and former Muslims. His

initiatives aim to promote Christian teachings and facilitate faith development within these communities, contributing to broader religious and cultural dialogues. The author can be reached at abdiandlaura@gmail.com.

CHAPTER 4

PROVIDING WELCOMING HOSPITALITY TO SOMALIS

Adam Cheney

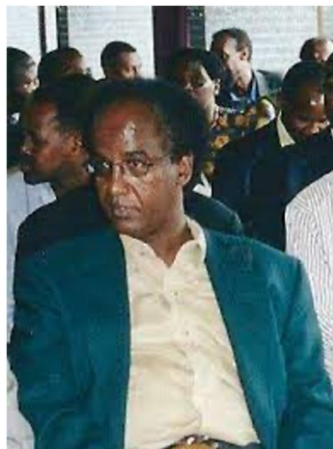
“A silent mouth does not feed the guest.”²²

A Somali Proverb

Abstract

In recent decades, a significant number of Somalis have immigrated to the United States. Unfortunately, American Christians have often struggled to provide a warm welcome to the Somali diaspora. This chapter aims to address this challenge and encourages the American Christian Church to explore new ways of welcoming Somalis into our communities. As Christians who have experienced the welcoming love of the Triune God, we are called to extend that same hospitality to those around us. My doctoral project has informed this chapter, focusing on the relationships between Somalis and Christians in Minnesota.

This chapter will examine biblical examples from both the Old and New Testaments, along with insights from key thinkers on the topic of hospitality. My hope for the American Church is to



Prof. Ahmed A. Haile. Credit: Ahmed Haile Blog

²² In Somali, *Af aammusani marti ma sooro*.

acknowledge where we have fallen short and to encourage Christian leaders to intentionally offer welcoming hospitality to the Somali diaspora, which continues to immigrate daily. By extending this hospitality, we can demonstrate the love of the Triune God and discover ways to support the young Somali Christian Church. Unfortunately, the American Church has largely turned a blind eye to the Somalis among us, but it is my hope and prayer that we will recognize the work God is doing by bringing new neighbors into our communities.

Introduction To Welcoming Hospitality

I never had the pleasure of being on the receiving end of a cup of tea offered by Ahmed Haile. However, I am familiar with the extravagance of East African hospitality. A decade ago, I visited an impoverished area of Addis Ababa, and an Ethiopian friend hosted me for a week in his home. My friend gave up his small one-bedroom home for me to use, as he stayed with his in-laws nearby. As an American, I was disarmed by his level of hospitality. This chapter is focused on encouraging the American Church to lean into welcoming hospitality, with a focus on the Somali diaspora in our midst. What if our hospitality is so welcoming that we disarm preconceived notions immigrants have of American Christians? Would this level of hospitality allow the love of Christ to be powerfully demonstrated?

First, let us define welcoming hospitality, and then we will address what it is not. Author Christine Pohl writes, “By definition, hospitality involves some space into which people are welcomed, a place where, unless the invitation is given, the stranger would not feel free to enter.”²³ She goes even further and succinctly states, “Hospitality is resistance.”²⁴ It is resistance to the dominant cultural narrative of our day that warns of immigrants and Muslims. It is resistance to the works of the evil one who prefers communities to be isolated and full of strife.

²³ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 39.

²⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room*, 61.

Welcoming hospitality is active rather than passive. It is hospitality that is generous and might make us uncomfortable. It is welcoming the ‘Other’²⁵ into our space as no longer an ‘Other’ but as kin. Mark Glanville and Martyn Percy both suggest in their respective works the need to welcome the stranger as kin, which means being “a community where we are asked to love those we dislike; bless and pray for our enemies.”²⁶

The level of hospitality I received in Addis Ababa demonstrated Jesus being lived out through my friend’s life. Martyn Percy writes, “Jesus is the Verb of God. Yes, the Word becomes flesh (John 1); but as the Verb of God, Jesus ‘does’ God. Jesus is the ‘body language of God.’”²⁷ Welcoming hospitality is so gracious that it makes “space for the gospel.”²⁸ Most Christians who come from an Islamic background have stories of Christian hospitality as part of their faith journey.²⁹

Now that we have discussed what welcoming hospitality is, it should be clearer what it is not. It is not simply a program at a local church where people open the doors to the church building on Sunday morning. It is not simply welcoming a small group of Christians into your home occasionally. Hospitality is not a life based on fear. A fearful Christian tends to retreat from the Other. A hospitable Christian will not let fear drive their actions but instead will engage with the new Somali immigrants living among us. Christians must go beyond the political rhetoric and media biases that further the divide and exacerbate misconceptions. Biases and rhetoric create more challenges for Somali people navigating a new culture.³⁰

Biblical Support For Welcoming Hospitality

²⁵ In using the term ‘Other’ I mean someone unfamiliar and not like ourselves. Someone we would not normally interact with.

²⁶ Martyn Percy, *The Humble Church: Renewing the Body of Christ*, (London, UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2021), 107.

²⁷ Martyn Percy, *The Humble Church*, 2.

²⁸ John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become like Him, Do as He Did*, (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2024), 128.

²⁹ David Goldmann, *Islam and the Bible: Why Two Faiths Collide*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 174.

³⁰ Hudda Ibrahim, *From Somalia to Snow: How Central Minnesota Became Home to Somalis*, 2nd ed., (Edina, MN: Beavers Pond Press, 2017), 8.

While the theme of hospitality is found throughout Scripture, both in the Old Testament and New Testament, the word transliterated ‘philoxenia’ is used only a few times. All of which are in the New Testament.³¹ We will look at a few examples of hospitality in both the New Testament and the Old Testament.

The author of the Hebrews writes, “Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!”³² (Hebrews 13:2, NLT). The usage here of hospitality is regarding strangers. He is not arguing that they ought to host their own family well or treat their friends well, but instead, they are to entertain strangers. In addition, there is a spiritual dimension to the act of hosting strangers. To invite a stranger in is risky business. Certainly, one needs to have wisdom and discernment as hospitality is lived out, but the example of radical hospitality extended by Jesus to the outcasts of society demonstrated that he had an acute sense of how his hospitality was received.³³

Throughout the gospel narratives, Jesus is found eating with people. Often, those whom he chose to eat with were the outsiders, the sinners, and those who would not normally have been offered the sort of radical hospitality that Jesus offered. James Comer writes, “You see, for Rabbi Jesus, meals were not a ‘boundary marker’ but a sign of God’s great welcome into the kingdom; not a way to keep people out, but to invite people in.”³⁴ The communal meals of Jesus’ followers became a significant part of what separated the early Christians from the community at large. Men, women, slaves, and free people were found entertaining each other and meeting together in opposition to the dominant culture surrounding them.

The narratives of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9) and of the four thousand (Matthew 15) provide examples of generous

³¹ Charles Cook, Lorajoy Tira-Dimangondayao, and Lauren Goldbeck, eds., *Beyond Hospitality: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Church*, (Canada: Tyndale Academic Press, 2020), 36.

³² “Blue Letter Bible”, (Web: Blue Letter Bible, 2017).

³³ Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration*, 1st ed., Moral Traditions Series, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 144.

³⁴ John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way*, 130.

hospitality. These were meals offered to the entire community. With abundance and generosity, Jesus provides food miraculously for the crowds. There was enough of his miraculous kingdom bread, his manna, for there to be plenty of leftovers in his hospitable meals among both Jews and Gentiles.³⁵

The examples of hospitality found in the New Testament are rooted in the Torah. The law declares that Israel must care for the aliens (strangers, refugees, immigrants, etc). among them. Leviticus 19:33-34 details how resident aliens are to be loved, as one loves oneself. Surely, this was an opportunity to invite strangers into the community rather than to ostracize them from the community. There are a variety of opinions on when the first hospitable act took place in Scripture.³⁶ Instead of taking a stake in one of those arguments, let us look at two specific examples of this generous hospitality.

In 2 Kings chapter 6, the king of Aram gathered to fight against Israel. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the prophet Elisha continuously relayed the king of Aram's secret plans to the king of Israel. Frustrated, the king of Aram sent chariots to surround Elisha and capture him. When this happened, Elisha saw the spiritual dimension and forces surrounding him. The vast army of God surrounded him for his protection. Blinded by the spiritual forces, the Aramean army was led into the heart of Samaria, where they were handed over into the hands of the king of Israel, who asked Elisha if he should kill them or not. Instead of killing their enemies, who had come to wage war against them, Elisha told the king to give them food and water. War did not happen that day. Nor did a mass slaughter. Instead, the king of Israel lavishly provided a massive feast. This was heavenly focused hospitality, resembling the overwhelming generosity of the heavenly banquet.

The book of 1 Samuel, chapter 25, highlights two distinct responses to hospitality. One response focuses on the kingdom and exemplifies an abundance mindset, while the other reflects a scarcity mindset driven by

³⁵ Martyn Percy, *The Humble Church*, 114.

³⁶ Many argue the first act of hospitality was Abraham welcoming the strangers. Some have also argued the first act of hospitality was by God himself who welcomed humanity into his garden.

fear and greed. During one of the times David was on the run, he sent some young men to Nabal to request some of the harvest from his flock. David and his men had protected the flock and Nabal's men. Nabal, whose name means 'fool,' shamed David and refused the request.³⁷ Abigail, Nabal's wife, heard about the situation and hurriedly offered generous hospitality. She gave David an abundance of what he would have been owed. Ultimately, her confidence in God's generosity kept David from sinning and killing Nabal to preserve his honor. Instead, days later, God killed Nabal, and David married Abigail. With a scarcity mindset, Nabal tried to preserve all he had but ultimately lost it. Meanwhile, Abigail's abundant mindset allowed her to give generously, and she was rewarded in turn.

Current Voices On Hospitality

As demonstrated, the theme of hospitality is found throughout Scripture, though the word itself is seldom used. Yet, it has now become a word that incorporates its own industry. Hospitality has become programmed and industrialized. Chrysostom noted early in the 4th century that hospitality was beginning to be outsourced.³⁸ Outsourcing hospitality is not inherently bad, as this is where hospitals and non-profits find their niche. It is neglectful, however, for Christians to leave welcoming hospitality to the Somali diaspora to be outsourced by entities such as World Relief. Like Chrysostom,³⁹ it is important to think about hospitality through a Christ-focused lens on a personal, practical, and applicable level.

Author Christine Pohl places Christian hospitality "within the larger picture of Jesus' sacrificial welcome to all who come to him."⁴⁰ Jesus welcomed all who came to him, even when the Jewish and Roman cultures surrounding him would have argued against it. As our American

³⁷ Chad Brand, ed., "Nabal," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015).

³⁸ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room*, 45.

³⁹ John Chrysostom (died on September 14, 407 AD) was an influential Church Father who served as the Archbishop of Constantinople. He is renowned for his eloquent preaching and critiques of the misuse of power by both the church and the state. He is also recognized for the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom and is noted for his ascetic lifestyle.

⁴⁰ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room*, 17.

culture shifts towards an increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric, the Christ-focused Christian will still choose to seek out and welcome those who come.

Pastor and writer Ed Stetzer challenges the American Church to dig a bit deeper and asks what churches are known for in their respective communities. He writes, “By leaning into hospitality and graciousness, we were renewing our church’s presence in our community.”⁴¹ Stetzer narrows in on something important here: Hospitality is seen by others; it is witnessed. When I, an outsider in the Ethiopian community, was welcomed into my friend’s house, it became a public event. The community as a whole was aware of the presence of an outsider, an “Other.” My friend and his church demonstrated hospitality to me in a public way.

Though Christians should always reflect hospitable attitudes, we do not have a monopoly on virtue. Generous hospitality is exalted in many cultures. One Islamic scholar, Mona Siddiqui, writes, “Thus, our hospitality to one another is a re-enactment of God’s hospitality.”⁴² She defines hospitality as “the virtue which defines humanity itself.”⁴³ Siddiqui attributes this to God welcoming humanity into the Garden of Eden as an act of hospitality to his abundant resources.⁴⁴ From her perspective, how we demonstrate hospitality to others is a sign of how we receive it from God.⁴⁵ Siddiqui recognizes that the Christian ideal of hospitality is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and how he exemplified both extending and receiving hospitality.⁴⁶ She highlights the vital act of receiving hospitality as Jesus sends his disciples on a mission with nothing to the countryside, relying on the generous welcome of others. Referencing Luke 9, she writes, “Jesus advises his disciples to go with nothing so that they would have to ask for

⁴¹ Ed Stetzer, *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst*, illustrated edition (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2018), 124.

⁴² Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam: Welcoming in God’s Name*, Reprint edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 123.

⁴³ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 1.

⁴⁴ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 122.

⁴⁵ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 83.

⁴⁶ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 57.

hospitality, become dependent, even surrender themselves to the generosity of others.”⁴⁷ An act of welcoming hospitality is learning how to receive the hospitality of others.

As noted, in the Islamic faith, hospitality is a virtue. Thus, it is imperative for Christians who seek to point Somali Muslims towards faith in Jesus to learn to demonstrate a high value of hospitality. Evelyn Reischer states, “Muslims have to see our faith through our lifestyle, compassion, and good deeds.”⁴⁸ This requires Muslims to be welcomed into the lives of Christians. To sit at the same table and eat the same food together. The imperative here is that one must make space at the table for this to occur and offer an invitation, which is accepted. The invitation might require multiple offerings for the welcoming hospitality to be accepted.

The lack of genuine hospitality that the Christian community offers to the Somali diaspora is evident, particularly when a Somali individual chooses to become a follower of Jesus. This decision often leads to a sense of loss from their original community. Typically, they face challenges being welcomed into the new Christian community at the same level as the loss experienced. Reflecting on his experience, one Somali Christian writes, “To ensure reception of hospitality among Somalis, his Christian identity had to be hidden as he ‘embedded’ himself within the Muslim religious community so that he was welcomed and accepted into the community.”⁴⁹

Obviously, the tension here runs deep, and there is a struggle for belonging. However, the Christian community in this case study has failed to fully welcome this man. “Unfortunately, the Church as an institution has not been able to adequately provide support and protection to Muslim converts so that they are not forced to stay in

⁴⁷ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, Hospitality and Islam, 47.

⁴⁸ Evelyn A. Reischer, *Joyful Witness in the Muslim World: Sharing the Gospel in Everyday Encounters*, Mission in Global Community (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 110.

⁴⁹ Buhle Mpofu, “I’m Somali and I’m Christian: A Dilemma for Religion and Identity in the Context of Migration in Southern Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (July 15, 2021): 6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i3.6678>.

Muslim communities to maintain material support.”⁵⁰ It is imperative for the American Church to understand the significant cost associated with Somalis coming to Christ and find a way to stand in the gap as we welcome them well.

Existing Challenges

This chapter advocates for a stance of generous, welcoming hospitality extended by the Christian Church to the Somali diaspora who have immigrated to the United States. The biblical imperative to offer hospitality is clear, as is the value of hospitality for both those who give it and those who receive it. However, the challenge for the Church is that hospitality is not easily provided, especially when many Somali people have clustered in communities that are resistant to integration with the broader society. A couple of decades ago, the initial wave of Somali immigrants was not well received. The American Church now has a deficit to address. This section will examine some of the prevailing challenges.

One primary challenge for the Church is that Somali people are strong, tight-knit, and globally connected. Their global connections enable them to maintain a robust identity and relational ties. This strong identity can be incredibly valuable while simultaneously presenting a challenge for the American Church. Professor Randy Mitchell writes, “Some Somali leaders pride themselves on Somali separateness and, in some cases, express distaste for the notion of interacting with non-Muslim neighbors.” The Church will need to find ways to overcome these barriers. A strong relationship with Somali Christians and other East African Christians may offer a path forward.

Conversely, the Christian Church presents its challenges. Author Marianne Moyaert argues that Christians have not learned how to interact with other religions well. She argues Christians need to learn to listen to the “Other” and their beliefs, but that interaction can be a

⁵⁰ Buhle Mpofu, *I’m Somali and I’m Christian*, 6.

“challenge to their Christian identity.”⁵¹ Christians are too eager to share our perspective or argue a counterpoint that we do not listen to the “Other.” In doing this, we never learn their perspective or how the beauty of the gospel message might fit their unique situation. Moyaert continues, “At the risk of sounding cynical, we would argue that it is sometimes easier to be hospitable to the needy than to the religious other who speaks based on his or her own beliefs.”⁵²

A third challenge is the uniqueness of Somali culture. Traditionally, Somali culture is highly nomadic. In the Somali desert, this made perfect sense as families sought pasture and water for their livestock. Yet, here in the United States, a nomadic lifestyle can complicate relationship building. Frequently, friendships between Somali Muslims and American Christians are interrupted by moves across town, across state borders, or even back to East Africa. For instance, many Somali men work as long-haul truck drivers, which suits their nomadic lifestyle well. Maintaining a friendship that isn’t anchored by a clan structure poses a significant challenge when one of the friends travels for months at a time.

Ethnocentrism and racism are significant challenges within the American Church that must be addressed. Many Christians may prefer to ignore the issue of racism, yet this subject alone could fill an entire book. Unfortunately, space does not allow for a thorough examination of this issue. Racism is prevalent within our church structures, and it has become increasingly socially acceptable to express racist views over the past decade. American Christians need to cultivate a stronger theology of race and a deeper appreciation for the beauty of all nations, tribes, and tongues gathering before the throne of God (Rev. 5:9). In a study of the refugee diaspora, missiologist Tabitha McDuffee writes, “For

⁵¹ Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*, Currents of Encounter; v. 39 (Amsterdam; Rodopi, 2011), 261.

⁵² Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 265.

many Americans, their poor theology of hospitality is a result of a history of cultural superiority and ethnocentrism.”⁵³

Differences between Somali and American cultures highlight additional challenges. Often, Somali families eat later than American Christian households, making it difficult to find a suitable time to bring families together in one space. While Christian families typically engage in activities together, this is not always the case for Somali families. More commonly, Somalis participate in activities that are more gender-segregated. This segregation is not inherently wrong, but it contrasts with what is considered normal for many Christian families. American families watch football, while Somali families watch soccer. Our cultural differences can serve as barriers, or they can act as stepping stones for learning from and interacting with one another.

Lastly, hospitality is complex and tiring. It is not easy to invite people into sacred spaces where our families gather. Christine Pohl writes, “Hospitality will never be free from difficulty.”⁵⁴ It is draining on the family. The grocery budget usually suffers. Hospitality might involve staying up later than usual or a child not getting the nap they needed. As we offer hospitality, we must discern the needs of our family along with the need to be hospitable. A balance must be found between welcoming others and caring for the needs of our spouse and children.⁵⁵ Balancing hospitality and family can be done, but it does take intentional effort and planning.

Counterarguments To Welcoming Hospitality

Counterarguments from Christians towards hospitality are worth exploring. Since hospitality is a desired attribute for Christian leaders,⁵⁶ counterarguments tend to be aimed at immigration in a more general sense. Indeed, immigration policies in the United States leave much to

⁵³ Tabitha McDuffee, “Becoming a Welcomer: Practical Ways to Serve Refugees and Obey Scripture,” in *Refugee Diaspora: Missions amid the Greatest Humanitarian Crisis of Our Times* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 135.

⁵⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room*, 127.

⁵⁵ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room*, 130.

⁵⁶ 1 Tim. 3:2.

be desired, and we would do well to overhaul our system. However, many political candidates running for office as Christians adhere to very inhospitable immigration policies. Kristin Heyer highlights this well from her Catholic perspective, “This use of anti-immigrant sentiment as a smokescreen to divert attention from needed reforms and the scapegoating of undocumented immigrants for economic and security woes threaten to deafen citizen disciples to gospel calls for hospitality and justice.”⁵⁷ It is possible to have immigration policies that protect America and welcome immigrants. Heyer further adds, “Amid a climate of anti-immigrant sentiment, buzzwords such as ‘national security’ and ‘illegal alien’ can serve as idols to conceal a sinful reality and provoke demonization.”⁵⁸ Setting aside the political realm, it is the Church’s role to welcome those who have come. The Church should, at the same time, advocate for humane immigration reform and welcome those in our midst.

Another counterargument is based on feeling unsafe and the desire to protect one’s own family and community. Often, these fears are exaggerated, but they are not always without warrant. A nationalist perspective, in which we must protect our nation from invaders, is often based more on fear than on reality. Matthew and Mark Glanville write, “Resurgent nationalism sees many people in the West hardening their attitudes toward displaced foreigners.”⁵⁹ This fear and hardening of hearts is because Christians often do not fully realize the sovereign work God is doing through the nations. Through mass migration, God is bringing Muslims into exposure to Christianity. People who never had an opportunity to meet Christians are now our neighbors. This mass migration should not cause fear, but rather, it should be seen as an opportunity to share the hospitality of Jesus among those who never would have had the pleasure. Matthew and Mark Glanville urge Christians “to extend kinship to those who are marginalized, to welcome

⁵⁷ Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders*, 36.

⁵⁸ Kristin Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders* 47.

⁵⁹ Mark R. Glanville and Luke Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined: Biblical Kinship in Global Politics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 5.

into the protective center of the community those who are without a clan, without family and without home.”⁶⁰

A common counterargument regarding hospitality is that there simply isn’t enough time. Activities have increasingly filled American lives, leading to a loss of both the ability and the desire to rest and allow margin in our schedules. Recently, a local church leader mentioned that he has no time left in the week for hospitality after shuttling his two kids to baseball and volleyball games. Christians have permitted the cultural influence of busyness to dictate our calendars. Authentic, welcoming hospitality cannot be confined to a one-hour time slot each week; rather, it is an experience to engage in. Welcoming hospitality puts people as a high priority. As Ahmed Haile affirmed, it is challenging enough for Somalis to be willing to integrate with people of other cultures.⁶¹ To overcome this, Christians must be ready to prioritize building relationships, which requires time.

8 Practical Applications For The Church

Now that we understand the common counterarguments, we will examine eight practical applications for the Christian Church in America. Somalis are increasingly arriving in America, a trend likely to continue. Therefore, the Church must find ways to think biblically about hospitality and develop new practices that will demonstrate the kind of Christ-centered hospitality to which we are called since we, too, are recipients of Christ’s hospitality.

Practice #1. Start small. Plans that are too ambitious often struggle to take off. Instead, begin simply by inviting your Somali neighbor or co-worker for a cup of tea. Somalis have a deep appreciation for their tea, and we can learn from the example of Ahmed Haile by sharing a cup with them. This

⁶⁰ Glanville and Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 9.

⁶¹ Ahmed Haile and David Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 45.

helps shift them from the category of “Other” to becoming a friend.

Practice #2. Organize your calendar in ways that allow for balance in your life. Avoid being so overcommitted to the American way of life that you neglect to take the time to know others. Given the significant cultural differences, building relationships with Somalis and Muslims in general requires more time than many Americans are used to.

Practice #3. Be willing to step outside your comfort zone. Ahmed writes, “[Hospitality] is welcoming the guest even when it is not convenient.”⁶² It can be uncomfortable to be a guest in someone’s home, so be open to visiting their home first if they invite you. In many households, sitting on the carpeted floor is customary, so prepare to embrace that discomfort. While language barriers can be challenging, they can be bridged with the help of a translation app. Learn to accept awkward moments and find ways to connect, such as assisting with dishes or cooking a meal together.

Practice #4. Find the location that works best for your friend. Hospitality does not need to always happen at the Christian’s home. Instead, choose to be received as a guest. Learning to be a gracious guest is an act of hospitality. Maybe the best place to meet each other is not even at home but in a third space, such as a park or a coffee shop.

Practice #5. Hospitality is not the gospel itself. However, as James Mark Comer writes, hospitality “makes space for the gospel.”⁶³ A Christian’s hospitality should demonstrate

⁶² Ahmed Haile and David Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu*, 15.

⁶³ John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become like Him, Do as He Did*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2024, 128.

the gospel and develop a relationship in which the gospel can be clearly articulated and understood.

Practice #6. In conjunction with practice #5, hospitality is not merely a ministry platform for converting people. Instead, we should strive to be known for our hospitality. Christine Pohl writes, “When viewed as a strategy, hospitality is usually short-lived. Unless it becomes part of our DNA, we often abandon the practice when we meet resistance or when it does not quickly ‘bear fruit.’”⁶⁴

Practice #7. Hospitality provides a safe space for the Other. A safe space allows the stranger to become a friend. This means it is a space where questions can be asked and love can be demonstrated, even in the face of disagreement about beliefs.⁶⁵ A safe space is a place “where hosts do not dictate how guests must change, but rather provide a secure forum for change to occur.”⁶⁶

Practice #8. Hospitality must happen beyond the church walls. It must be demonstrated in homes, the public sphere, and the church. This is a chance for Christians to love the “Other” unconditionally as who they are.⁶⁷ Historically, the love of a Christian has repeatedly been one of the primary reasons Muslims have begun to follow Jesus.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The eight hospitality practices are a good starting point for the American Church to begin fostering a life of hospitality toward Somali immigrants living among us. However, these practices are not comprehensive and can certainly be expanded upon. Given more space, it would be

⁶⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012), 168.

⁶⁵ Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 133.

⁶⁶ Amos Yong, *Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, 132.

⁶⁷ Daniela Christova Augustine, *Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration: Toward a Spirit-Inspired Vision of Social Transformation* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 44.

⁶⁸ Jonathan M. Menn, “Christianity and Islam: The Essentials” PDF, Appleton, WI: 2020, 171.

beneficial to elaborate on each practice and examine how racism impacts hospitality and the relationship between the American Church and Somali Muslims.

The primary aim of this chapter is to encourage American Christians to be more proactive in offering welcoming hospitality to Somali immigrants who have settled in our communities. Hospitality is a theme woven throughout Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. As Christians, we have a biblical calling to welcome both the stranger and the enemy. Jesus exemplifies hospitality, and the gospel message conveys that he welcomes his followers into his holy presence. Followers of Jesus should reflect this truth in their lives.

Somali people who have found their way onto American soil have endured many challenges. As a nation, they have endured a civil war, causing thousands upon thousands of people to flee for safety. Upon arriving in the United States, one Somali refugee states, “We’re looking to give our families more stable lives.”⁶⁹ When we choose to engage with our Somali neighbors and learn from them, we learn that many of us want the same thing: safe neighborhoods, stability for our children, and jobs that pay the bills.

As noted above, welcoming hospitality is difficult; it takes intentionality and determination. Quoting missiologist Tobias Brandner, Evelyne Reisacher writes, “To offer hospitality to the stranger is to welcome something unknown and vulnerable into our life-world, to create space for something foreign, to offer room, to accommodate, care for, and protect the alien.”⁷⁰

It is time for the American Church to rise above the political rhetoric on immigration and learn to see and welcome those who are coming to America as people bearing the image of God. Daniela Augustine states, “Hospitality to foreigners does not demand their conversion and cultural conformity before experiencing the gift of

⁶⁹ Hamse Warfa et al., “Somalis + Minnesota,” *Minnesota History* 66, no. 1 (2018): 25.

⁷⁰ Evelyne A. Reisacher, *Joyful Witness in the Muslim World*, 117.

hospitality.”⁷¹ Welcoming hospitality in Christ’s name will welcome people even when we hail from different cultural backgrounds and religions. We might have plenty of cultural differences but amidst those differences, we can learn to enjoy a cup of tea with one another.

About The Author

Adam Cheney currently resides in Minnesota, where he works with refugees and immigrants who are new to the United States. Prior to moving to Minnesota, Adam and his family worked as church planters for five years along the southern coast of Kenya. Adam is currently working on a Doctorate of Leadership in Global Perspective through Portland Seminary. Adam also holds an MA in Intercultural Ministry Studies from Bethany Global University and a BS in Bible Theology and Cultural Engagement from Moody Bible Institute. The author can be reached at acheney23@georgefox.edu.

⁷¹ Daniela Christova Augustine, *Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration*, 44.



CHAPTER 5

FOR SOMALI BELIEVERS

Barbara Keener Reed

“When God blesses you, you prosper.”⁷²

A Somali Proverb

Biblical epistles were sent as encouragement to scattered, persecuted believers in long centuries past; may these words also bless readers with encouragement and joy - that is my earnest hope and prayer.

Impressed by the account of John and Betty Stamm, who were beheaded for their faith, I sensed that God was calling me to missions overseas and expected that someday I would go to their place of service, China. As a young child at that time, God only needed me to hear the call and turn my intentions in that direction, for God had another destination.

During a visiting pastor’s sermon at university, Harold was convicted about the way he had related to his younger siblings; he wrote home: “Ever since I have been big enough to have my own way, I have been insisting pretty hard on having it . . . (causing) fights, commotions, and dissatisfactions.” He asked for forgiveness from his father and siblings, in addition to prayer so “this won’t happen anymore.” That confession signaled a major turning point in Harold’s life; instead of power over people (due to age, strength, or position), his stance would now be power in collaboration with people, now known as servant leadership.

⁷² In Somali, *Barako Eebbe baa rag barwaaqaysa*.

Before marriage, I learned of Harold's sense of call to missions beyond our homeland; happily, we agreed about this very crucial life choice. Harold was also loving and considerate at home; he listened well to my thoughts and feelings and when significant decisions were "on the table," we made them together.

For our service, the mission agency gave us a choice between one of several European countries, Tanzania or Somalia. We asked the administrator to decide since he knew us fairly well and the particular needs or circumstances of those countries. However, in my heart, Somalia was what resonated. I couldn't have explained why that was my heartthrob but I can say, "Thanks be to God" that the administrator chose Somalia as the context for our service.

We arrived in Somalia in mid-October of 1961. Climate, language, culture, primary religion, dress, and landscape were all vastly different from life as we had known it but we set our intentions to learn, adjust, and fall in stride with life as it was, not as it used to be, and were happy.

Before long a major difficulty happened with the government's closure of all Mennonite Mission programs: day and evening schools, the hospital, and clinics. This edict followed a few believers having distributed gospel tracts in the Arabic language, which soon found their way into the hands of religious leaders. With closure, we were quite aware we might all be expelled from the country. Psalm 23 was my comfort:

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.⁷³*

⁷³ All Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1989.

After some months, our mission was allowed to resume services but soon a Somali assailant killed our colleague, Merlin Grove, propelling us into shock and grief. Dorothy, Merlin's wife and mother of three children, was also attacked and nearly killed by the same man. Still hospitalized at the time of the assailant's trial, Dorothy sent a testimony of forgiveness. (The judge was quite shocked!)

With Merlin no longer present, it was now incumbent on Harold to assume additional classroom teaching, administration of the intermediate school, and leading Sunday morning services plus preaching every week. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Yes. Yes!

In 1963, buildings for Shebelli Intermediate School were being prepared at Johar, and we moved with our three children to an apartment on the campus. Students, mostly those who had studied in Mogadishu the previous year, stayed in a dormitory. It was a stressful time for Harold, ensuring that beds, desks, kitchenware, tables, and staff were all in place by the start date. Within days of the school opening, two teachers left without giving any notice. Another issue was that the plastic water pipes had already cracked upon arrival, and the well pump was also having major problems. Life on a basic level was tough, but Harold, by God's grace, was giving it his all.

The electric generator also failed and I had a very painful toe; with a complaining spirit, I was not "a happy camper!" Then the Lord spoke this word to me as he had done for terrorist Saul of Tarsus in Biblical times: "Why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads." (Acts 26:14) By emotionally resisting our minor difficulties, it was as if I were trying to demolish an unyielding – and injurious – stone wall. But I was only hurting myself by fighting what I had no power to change. That experience at Johar gave rise to a very important life lesson for me: "I will not fight (emotionally) what I have no power to change!" Nothing in those natural circumstances changed immediately but by accepting my lot, my spirit was buoyed up immeasurably; peace returned

and life was good again. Such a resolve continues to benefit me ever since; it is an important “take-away” from the Somalia years.

Another day at Johar while Harold was still grading students’ papers and I had retired for the night, unexpected visitors came to our door. They brought shocking news sent from my family in Pennsylvania of the accidental death of my parents by vehicle. Awakening from a deep sleep to read that telegram, I first wondered which one was killed, only to have the full truth register on a second read. My parents - both gone! Never again would I see them on this earth. Thankfully, both colleagues and students were supportive in this tragic loss as they came offering condolences. I trust the students heard and were deeply influenced by my confession of hope that, even though grieving, my parents were safe with God because of Jesus’ death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins.

Due to the great distance and expense, I was not able to join my family in the United States to grieve together or attend their funeral and burial. It was very hard but God comforted me with a host of pleasant memories and that eternal hope, the gift of all who receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

On top of that huge grief, another shocking thing took us by surprise! One day while our family was having lunch, a very angry student burst in – no “Xodi, xodi,” from this young man, whom I will call Yusuf. He had no time for polite cultural norms at the door, but entered immediately and lashed out verbally at Harold with this demand, “You change that conduct grade or I’ll make your family a widow and orphans!” (The grade for his leadership in a student strike had been decided by all the teachers, both Somali and missionaries).

After a very brief pause, he added, “I’ll give you three days to do it!” Then he left as abruptly as he had come. Never mind that all students, including he, had previously signed a statement promising they would not request grades be changed and that expulsion from school would result if they did so.

This young man was dead serious and coming on the heels of Merlin's murder about fifteen months prior, you can well imagine our thoughts and feelings; even so, we merely listened to his tirade. Harold, remaining calm, said nary a word in rebuttal.

I did not know how long I would have a husband, but by the grace of God, our goal was to be loving and forgiving to each other. The police wanted Harold to file charges, but he declined to do so. Per school standards, Yusuf was expelled.

Several months later, while Harold was in the classroom teaching, I saw a young man coming towards our door; might he be Yusuf? Indeed, it was Yusuf! This time he followed Somali custom and I, wondering what might happen, invited him to enter. I suppose we exchanged greetings, and then he said, "I'm sorry for the things I said against you that day." Surprise – this was an apology! Of course, I forgave him; even before his confession, our heart attitude was one of forgiveness, as Jesus would have us do. But Yusuf did not follow suit with Harold. At the close of the school year, we were transferred to Jamama to fill an upcoming personnel vacancy there and a new teacher from North America took Harold's place at Shebelli School.

A long, muddy trip by two Land Rovers took us four days to reach Jamama; one night we slept in or on top of Land Rovers. On that journey the vehicle Harold drove flipped onto its side which let muddy water seep into containers holding our bedding, clothes, and dishes. "Not fighting what I could not change" was my recourse again; unpleasant and trying as the whole experience was, I do not remember complaining. The men worked hard through all those difficulties as we got stuck in deep holes time after time after time. After arrival, lots of soap, water, and time were required to make clothing and dishes wearable and usable again. Nor will I forget the experience - there is still a mud stain on some paper files, but again, we took it in stride because of a greater purpose – to share the wonderful love and message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Earthly things will pass away but Jesus is ours forever!

Every Sunday in Jamama I was impressed by Christian believers such as Elisha and family, Tabita and her husband, Musa and Ruta who walked many kilometers from other villages to attend services in our home; (we were not allowed to have services in their homes). A few younger men from our area also attended. Such stalwart characters! Before their long walk home again, we all enjoyed bariis, maraq, papaya, bananas, and Somali shai around our table. I was challenged by their faithfulness. We invited hospital and school employees to our home for an evening of games and at Christmas, we gave a short program in the school. It was a good year.

As our first States-side leave drew to a close, Harold had some anxieties about returning to Somalia because we'd be living in Mogadishu again – easily within reach of Yusuf whom, he assumed, was still angry. That was not an unrealistic thought. Within hours of our arrival, who should appear at our door but Yusuf! We welcomed him in, exchanged greetings, and had a brief conversation. After he left, Harold said, "I wonder what he wanted." Indeed, why had he come? What did he intend? (To assess the lay of the land?)

We did not have long to wonder; the very next evening Yusuf came again. This time, almost three years since his angry tirade, he sought Harold's forgiveness and asked Harold to teach him the Bible. Wow! How touched we were; unknown to us, God, the Hound of Heaven, had been working all those years to bring this lost sheep into a safe and peaceful fold with the family of God. Praise be to God!!

Very soon, Yusuf made a clear confession of faith in Jesus Christ; when giving his testimony to the believer group of that time, he said he had watched Christians for a long time, noticing their joy, kindness, and patience. Then he recounted his threat to Harold at Johar and that Harold didn't get angry. Again, I can only praise God for redeeming what Satan meant for evil into a life transformed; Harold wrote home, "(Yusuf) is a changed man now."

Fast forward to 1986 when I was with Harold on an administrative visit from the USA to Somalia for Eastern Mennonite Missions. We were entering the Ministry of Education for Harold's appointment when whom should we encounter: Yusuf! Happily, I had an hour's conversation with him while Harold kept his appointment with the Director General for Education. Then about fourteen years ago, the last time we were in Toronto, Canada, at the invitation of Somalis, Yusuf arrived near the conclusion of the day's program. I think he had walked a long way from his home to reach the meeting place. How I wished we could have talked at length but there was only time for hello and goodbye; I would very much like to know how he is doing now. I remember his name, his father's and grandfather's names.

I look back with gratitude about having made a choice not to worry during our Somalia years, 1961-1974. Uncertainty was predominant throughout, even more so after the Coup d'Etat and the rise of Sayed Barre to power. Yet I think it fair to say that, as a team, we were taken by surprise when all private schools and our hospital were nationalized as announced publicly on the anniversary of Revolution Day, 1972. Who would the new headmaster be for Shebelli School, opening the very next day? Harold and the prior headmaster, Kenneth Nissley, went to the Ministry of Education to inquire, and then Kenneth went to Afgoi and informed Axmed Geedi of his appointment. He had been one of our excellent teachers and this change, although sudden, went well. While we would have wished for more planning, our long-term intent was for schools to eventually make such a transition. It was later reported that, of all private schools now under government administration, the smoothest transitions occurred with Mennonite Mission. I believe that implies that our personnel responded with grace in the spirit of Jesus, such as Kenneth Nissley, and the late Roy Brubaker, fully cooperating and carefully labeling keys, etc. to make it as easy as possible for the new headmaster called to greater responsibilities on extremely short notice.

Medical missionaries were supposed to stay at their posts after nationalization so Harold traveled to Jamama to help in the transfer of administration to government appointees. The government sent a new

directive: our physician and nurses were all told to leave. They were not given a deadline but soon packed up and said their goodbyes. It was again a time of great flux, more opportunity to cooperate with plans not of their choosing; to give their best when wanted, and then leave with goodwill towards all, even when prevailing winds blew in the opposite direction. It's what Jesus would do.

Another surprise came at the year's end: one month's notice to vacate the Mission's legally-owned Mogadishu property and leave behind vehicles, motorcycles, tools, classroom furniture – anything and everything not personally owned by missionaries. The government did make one exception – teachers were allowed to take mission-owned furniture and appliances to their next (rental) homes.

Of course, the notice to vacate this property raised big questions. Are authorities wanting us to leave of our own volition but are just not saying so? Without assignments, several families left because they were not given a teaching position, or tools previously used in their jobs at Johar and Mahaddei were no longer available for their use. Mogadishu teachers offered positions in government schools stayed but would require renting houses elsewhere, no small expense for the Mission. Our family had previously moved to a rental at Kilometer Four to provide housing for an additional family on the compound. Thus, at least Harold, the Mission Director, and I were settled elsewhere with our children when that ultimatum upset the status quo for others. Because of Jesus, through these changes, the team also “refused to fight what we could not change.”

Another opportunity for us to practice peace came with a false accusation against Harold. Initially, we had no idea why he was not allowed to board a flight, the first of several we had booked, en route for home leave in the United States. Whatever the issue was, it was declared resolved by authorities so we returned to the airport the following day, cleared immigration, and boarded. The pilot was readying for takeoff when suddenly the passenger door opened and an official announced, “Mr. Reed, you may not leave; there is a court order against

you!” Although the official said that my daughter and I could leave, we all depanded; in this uncertainty, I was going to be there for Harold.

Finally, the accusation came to light, a hearing was held and the judge ruled that Harold was innocent, fully exonerated of the charge against him. On our third trip to the airport in five days, we finally left without incident. On return to Mogadishu several months later, some were surprised that Harold would return after such trouble but a little inconvenience was not going to get in the way of our commitment to a higher calling.

Then one day an ultimatum came for our family and Naomi Smoker: Within 68 hours, board the next flight out. This was hard! Somalia had captured our hearts and was home, but we had to comply. So we left.

Throughout the years we were privileged to live in Somalia, one by one, young Somali men would ask a male missionary for lessons from the Bible. Thus, Harold had the great privilege of teaching the truth about Jesus, the plan of salvation, and how to live as a disciple. What glorious opportunities and several men, like Yusuf, made the crucial choice to become a follower and disciple of Jesus as Savior and Lord!

So, we left our family and homeland, adapted to life in a new and very different country, sometimes facing frustrations or obstacles along the way, but it was with joy that we served! Any “sacrifice” we may have made was more than offset, especially when Somalis made that very difficult – but very wise – choice to accept Jesus! Please know that during those years in your homeland, I grew emotionally and spiritually in significant ways—much, much more than ever before. I truly believe that God took me to Somalia to help me grow, perhaps even more than for what I could contribute to the cause for which I was sent. At a crucial time in my spiritual life, I was especially blessed by Adam Jimale through some of his sermons. Thank you for the privilege you gave us; we have never been the same since.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31

About The Author

Barbara Keener Reed, along with her husband Harold and their family, served in Somalia and Eastern Africa for 15 years. During this time, she learned valuable life lessons that crossed cultures and experiences. In hindsight, Barbara believes that God guided her to Somalia not only to help the Somali people but also to shape and transform her own life. After returning home to Pennsylvania, USA, she worked for many years as a registered nurse in the field of mental health. Eventually, she provided extended care for her husband during his decline and passing. Barbara's deep love for her family—comprising four children, a granddaughter, and two great-granddaughters—remains strong alongside her affection for Africa. For a detailed account of Barbara and the Reed family's life journey, read *Standing on Holy Ground and Some Not So Holy* by Barbara Keener Reed. The book is available from the author or on Amazon. The author can be reached at hereed80@gmail.com.



CHAPTER 6

SUFFERING AND SOVEREIGNTY

Hadliye Baashe Amani

“Patience is God’s divine presence.”⁷⁴

A Somali Proverb

Introduction: Faith Blooming In The Desert

In the shadowlands where embracing Christ is seen not just as a change in faith but as an act of cultural treason, a renunciation, a profound drama unfolds. Here, where ancient bloodlines and traditions intertwine like threads in a centuries-old tapestry, believers walk a path lined with thorns. Their discipleship is not a casual commitment, nor a comfortable Sunday ritual—it’s a daily act of sacred defiance, with each sunrise bringing a renewed choice to carry the cross of Him who first bore the weight of rejection.

Against this harsh backdrop, the Somali Church rises like a desert rose—delicate yet indomitable. Each congregation, though small and scattered, blazes with the quiet radiance of unconquerable faith. Their petals unfurl in secret places, nourished by hidden streams of divine grace that flow beneath the parched surface of persecution. These believers mirror both the ancient and the immediate: their story echoes the resolute faith of those first Christians who stood firm before Rome’s imperial might, while simultaneously reflecting the unwavering courage of contemporary believers across the Muslim world who daily choose Christ despite the cost.

⁷⁴ In Somali, *Calool-adayg waa Ilaah wehelkii*.

This theological exploration delves into the rich soil from which such extraordinary faith springs forth. It examines the biblical bedrock and theological aquifers that sustain these believers through seasons of trial. Through their crucible of suffering, the Somali Church illuminates a timeless truth: that in the economy of God's kingdom, persecution does not diminish His sovereignty but rather serves as its theater. Their narrative interweaves with the grand tapestry of God's redemptive work—a story where suffering becomes sanctification, where faith proves unquenchable, and where grace continuously triumphs over darkness.

The Paradox Of Divine Sovereignty And Human Suffering

Through the corridors of sacred history, faith's footsteps echo with a haunting symmetry. Like pearls formed in the depths of adversity, each generation of believers adds its testimony to an unbroken chain of divine paradox, where persecution seeks to extinguish but instead illuminates, where weakness becomes the vessel of transcendent power.

Consider Stephen, whose face blazed with angelic light even as stones rained upon him. In that moment of supreme crisis, heaven itself parted, offering him a glimpse of Christ standing—not seated—at God's right hand, as if rising to welcome His faithful witness home. Under the shadow of emperors who fashioned themselves as gods, the early church discovered an astonishing truth: persecution, rather than crushing their faith, distilled it to its purest essence.

Today, Somali believers inherit this mantle of sacred resistance. Their stories mirror those ancient testimonies with striking fidelity—each threat of imprisonment becoming an echo of Paul's chains, each whispered prayer in hiding reflecting the hushed worship in Roman catacombs. Yet in this mirror, they discover not merely reflection but revelation: that persecution unveils the sovereign hand of God working through human frailty.

The apostolic declaration resounds through centuries unchanged: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). These words, far from mere poetic comfort, become a living reality in the crucible of the Somali faith. Each phrase maps perfectly onto their experience, where divine sovereignty demonstrates its most profound truth—that God’s power finds its perfect expression in human weakness.

The Cost Of Following Jesus In Muslim-Majority Countries

In lands where the crescent moon casts long shadows, following the cross demands a price few in the West have been asked to calculate. Here, conversion is not merely a spiritual transaction but a seismic rupture—tearing through family bonds, severing economic lifelines, and often leaving believers suspended between two worlds: one they can no longer inhabit, and one that seems perpetually beyond reach.

The arithmetic of discipleship in these contexts is brutally simple: everything must be counted as a loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Yet within this severe equation lies a mysterious multiplication: as earthly securities diminish, heavenly treasures multiply. As human relationships fracture, divine intimacy deepens. It is a mathematics of grace that defies worldly logic.

Like their spiritual ancestors who “rejoiced at being counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41), Somali believers discover an inexplicable joy blooming in the desert of their trials. This joy, far from being a I optimism or emotional escape, springs from a well deeper than circumstance—the unshakeable assurance that they are held in the sovereign grip of divine love.

Their lives incarnate Jesus’ paradoxical promise: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). In hidden rooms where believers gather, these words cease to be mere scripture and become living bread,

nourishing souls famished for encouragement. The kingdom of heaven, they discover, is not a distant promise but a present reality, manifest in their very suffering.

Suffering As A Crucible For Spiritual Growth

In the eternal garden of divine purpose, Jesus emerges not merely as a figure of history, but as the cosmic paradox—a flower whose petals unfurled most magnificently in humanity’s midnight hour. Isaiah’s prophetic brush painted Him as *“a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief”* (Isaiah 53:3), but for Somali believers, these ancient words burst into living color, each syllable a seed taking root in their soil of suffering. In His wounds, they discover not theoretical theology, but breathing truth—each lash He endured becomes a luminous beacon, casting golden light across their shadowed path.

These persecuted faithful find in Jesus not the distant thunders of deity, but the whispered intimacy of a fellow sufferer. His footprints pressed deep in history’s dust, marking their trail through tribulation; His tears, like morning dew, consecrate their streams of sorrow. His resurrection stands as dawn’s promise that darkness, however long its reign, must ultimately yield to light. In their mysterious communion with Christ’s anguish, they touch what Paul’s soul thirsted for: *“to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings”* (Philippians 3:10). Each trial becomes not a mere burden to shoulder, but a sacred doorway into love’s deepest mysteries.

The Faith Of Flowers: Where Desert Stones Sprout Gardens

Nature whispers its most profound secrets in places that seem to forbid life itself, where wildflowers paint color across a canvas of desolation. This living parable finds its spiritual reflection in the Somali church, where faith blooms like desert roses in the midst of seeming impossibility. These believers exemplify how faith’s most tenacious roots often sink deepest in soil that the world deems barren.

Their gathered community transcends the simple metaphor of “a garden of flowers”—it becomes a living tapestry of divine resilience. In their hidden sanctuaries, each believer embodies both the delicate flower and the devoted gardener, drawing vital strength from the community while offering their unique fragrance of faith to sustain the whole. Their worship, though softly spoken, rises like sacred incense through history’s shadows, each prayer a petal borne aloft on winds of grace toward heaven’s listening heart.

What appears fragile beneath the world’s callous gaze reveals an otherworldly fortitude that confounds human understanding. These scattered gardens of faith demonstrate a resilience that bewilders their persecutors—for their roots reach deeper than hatred’s sharpest spade, drinking from eternal springs that no earthly power can diminish. Their living testimony gives flesh to the prophet’s vision: “The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom” (Isaiah 35:1). In their persistent flowering, they prove that God’s garden grows most vibrantly where the world sees only wasteland.

Theological Insights: God’s Sovereignty In Persecution

The biblical narrative weaves suffering and glory together with divine intentionality, creating a tapestry where darkness serves to highlight heaven’s gold threads. From Genesis to Revelation, we witness God’s sovereign alchemy—transforming the lead of human suffering into the precious metal of spiritual triumph.

Consider Joseph’s odyssey through betrayal’s depths. In the pit of his brothers’ hatred, in Potiphar’s dungeon of false accusation, providence was silently working its masterpiece—his declaration to those same brothers years later. “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20)—becomes more than a historical record. It stands as a theological lighthouse, illuminating how divine sovereignty can transmute human malice into miraculous provision.

The Exodus narrative similarly unveils God's pattern of working through, rather than despite, suffering. Israel's groans under Egyptian oppression became the very birth pangs of their deliverance. The waters that threatened to drown them became the walls of their salvation, while those same waters crashed down as judgment on their pursuers. In this divine choreography, suffering serves not as an obstacle to God's purposes but as their very instrument.

Yet all these streams of redemptive suffering flow toward one supreme confluence—the Cross. Here, at history's pivot point, Jesus transforms an instrument of imperial terror into the throne of divine mercy. His cry, "It is finished" (John 19:30), announces not defeat but the completion of suffering's redemptive purpose. For Somali believers, this truth transforms their cross-bearing from meaningless pain into purposeful participation in divine victory.

The Church As The Body Of Christ

Paul's metaphor of the church as Christ's body takes on heightened significance in the context of persecution. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27) becomes more than an organizational principle—it emerges as a profound theological statement about suffering's shared nature and purpose.

When Somali believers endure persecution, their pain resonates through the entire body of Christ like nervous signals through living tissue. Their suffering is not isolated but integrated into the broader story of God's people. This divine nervous system of shared experience fulfills Paul's vision: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

For the persecuted church, this organic unity provides both comfort and purpose. Their trials are not silent screams in the void but vital testimonies that strengthen the whole body's immune system of faith. Each act of endurance becomes a spiritual antibody, helping the global church resist the infections of complacency and compromise.

The mystery of this divine body transcends physical distance and cultural barriers. A whispered prayer in a Somali hiding place strengthens believers' continents away. A tear shed in secret becomes a seed watering the garden of global faith. In this holy ecosystem, nothing is wasted—every trial serves its purpose in the economy of God's kingdom.

The Testimony Of Endurance

In the crucible of persecution, forgiveness emerges not merely as a moral imperative but as perhaps the most eloquent apologetic for the gospel's transformative power. Like a flame that burns brightest in darkness, the capacity to forgive one's persecutors illuminates the supernatural character of Christian love with stunning clarity.

Consider the revolutionary mathematics of divine forgiveness: where human calculation demands retribution, heaven's arithmetic operates on the principle of multiplication through subtraction. Each act of forgiveness subtracts from the ledger of vengeance while multiplying the witness of grace. When Somali believers extend forgiveness to their persecutors, they participate in the same divine alchemy that transformed Christ's cross from an instrument of death into the fountain of eternal life.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34)—these words from the cross find fresh incarnation in every persecuted believer who chooses love over hatred. Such forgiveness becomes a living exegesis of the gospel, more powerful than any verbal proclamation. It poses an unanswerable question to the persecutor's conscience: What manner of faith is this that transforms enemies into intercessors?

The testimony of forgiveness speaks in a language that transcends cultural and religious barriers. It whispers to hardened hearts with an eloquence that no argument can match, demonstrating that the power of the gospel lies not in its ability to win debates but in its capacity to transform human nature at its deepest level.

Creative Expressions Of Faith

Under pressure, faith does not merely endure—it innovates. Like water finding its way through stone, the Spirit of God inspires creative expressions of devotion that transform limitations into opportunities. The Somali believers' ingenuity in maintaining their faith recalls the early Christians' use of the ichthys symbol, but with contemporary adaptations that speak to their unique context.

Their creativity manifests in sacred semiotics—a holy system of signs and symbols that communicate deep truths while eluding hostile scrutiny. A simple basket becomes a tabernacle, carrying not just daily goods but the bread of life in hidden scripture pages. Common phrases are infused with double meaning, creating a spiritual dialect that nourishes the soul while preserving safety.

Even their sufferings become art—each trial transformed into a testimony, each hardship woven into a tapestry of grace. Their lives compose a living liturgy where ordinary objects and everyday moments are transfigured into vessels of divine communion. A shared glance becomes a benediction, a subtle gesture transforms into a doxology, and silence itself becomes eloquent with praise.

Implications For The Global Church

In the shadow of persecution, the Somali Church rises not merely as a congregation, but as a living theological manuscript written in flesh and faith. Here stands an academy of the heart, where truth is not merely taught but bought with tears—a seminary whose curriculum is carved in the bedrock of sacrifice. While some theologians pen treatises in leather-bound comfort, these believers write their doctrinal theses in the ink of their suffering.

Their faith, like gold subjected to the refiner's flame, emerges with a brilliance that both blinds and illuminates. Gone are the comfortable impurities of casual Christianity, burned away in persecution's furnace until what remains is faith in its most elemental form—pure, potent, and

profound. Their witness strips away our carefully constructed facades of religious convenience, revealing how far our comfortable Christianity has drifted from its cruciform origins.

In their daily crucible, the artificial walls between belief and practice crumble like ancient desert ruins. Here, theology isn't an intellectual exercise performed in climate-controlled classrooms but a lived reality written in the grammar of survival. Their doctrinal statements are not penned in academic journals but composed in whispered prayers and steadfast endurance. Prayer itself transforms from a scheduled activity into the very rhythm of existence—not a spiritual supplement but the oxygen of their souls, drawn in with every heartbeat of hardship and expelled in whispered worship.

Consider how they shatter our pale paradigms of prosperity: Their lives are a holy rebellion against the glittering promises of wealth-wrapped gospel. In their sacred poverty, they expose the bankruptcy of prosperity theology while unveiling treasure vaults of spiritual wealth that affluent believers rarely discover. Watch and wonder as those who have surrendered everything for Christ radiate a joy that puts to shame those who have sacrificed nothing. Their abundance flows not from material excess but from the bottomless wells of divine presence, teaching us that true prosperity is measured not in gold but in grace, not in possessions but in persecution's strange pearls.

These believers become living parables, their lives etched with questions that demand answers from the global church:

- What if comfort has become our cage rather than persecution in their prison?
- How has our abundance become our poverty?
- When did our safety become our spiritual liability?

In their suffering, they hold up a mirror to our manicured faith, revealing both its cosmetic comforts and its cosmic deficiencies. Their testimony becomes a divine plumb line, measuring the true verticality of

our devotion against the gravity of their sacrifice. Yet they offer these lessons not with condemnation but with the gentle authority of those who have walked through fire and emerged singing.

From this crucible of conviction emerges a truth as uncomfortable as it is undeniable: authentic Christianity has always cost everything precisely because it offers everything. The Somali believers, through their precious and purchased wisdom, call us back to this first love, this primitive poetry of faith where loss becomes gain and death becomes life in the upside-down kingdom of our crucified King.

Supporting Those Who Suffer

The call to support persecuted believers flows from the profound theological reality of our union in Christ's mystical body—a spiritual organism where divine life pulses through every member. As Paul illuminates in Ephesians 4:16, we are “joined and held together by every supporting ligament,” sharing not merely in fellowship but in the deeper currents of spiritual life. When brothers and sisters face persecution's furnace, their spiritual battles reverberate through our shared communion, calling us to engage. In the ministry of spiritual strengthening that Paul demonstrated when he wrote, “I remember you in my prayers night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3).

Our intercessory ministry must ascend beyond casual remembrance to become a focused outpouring of spiritual energy. Like Epaphras, who was “always wrestling in prayer” for the Colossian church (Colossians 4:12), our prayers should be specific and sustained, grounded in intimate knowledge of their spiritual struggles, and anchored in faith that penetrates heavenly realms. These prayers become channels of divine strength, much as Paul's prayers for the Ephesians sought their inner strengthening “with power through His Spirit” (Ephesians 3:16). Through such focused intercession, we participate in the spiritual supply lines that sustain faith under fire.

The worldwide church bears a sacred responsibility to become a spiritual academy for persecuted believers—a place where theological wisdom is distilled into life-giving truth for those in the crucible. As Paul mentored Timothy through letters of theological guidance and pastoral encouragement, we must develop ways to transmit robust spiritual teaching that addresses the unique challenges of persecuted believers. This involves crafting theological resources that speak to questions of suffering, sovereignty, and faithfulness—precious treasures of truth that sustain the soul when external supports are stripped away.

Our educational ministry must mirror the depth and practicality found in the apostolic letters, where profound theology was married to pastoral application. Every teaching should illuminate Scripture's promises like stars in darkness, every doctrinal truth become a well of refreshment, every biblical principle a foundation stone of unshakeable faith. We must cultivate spiritual formation that weaves together the threads of biblical wisdom, theological depth, and practical discipleship. This represents the kind of spiritual equipment Paul referenced when he spoke of preparing God's people "for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12).

The healing ministry to persecuted believers must focus on the deep waters of spiritual restoration. Through guided meditation on Scripture, pastoral counsel, and the ministry of encouragement, we help bind up spiritual wounds and strengthen weary hands. Like Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," we are called to strengthen our suffering family with words of grace and truth. Each letter, teaching, or prayer becomes a balm of Gilead, bringing spiritual healing and renewal to those bearing the marks of Christ in their bodies.

This spiritual support embodies the highest calling of the church—to nurture, strengthen, and equip the saints for every good work. When we truly grasp that their spiritual battles are our battles, their growth—our growth, their faithfulness—our inspiration, then supporting them becomes a holy privilege. Our commitment must mirror the devotion of Paul, who counted everything as loss compared to the surpassing

worth of knowing Christ and sharing in both His sufferings and His glory (Philippians 3:8-11). For in strengthening these precious ones spiritually, we participate in Christ's ministry of shepherding His flock through the valley of shadows into ever-deeper communion with Himself.

Conclusion: The Garden Of Faith's Eternal Bloom

In the grand tapestry of divine providence, the Somali Church blooms like a miracle of sacred horticulture—each flower a testament to the paradoxical power of persecution to cultivate rather than crush authentic faith. Their garden, though surrounded by hostile elements, demonstrates the unchangeable truth that God's sovereignty does not merely survive human opposition but transforms it into soil for spiritual flourishing.

Like master gardeners reading the weather in every shifting cloud, these believers have learned to discern divine purposes in the storms of persecution. Their wisdom, earned through tears and tested by fire, reveals that suffering in God's economy is never merely punitive but always purposeful. Each trial becomes a trellis upon which faith climbs higher, each hardship transforms into humus from which deeper roots grow.

The metaphor of the garden captures both the fragility and the ferocious resilience of their faith. Individual believers, like delicate blooms, may seem vulnerable to every harsh wind. Yet together, they form an ecosystem of extraordinary durability—their roots intertwined beneath the surface in networks of mutual support and sustenance. This underground fellowship mirrors the mystery Paul celebrated: that the church, though manifested locally, participates in an eternal communion that transcends time and space.

Their story compels the global church to reexamine its spiritual ecology. In lands of religious freedom, faith can become like a hothouse flower—beautiful but brittle, cultivated in artificial conditions that provide little preparation for life's fiercer seasons. The Somali believers,

by contrast, demonstrate faith that has learned to thrive in the wild spaces where divine grace meets human hostility.

When Paul posed his rhetorical challenge to the Romans— “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35)—he was not merely offering comfort but proclaiming a fundamental truth about the nature of divine love. The Somali Church answers Paul’s ancient question not with words but with lives that demonstrate how persecution, rather than severing believers from Christ’s love, often becomes the very channel through which that love flows most powerfully.

Their testimony reveals that God’s sovereignty operates not despite human opposition but through it, like a master artist incorporating flaws in the canvas into the final masterpiece. In their suffering, they participate in a mystery deeper than mere endurance: they become living witnesses to the truth that the kingdom of God advances not by force but through faithful presence, not through domination but through divine paradox.

As their garden continues to grow, watered by tears yet sustained by unseen springs of grace, it offers prophetic testimony to the world: that faith which costs everything proves the worth of He who gave everything. Their lives declare that the light of divine sovereignty shines most brilliantly against the backdrop of human opposition and that God’s power finds its perfect expression precisely where human strength fails.

In the end, their story is not merely about survival but about transformation—both their own and that of the watching world. Like flowers always turning toward the sun, their relentless orientation toward Christ even in the darkest hours reveals the magnetic power of divine love. They demonstrate that persecution, though intended to destroy faith, often becomes the very instrument through which faith’s authenticity is most powerfully displayed.

And so, the garden grows on, each new trial becoming fresh soil for faith's flowering, each act of persecution transformed into another opportunity for grace to triumph. In their continuing witness, they remind the global church that the sovereignly ordained pattern of the kingdom remains unchanged: that life springs from death, that strength emerges from weakness, and that the light shines most brilliantly in the darkest places.

Their legacy calls us all to recognize that in God's garden of grace, no suffering is wasted, no tear falls unmarked, and no faithful witness goes unseen by the divine Gardener who promises that one day every wilderness will rejoice and blossom as the rose. Until that day, their testimony stands as a living seal of the truth that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ and that God's sovereignty remains undiminished—even in the shadows of persecution's deepest valleys.

About The Author

Hadliye Baashe Amani currently lives in Mogadishu, Somalia, where he serves as the Director of Education and Evangelism for the Somali Bible Society. He is a dedicated STEM and language teacher as well as a consultant for school and education development. As an active member of the global Somali Christian community, Hadliye is passionate about connecting Somali Christians worldwide and fostering spiritual growth within the diaspora. With over 20 years of experience, he has lived and worked across multiple continents, primarily in Southern and Eastern Africa and Europe, which has allowed him to develop extensive intercultural and multilingual expertise. Hadliye holds a Master's degree in Education from Luleå University of Technology in Sweden and is currently pursuing a PhD at Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya.

The author can be reached at educationdirector@somalibiblesociety.org.



CHAPTER 7

CHARITABLE PROTOCOLS

Joseph Z. Bach

“Generosity is not how much you give but how you give.”⁷⁵

A Somali Proverb

Introduction

This chapter is an outgrowth of the ever-present requests for funds that foreigners receive while working in the developing world. It is shared with the utmost wish to be “listening,” sensitive, and respectful to all, but is shared nonetheless as one person’s thoughts and observations to date.

Starting with the “protocols” that the author has created to guide his responses, the chapter then presents three case studies showing how these were applied, including the responses, and concludes with additional thoughts. Although mainly aimed at Western expatriates, it can also be used with great caution and care to help people from developing countries understand why Westerners respond to financial requests the way they do.

The Protocol Statement

With increasing numbers and larger requests for financial assistance, clearer guidelines are needed to ensure consistency and understanding in giving, to protect current resources, and to safeguard those who do not receive aid. For those who do not receive assistance, greater clarity

⁷⁵ In Somali, *Deeqi waxa laysasiyo ma aha ee waa sida laysu siiyo.*

can offer a reason why they are not beneficiaries, hopefully preventing strained relationships and fostering genuine friendships without feelings of rejection.

This is set against the backdrop of African understandings about money management, which, in its primal form, states, “If you have money and I have a need, you should give to meet my need,” a statement whose merits are often insufficiently appreciated by Westerners.⁷⁶ What is here also recognizes the Western standard, a criterion seemingly often unseen by Africans and an additional “grid” that Westerners must satisfy. Aside from outright and likely limited almsgiving, Western disciplines expect that 1) the reasons why someone lacks funds must be identified first (and corrected if necessary), 2) there must be transparency to see where the money is going, and 3) there must be accountability to ensure the money is used effectively for its intended purpose, with results aligning with the initial goals (these, interestingly, address past, present, and future dimensions of a donation). Having white skin is another factor, as it often leads Africans to believe one has unlimited wealth (which, although likely far exceeding any African individual’s wealth, is usually limited by Western standards and does not recognize the higher cost of living in the West).⁷⁷

To fulfill the purposes above, the following protocols have been developed. These may well raise additional questions; regardless, they are not binding, and both the full freedom and the full responsibility to make wise decisions are left to the sole discretion of the prospective donor. The protocols:

1. Where needs are: 1) routine in nature, 2) can be anticipated (suggesting that planning should be in place), or 3) are for items that can be purchased locally – in these cases people should look to local resources for both funding and local, in-country vendors

⁷⁶ “African,” as used here, generally refers to those in eastern Africa, where personal financial resources tend to be limited and where the author’s experience has been. “Western” refers to those from the wealthiest parts of the world; generally, the USA, Canada, western Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand..

⁷⁷ That the Westerners which Africans often see are often well-to-do and that they can travel, live at high standards or with impatience toward those of lesser means, or give with impunity and without any apparent disciplines, only compounds this concern.

to provide the goods or services. (Conversely, needs not within these categories might well be considered for assistance.)⁷⁸

- These points include most health, education, and various other needs.
 - An example of bypassing these criteria is a truly advanced technology that is not available locally or for which funding and/or modes of payment would be prohibitive or unavailable (i.e. the need for a Western credit card or bank account to pay). Truly cataclysmic health concerns might fall into this category as well.
 - These are preliminary standards, which may raise additional questions. Further, just because a request passes these three standards does not mean it will be met – a request’s legitimacy does not obligate a potential donor to give.
2. Generally, support should have a broader reach than just for someone’s project(s) – it should be for a larger spectrum of people, or be through the sanction of a church, NGO, or other organization (thereby confirming the corporate benefit, or the integrity of an individual’s need, as may be the case).
- This also allows for donations to be given through the said organization, rather than to an individual (forestalling jealousy by others or others coming with the expectation of the same support, among other issues).
 - Accountability any supported endeavor should be in the hands of a corporate and hopefully a local group (i.e. the church or an NGO), and must be both for the funds given and for the realization of the designated goals or project.

⁷⁸ In “The Oath for Compassionate Service,” Lupton says much the same: “Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves” Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help*. (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 128ff.

- Though the above is generally true, personal giving may at times be to personal causes.
3. These protocols are to meet several further objectives: 1) to preserve extant resources for more broadly based, custom, or higher impact projects (vs. the ever-present personal requests), 2) to strengthen accountability, fiscal discipline, and fiscal resilience among local Christians, and 3) to avoid dependence (or its often conjoined twin, opportunism) on outside resources, a dependence which is often short-sighted and seems, in the long term, to often defeat the deeper growth and transparency which both the giver and the receiver could have had.⁷⁹

There may be exceptions to the above, such as direct charity or almsgiving (i.e. to one's house helper, the beggar on the street, etc.); however, the above are taken as defaults and as broad parameters.

Any interpretation of how these protocols are applied or of how a situation at hand is understood is finally, and solely, that of the donor: the above does not establish any accountability for a potential donor to a potential recipient.

Three Case Studies

Three actual exchanges follow, where these suppositions were in play and which form possible templates for future engagements. The first receiver is a married, young adult parent; the other receivers are older and have significant maturity; all are fully conversant in English, so communication is secure. They are also from more than one country, and there is regional and some cultural diversity among them.

Case #1

A young man had served as a tour guide in northern Ethiopia on my first return to Ethiopia some years ago. After the Ethiopia-Tigray war was well underway, the loss of tourism due to the war

⁷⁹ The less outside support there is, the less dependency will be an issue and the healthier the situation will likely be.

resulted in his loss of income and he sent several messages requesting help, earnestly saying he would pay it back. On pondering and praying about it I felt I should give, and with a substantive amount, though not excessive by Ethiopian standards.

In notifying him of the transfer to his bank account, I said that when he was on his feet and had money again, he should not repay me, but that he should pass it on to someone yet more needy than he. This set both of us fully free from pressing future obligations – him to repay (or to report back), and me to “collect.” His response was one of happy shock and total relief, and he would be eager to help others when his fortunes improved. (In 2+ years, I’ve not heard from him or if he has “advanced” the money – from news accounts, his situation must still be very bleak, but I am at peace that when he can, he will do this. In its time, it will find its way, and I hope our paths will cross again sometime in the future.)

Case #2 –

From an email exchange, shared with permission but with some details obscured to protect his identity

Dear “Paul,”

Good day, and I trust all is well?! Hopefully, your family is well, and that your job has also been going well, without too many reverses or other issues.

I’ve had to take more than an extended pause about your funding request, for what is certainly a legitimate request. First, know that I am very supportive of your wish to further yourself and to complete what you’ve started. That is commendable, without question, and I hope all move forward that this can be accomplished!

I have counter issues to assisting financially, though: I’ve been receiving more and ever larger requests, and so have had to step back quite far to reconsider all, as a total picture. The first issue is

that I am not primarily interested in being a financier – I am here, first, for the people. This is not to be insensitive to people’s material needs – that is part of the package – but is 1) in hopes that financial activity will be a somewhat distant, secondary matter, or 2) in hopes of supporting people in first working out financial concerns within their local contexts, with local resources.

To give a little feel for the larger picture (these are from a multi-country area, not just from your country):

- In one case, requesting large and ongoing sums of money (an annual, moderate four-digit figure in US\$), I committed to give less than 1% (one percent) per year (this project has also been under the direct, ongoing observation of church leaders).
- In another case, I gave 50% of the requested amount, even though well-placed church leaders urgently pressed me to give the full amount (a small four-digit figure in US\$).
- Elsewhere, I was recently approached to fund a project which is unusually well-aligned with activities I am already pursuing, and where I would be closely involved in the effort’s activity through completion (I would see the inner workings of the project, from the inside). The project would be sponsored by a well-established institution, but the cost, by early estimations, is some US\$60,00-100,000. Though I expect to give some financial support, my response to funding the project as a whole has already been “No”: ... I will be working out alternative solutions with them so the project can still move ahead, but so they are also bearing a significant part of the burden and taking major ownership as stakeholders.

Some of these scenarios are coming through or are under the direct oversight of highly placed church leaders – they are not “flukes” or the notions of idle opportunists. As noted, I do give on

occasion and do make note of or give at least some genuine consideration to requests that come my way.

Hopefully, it is apparent that this is an environment needing very sharp curbs, with exceedingly stiff and defining parameters, and an abundance of wisdom about how to say “No” without alienating people to whom I really do want to relate. The wisdom of Solomon is needed, with a “sword” which, when used, is immediately recognized by everyone present—by friend and by foe—as wisdom’s true word, and as something more than just my self-serving reaction (1 Kings 3:16-28). My pause in responding to you has partly been that I have personally needed to work out some of these issues in my thinking (this email has been drafted several times over several weeks – it is not that I haven’t remembered the request, though should have said as much – my apologies).

That said, my attention has turned, very narrowly, to needs that 1) are truly unusual (I do not remember the particulars of your dad’s illness, but believe it may have met this criteria), 2) have an extremely unlikely chance of otherwise being met, or 3) where there has been unusually clear or compelling guidance from Scripture and/or the Holy Spirit to give support (loans, as opposed to gifts, would need to meet additional criteria as well, and might only be kicking the ball laterally instead of toward the goal). Regardless, at the “end of the day,” I will likely need to individually decide, yea or nay, for each request that presents itself, and those decisions will need to stand as final (hopefully others will be able to accept and respect that).

As such, unless there are factors I am unaware of in your situation, I need to “pass” on being a financial underwriter, on being a guarantor of any financial obligations, or as the source of any loan. I am truly sorry, as I genuinely hope that your project will proceed, and sooner than later – I know it is a genuine and legitimate “heart hope” of yours – but I hope the need (and struggle) for me to come under strict disciplines is also sufficiently

apparent. I would be more than happy to look at any details of your plan, financial or otherwise, to see if there is something that, perchance, I have missed, or should you want my input.⁸⁰ If interested, my comment on what you have planned is always available – that can be freely shared!

Brother, it is a difficult thing to write a letter such as this, and life is rather sorely testing me in these matters, but this at least shares the pivotal thoughts. If it would be helpful to talk on the phone, we can always do it – just let me know.

God bless you and your family on life's way (... and your work!)

Brother Joe

... and “Paul’s” response to the above:

Joe,

I hope this message finds you well amidst your challenging endeavors. I appreciate your candid response and the time you’ve taken to carefully consider my request for financial support.

I completely understand the complexities of the financial landscape you are navigating, especially given the substantial requests you’ve been receiving. Your commitment to prioritizing people over finances is admirable, and I respect the disciplined approach you’ve chosen to adopt.

While I am disappointed that I won’t be able to secure funding assistance from you, I genuinely appreciate your honesty and transparency throughout this process. Your willingness to review any details of my plan is noted, and I may reach out if there are aspects that could benefit from your insights.

. . . Thank you for sharing your thoughts openly and for considering the particulars of my situation.

⁸⁰ The initial request had asked if he could lay out the details of his situation.

I would be open to [a] call if you so wish to talk about this in the future. Regardless of the outcome, I value our connection and appreciate the support you've offered in various ways over time.

Wishing you strength and wisdom as you navigate these challenges. May God continue to bless you.

“Paul”

Case #3

This instance involved an older, well-established church leader to whom, after carefully expressing the gist of the protocols, after giving a very clear affirmation of the project he was asking support for, and after giving him some time to think, I said I realized I was not being “helpful,” but that I needed to exercise significant caution (in other words, “No” to the loan request). He fully understood, and immediately put his hand on my arm and said that, given my concerns, I should not give, that he would pursue other means, and that this was right ... and that the matter was settled. It was an incredible release from him and clarity confirming the way forward – probably for both of us – and as far as I know, his need somehow found its way through a daunting maze of issues.

As may frequently be the case, the particulars of this situation were uniquely African (this “need” would not have happened in the West, or only muted in degree). As a distinctively African problem, a uniquely African solution was needed, not external, foreign intervention – that was correctly discerned and acted upon. As of this writing, it has been three months, and the relationship with this man and his family is without any “twinge” of reaction or hesitation – it is fully open and very active.

Wow – situations do not always turn out like these three case studies! There are other situations, though, which have been equally devastating, confrontational, or problematic as these have been constructive. Nonetheless, what truly gracious and mature responses the above are!! God is good, and I do hope things come together for each

one! The time taken to match the seriousness of any request is well invested, whether one supports the cause financially or not!

Additional Thoughts

These additional thoughts are either implicitly “baked in” above or are not covered. Many are delicate and should not be rashly applied or used without pervasive circumspection and restraint, and by taking only the smallest, safest steps possible until the path ahead is confirmed to be clear. Nonetheless, from my experiences and observations:

1. The above protocols and communications have attempted to be as transparent as possible, but without being unduly vulnerable. In opposition to each other, both transparency and vulnerability need to be in balance when interacting with people requesting money, but because of the difficulty in doing this, many Westerners seem to quickly scuttle transparency, only focusing on “fortifying their defenses” and thereby dismissing the need to also be vulnerable. May we have the grace to balance these two; to balance and walk in the light of both!
2. A factor not mentioned is that one gift tends to lead to another, with a receiver asking for repeated and ever-larger gifts. Eventually, a giver will need to say “No,” which is easier said sooner rather than later. With that, Africans culturally and too frequently do not know how to stay within limits, as this issue is rooted in the deeply imbued notion that Westerners have “endless wealth” (thereby legitimizing “endless requests”).
3. Two ways I have used to counter the “endless-wealth-of-white-skin” issue are:
 - I clearly state at the beginning of an encounter that I cannot solve (i.e. fund) all the issues a person might face, and
 - I clearly state that my name is not “Mr. ATM” (“Ato ATM” for Ethiopians) and that one cannot just come up

and push a button on me and endless cash will spew forth.

These are usually sufficient to at least begin developing a sense of realism that my involvements will have limits, they prepare a recipient for a “No,” and they let the recipient know that they are still the ones bearing final responsibility for their situation and funding issues. As a further concern, when there is the assumption that the Westerner has endless amounts of wealth, there is little left to stop opportunism or its compulsive requests.⁸¹

4. A tell-tale sign I am quite sensitive to (and when in the West as well), is to what extent a request comes with a genuine, all-encompassing sense of appeal and personal submission. Is there a real spirit of supplication, that the request is really to the Lord and I just happen to be present as a witness and as a possible agent of relief, or is a sense of demand and expectation projected, of pressure toward me individually to fulfill the request? Two have come to me with an unqualified, appropriately submitted, and “broken” spirit, and in each case, my giving has 1) from the outset been under the oversight of church leadership, and 2) been ongoing and repeated, to meet their needs.⁸²
5. If pending certain conditions being met, you have openness to contributing, it may be appropriate to provide a “wall” and a “door of access.” In one case a young man asked for money to go to the USA for higher education, and I firmly, twice, told him I would not entertain the matter unless it came through his pastor (whom I know) - that even then I might not contribute, but access (trivial social niceties excepted) was only through his pastor. The “wall” was that I would not consider the matter

⁸¹ Opportunism can be looking for a donor to be a “silver bullet” for a larger amount, taking care of a need in one “fell swoop” vs. asking many African compatriots for small amounts each, and whether loaned or gifted.

⁸² Biblical examples of a true spirit of supplication would be both ample, and rich in their purity and impact: the true mother of the living baby, before Solomon (I Kings 3:16-28); Ruth, before Boaz and how she came under Naomi’s direction (as well as Boaz’s— Ruth 2:8-9, 14-16; 3:1-4:12); Hannah, praying for a child (I Sam.1); and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego appealing the order to eat rich food (Daniel 1:5-16).

further, and the “door of access” (to my involvement) was through and only through the pastor. The wall was firm and the door was not unreasonable or insurmountable, but it required his accepting effective discipline and accountability. The young man waited several months before asking for money again (a common tactic, whether conscious or not, that I might perchance have forgotten my “wall” and “door,” and might now give directly to him), but he was met with a direct “Unfortunately, no, I cannot help”: the “wall” and “door” were both firm.

6. Putting a meaningful hurdle in front of a requester can be very helpful in sorting out who is in serious need (or not), and who is willing to expend the needed effort to legitimately get help vs. just looking for “quick money.” (The fellow’s response? “Ouch! That is painful for me!” He has been in touch several times since, over several months, and always with positive words, but money requests have stopped.) Sending people to their family and/or church (or mosque, etc.) authorities (usually the latter), and leaving the matter there, has been used various times. If followed through, the authorities can approach you, or you can follow through with the authorities if the requester comes again. In several cases, I have insisted that consideration will not be given unless the church authorities are present for the deliberations.
7. What about the beggar on the street? I used to give occasionally, but have become very tight (... with my sense of “guilt” tightening as well!).
 - Rarely do I give to men, especially if they appear able-bodied and regardless of how poor or their age – they need to become productive (an exception is if a priest prevails upon me, out of respect for his office). Preference is to older women who are truly past their prime (they may be widows – James 1:27, etc.), those

known to be orphans, and those who have truly profound, debilitating physical handicaps – whether I give, or not, these I give true second thoughts to.

- A young woman carrying an infant and asking for bread? My question to her is “Where is the father?”⁸³ It is my way of saying that he should be taking responsibility for the child (if he needs help, he can ask me, and we will look at what it will take for him to become a responsible provider for his family). At the risk of sounding harsh, I do not give, even if she says she doesn’t know where the father is: this question points her to where responsibility must start – with her and with the father. It also holds illicit sexual activity accountable, and it points to a constructive long-term solution and structure where help and stability can ultimately come from.
- The children who ask for money, but do not appear to be in economic distress (i.e. opportunism, which many have ingrained into them)? Again, “Go to your father for money and if he needs help, he can ask me.” If a father came to me (none have), I would direct him to his house of worship (church, mosque, temple). If the house of worship or civic leaders came to me, I would get two or three nationals with significant life experience to translate and provide participatory counsel, and we would sit down and talk about what might best serve the neighborhood or community. (My pockets aren’t endlessly deep, but there would be some possibilities – I would likely give something.)
- How many street beggars are “plants” by handlers awash in cash (beggars whose handicaps may be exploited by

⁸³ While I do not investigate a woman’s circumstances, such a situation could also be from rape, with both economic devastation and social ostracization being results. In such a situation compassionate aid might very well be encouraged.

their handlers to evoke more alms from unwitting passersby)? If with a national, they will likely sift these situations very quickly, but I very rarely acquiesce to such requests.

8. It is very difficult to understand requests when the requester is, in significant and quantifiable ways, living at a higher standard of living than what mine as a Westerner has ever been (i.e. they are living at even higher standards than I do when I am in the West, and no, this is not a “typo” – it has happened too blatantly, that I take serious pause).

- Africans need to understand that they frequently do have serious resources and can cover many of the things they want and that as such, the ratio of their wealth to that of their Western friends may not be as out of balance as they might suppose. Often, the perspectives of several generations ago, when the ratio was truly stark, have been embedded so deeply in the African psyche that they do not realize the shifts that have happened in the interim, and one may need to gently but firmly confront them about this.
- While there are valid, meritorious reasons why every society works the way it does, Africans would do well to consider that if they wish to indigenously and individually have financial wealth comparable to the West, they will need to come under the same long-term burden of fiscal disciplines which Westerners have used to accumulate that wealth: an industrious work ethic (resource generation), planning (anticipation and preparation for needs), and restraint (asset preservation and management). As obvious as these may be to those with Western inclinations, there seems to be insufficient or little awareness of them for those with solely African perspectives (at least as universally understood as in the

West). Though these fiscal disciplines seem to be the West's proprietary rights, they are not distinctive to the West: they are available for all to engage and adhere to. As these fiscal disciplines begin to embed, the dual assets of diligence and prudence will develop, striking mortal blows to the roots of both dependency and opportunism.

- It seems the unspoken, undergirding African paradigm is that when money is flush, one should spend (including for large ticket items), and if the cash they had is needed later, the items recently bought are sold, somewhat in a “revolving door” scenario. This appears to lack a circumspection or longevity of forethought, where needs and assets might be kept in equilibrium over the long term. Savings accounts should be seen as long-term assets in their own right, to be guarded and nurtured, and not as avenues to immediate spending outside comprehensive fiscal disciplines and planning.
- A subsequent concern is to know where Africans have helped their fellow Africans, or is that concern left untended, for the white man to fulfill? With increasing wealth and resources, many Africans should be carrying an increasing load, letting any greater Western resources for the most pronounced needs.⁸⁴

Lastly, some thoughts from Scripture.

It is well to remember that “the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and the poor, in the land” (Deut. 15:11⁸⁵; also see

⁸⁴ Personal economic development in eastern Africa has shown a radical change over the last 50 years – there are now significant segments of African society which have significant means, if not outright wealth (I’ve several times seen a Tesla down the street – wow!! and I have not seen any foreigners there!). To still assume that poverty or other needs are the white man’s responsibility to eradicate is not legitimate or realistic, regardless of how much Westerners should still share out of their abundance.

⁸⁵ All Biblical citations are from The Revised Standard Version. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1971. Any emphasis in quoted Scriptures is added.

other uses of “poor” in the Torah). And again, “Let brotherly love continue [to all mankind, such as this passage continues with and not just to the household of faith]. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body” (Heb. 13:1-3). Have I passed by angels unawares, who I should have given to? Barring God’s grace, I fear that I have – what is here is just the best I’ve found to guide my steps. May God have as much mercy on me as I think they need from Him, and may I ever have the heart of the publican, not the Pharisee (Lk. 18:9-14)!

True, Godly giving can be highly restricted, and a prospective donor should understand that s/he is not required to give to all but to accurately ascertain where God’s hand wants them to give. Prospective donors should be actively praying and “sifting” where God wants to provide through them. Receivers, on the other hand, must understand that if they do not receive, it may well not be a failure on the part of the donor. Christ himself made these paired insights very clear:

But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine [not just famine, but a great famine] over all the land; and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:25–28, referring to I Kings 17:8-24 and II Kings 5:1-19).

Note that the widow was likely a non-Israelite – Zarephath was in Phoenicia, outside Israelite territory – while Naaman was clearly outside the house of God, making Christ’s point even stronger and more selective (cf. Matt. 15:21-28, where even Jesus did not by default give to all who asked).

The issue for a donor is the utmost clarity in knowing God's direction, and an unusual sensitivity to and affirmation of any for whom help is denied. As with Solomon's judgment concerning the two women with the one living baby, may we too live in such a way that both friend and foe, and recipient and non-recipient alike, immediately recognize the rightness of what we have done. As James said so well: "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. . . . [For] the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:13, 17-18). May God grant us the grace to walk in such a spirit of wisdom, grace, understanding, and provision, that we may "prove [in our righteous responses to requests for funds, to friend and foe alike,] what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

The goal is not to extend endless charity, but to raise people whose health of body, soul, and spirit is ever-increasing, surpassing what they could attain on their own:

*"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?"*

*⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"*

*⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

*⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say,*

Here I am.

*“If you take away from the midst of you the yoke,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,*

*¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.*

*¹¹ And the LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your desire with good things,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,*

whose waters fail not [ed.: these are likely the results for those we help as well].

*¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

Isa. 58:6–12.

The larger perspective? “Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD’” (Jer. 9:23–24). May our wisdom, vision, and treasures go far beyond the realms of temporal finance, that whether rich or poor, whether abounding or abased, may others attest to the integrity of our witness, and give true glory to God for what we have done!

Suggested Reading

Maranz, David E. *African Friends and Money Matters*, Second Edition. Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2015.

Lupton, Robert D. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011.

Corbett, Steve and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2012. Note: I have not read this book, but it has come highly recommended.

About The Author

Joseph Z. Bach is the son of former missionaries to Somalia who served with the Somalia Mennonite Mission from 1961 to 1974. He currently resides and travels within the Horn of Africa, where he is involved in various projects. These include supporting Somali Christians, providing training on how to use the Logos Bible study software, and teaching the Bible. In addition, Joseph holds a Master's Degree in Polemics and Apologetics related to Islam while also participating in various charitable activities. He welcomes your comments and can be reached at gkr745@gmail.com.

CHAPTER 8

SHARING WITH MUSLIMS

Scott Johnson

“God is enough for guidance.”⁸⁶

A Somali Proverb

A friend once told me that sharing the good news is like a starving person showing another starving person where to find food.⁸⁷ Both understand what it is to be desperate and in need of life. One has simply received food earlier and now has the opportunity to help others in the same situation. None of us has earned our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor did we gain illumination through our efforts (Ephesians 1:15-18). We are not entitled. All people experience equal desperation to hear the good news and receive salvation. If we hear and believe before someone else, it simply means we must do our part to ensure others hear it as well. Each moment we remain on earth presents an opportunity to share the truth of the Word that offers life.

When writing a chapter about evangelizing Muslims, one should remember their audience. Although the primary reader may be from the Christian faith, the audience for the good news is Muslim. The piece should be worded so that when Muslims read it, they feel encouraged by the love and respect conveyed in the writing. Even if a Muslim person does not agree with all the points of the chapter, they should still perceive the love in the message. A leading atheist once wrote that if

⁸⁶ In Somali, *Rabbi talo ku filan*.

⁸⁷ Editor's note: The original quote is, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food." The quote comes from D.T. Niles, a Sri Lankan pastor and missionary (1908–1970). The quote is from the book "That They May Have Life" (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 96.

Christians truly loved her, they would do everything possible to convince her that God is real. They should be so consumed by their belief that a person who does not know God through Jesus will be separated from Him that they would do all they can to help them understand God through Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.” If a Christian believes this to be true, they should always seek to share with everyone that Jesus is the way respectfully.

- Reaching Muslims: prayer, care, prepare, share
- Prayer—See as God sees: World, All People, Muslims as people, Relationships and Conversations

World: All People

We want to see the world as God sees and care for what He cares about. God loves all people and offers a relationship to anyone who will believe. In John 3:16, we are told that God so loves the world that He gave His one and only son that whoever might believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God’s heart is for everyone in the world. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations. In the Greek in which the New Testament is written, “all nations” is “ta ethnae” which means all ethnicities or all people groups. God wants us to share the gospel of Christ with the world. Currently, 1 in 4 people globally identifies as Muslim. To effectively reach our world, we must learn how to connect with Muslims.

Muslims As People

How do we reach Muslim people with the gospel? The answer is simple. Muslims are people. As we seek to share with others, we must start with prayer because it is God’s power that transforms lives. Additionally, we need to be prepared and then actively share the gospel verbally. We must be so engaged with God’s Word and connected to Him that we see all people as individuals in need of the gospel. Just as someone was willing to share with us to help us know God, we must tell others so they can

also know Him. Romans 10:13-15 asks us how someone can hear without someone sharing with them. We must verbally proclaim the gospel.

The media has done a disservice by portraying Muslims as terrorists. Movies and the news create an untrue image that all Muslims are terrorists. These portrayals have led us to fear and stereotype when we see someone wearing Muslim clothing at a grocery store or in the mall. Wrongly, a woman's outfit designed to cover herself and honor God or a man's outfit and hat for prayer evoke images of terrorism in our minds. Instead, such encounters should prompt us to see people who are trying to honor God and would be blessed to hear about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

While there are some radical Muslims in the world, the vast majority of us will never encounter a terrorist. My family has been working and living in Muslim Africa for over 15 years and has yet to meet one. We have resided in Muslim towns surrounded by the Muslim community, and I can assure you that most Muslims are striving to honor God and their families. We have spent many weeks in villages deep within Muslim Africa and repeatedly meet people who are trying to care for their families and honor God. All they have ever known is Islam because no one has shared anything different with them. All their friends, family, and everyone they have ever known have followed Islam.

Interestingly enough, while many Westerners associate Islam with terrorism, people in the East see the West as a Godless place. Hollywood movies, TV shows, and music videos often mention God or show crosses, while simultaneously glorifying illicit sex, drugs, and violence. News reports in the East discuss Western militaries fighting in Muslim countries like Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, often highlighting the killing of innocent Muslims. Images displayed include Muslim civilians who are accidental casualties of war, and reports criticize Western governments for not being willing to help refugees fleeing from war zones.

Such media could easily incite fear and hatred. What a great opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ and to love our neighbors. The Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22 instructs us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. One of the most impactful ways to love our neighbors is by sharing His good news of salvation in Christ. This is best accomplished through relationships when a person has earned the right to share. Sharing can occur in conversation as two people show care and connect with one another. The enemy, Satan, tries to divide cultures and keep people apart. However, let us focus on engaging the lost, as Jesus sought to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10).

Pray For Relationships And Conversations

We need to pray and ask God to work in the hearts of Muslims. Psalm 2:8 tells us to ask, and He will make the nations our inheritance and the ends of the earth our possession. Pray for God to give you opportunities for relationships and conversations with Muslims. Then, be attentive to those opportunities that God will provide. As you go about your day, look for chances to talk at the store, mall, park, school, worksite, and wherever you go. Pray during those interactions that God will enable you to verbally share the full gospel.

Care

In John 10:10, Jesus says, “I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.” The word “full” means abundant and overflowing. As a person stays connected to Christ through prayer, Jesus can overflow from that person (John 15:1-11). Reflecting Christ’s heart, the person cares for all people and the lost (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 19:10). They love their neighbor as themselves and care enough to share the good news with others the way someone shared it with them (Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 10:13-15).

Types Of Muslims

When aiming to share with someone of a Muslim background, it is helpful to learn more about them to better understand how to reach them with the gospel. When considering Muslim individuals, each person can often be categorized into one of five groups that can guide us in our gospel conversations.

1. **Thinker**—This group includes most of the Muslims we meet. They aim to honor God and are open to discussing Him. They might be interested in reading literature, watching a film, or having a conversation about a relationship with God through Christ.
2. **Spiritual**—Some Muslims come from a very spiritual background where they have prayed to many spirits for help. They have prayed in villages for rain so their families and livestock can have water. They have worn bracelet or necklace charms and performed ceremonies to spirits to receive healing. These people would benefit from learning about the Spirit of God, His power, and the many miracles of Christ.
3. **Hurt**—Their religion and its followers have caused pain for some Muslims. Perhaps they have been beaten for questioning the Qur'an or had a loved one expelled from their family for choosing a different faith. Often, women have been harmed by Muslims who say there will be more women in hell than men because "women are ungrateful to their husbands."⁸⁸ These hurting people would find comfort in hearing about the love and compassion of Christ, as well as the respect with which Jesus treated women.
4. **Non-religious**—People of Muslim background who are born Muslim families and follow Muslim culture but do not seek to participate in the religion. They may benefit from hearing about our God, who desires a close personal relationship with us. He

⁸⁸ Belief. Sunnah. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:29>, accessed 02 July 2025.

is not like Islam describes—a distant God who is an unapproachable judge.

5. Fundamentalist—This Muslim often looks for arguments or debates. They aim to publicly discredit your faith, intimidate, and humiliate you. We should avoid engaging in such altercations and instead encourage these individuals to have personal conversations without conflict.

Although it helps to understand where someone is coming from when discussing the gospel, we don't need to grasp everything they believe. When searching for counterfeit currency, the FBI in America knows money so well that they don't need to focus on counterfeit bills. Likewise, we need to know God's truth and get to know Him. By spending time building that relationship, we'll recognize a counterfeit when it appears. We don't have to study every faith in detail; just enough about Islam to bridge to the gospel truth.

Know The 5 Pillars Of Islam

1. Shahada: Faith in one God
"There is no true god but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet"
2. Salat: Pray 5 times a day facing Mecca
3. Zakat: Charity
4. Sawm: Fasting Ramadan
5. Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca once if you can afford it

The Muslim religion can be summarized by what is known as the five pillars of Islam. A Muslim believes the Shahada, which states that "there is no true god but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet." Both Muslims and Christians believe in one God. The Arabic word for God is Allah. Believers should help Muslims understand the love of Allah. Just as Bible translators used the pagan word "god" to describe "God,"⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Editor's note: The word "god" originates from the Old English "god" and may be connected to the Proto-Indo-European root gheu(e)-, meaning "to call" or "to invoke," possibly in relation to sacrificial libations.

Christians should consider using the word Allah when talking about the God of love who desires a relationship with His creation.

Muslims pray five times a day in what is known as the Salat. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Christians are told to pray continually. Talking about prayer can serve as a bridge to sharing the gospel. Muslim prayers ask God for mercy and forgiveness. Christians should share with Muslims the importance of prayer. When a Christian closes their eyes to pray silently, a Muslim often thinks the Christian is just nodding off or falling asleep. Agree with Muslims on the importance of prayer, as talking with God leads to a closer relationship with Him.

The Zakat encourages charity in helping the poor. Christians also believe in assisting those in need. Giving to others is a way to show love. Romans 5:8 tells us that God showed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners. This verse is a good bridge to the gospel when talking about helping others in need.

Muslims observe fasting during Ramadan to commemorate Muhammad's receipt of the Qur'an.⁹⁰ During the fast, Muslims refrain from eating and drinking during daylight hours to get closer to God. Christians also fast to draw nearer to God. Discussing fasting can easily lead to sharing about a relationship with God through Christ.

The fifth pillar of Islam is to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca at least once in a lifetime if possible. Although Christians are not required to undertake a pilgrimage, they can relate to the significance of visiting the holy land as described in the Bible. Visiting Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee, or Bethlehem can hold special meaning for believers, just as Muslims value visiting Mecca. When discussing the importance of holy sites, Bible stories, including those from the gospels, can be shared.

⁹⁰ Editor's note: Muslims believe the Qur'an was revealed on the "Night of Decree" (Laylat al-Qadr), which takes place during the last ten nights of Ramadan. They also believe that although the entire Qur'an was revealed to the lowest heaven during Ramadan, it was then revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in stages over 23 years.

Practice Your Testimony And Gospel Sharing

As part of your preparation, practice your testimony and gospel presentation. Work with fellow believers to craft your story and how you share the gospel. Follow the example of Acts 26, where Paul shares his life before knowing Christ, how he came to know Jesus, and what Christ has done in his life since following Him. Be sure to include Bible verses because it is God's Word that can change lives. Isaiah 55:11 reminds us that God's Word will achieve its purpose and will not return empty. Remember to challenge the listener to understand that the gospel invites a personal response. As you share with others, reflect on what works and what doesn't in your conversations. Repeat successful techniques and teach fellow believers what is effective as well.

Share The Full Gospel And Be Culturally Sensitive

The goal in gospel conversations is to share the good news of a relationship with God through Christ. A Christian's role is to share God's truth and allow the Holy Spirit to work on people's hearts. Just as we would not want someone to attack our faith or belittle our beliefs, we should not look to win arguments or disrespect others concerning religion. We should have loving conversations and share the love of God with others. We are looking for people of peace whom God is working on their hearts. He is the one who draws people to Him. They cannot be argued into faith.

Full Gospel And Invitation

We aim to share the whole gospel and invite people into a relationship with Christ (Romans 15:19). Merely stating that God is good or that God is the most important is not enough. A Muslim can agree with that and still be on a path to hell. Believers need to share the complete story: Jesus came, lived a perfect life, and died for our sins. He paid the penalty by dying for us and defeated death through His resurrection. Jesus gave His life so that we can have a relationship with God. John 14:6 states there is no other way to God except through Christ.

Look for ways to connect to the gospel. For example, Jesus Christ is mentioned in Surah Al Imran in the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an, Jesus is a prophet, perfect, born of a virgin, and performs miracles. He came from heaven, returned to heaven, and will come again to judge.

Muslim tradition suggests that Jesus did not die but that His body was switched on the cross. The core of the gospel is the crucifixion—the fact that Jesus died to pay for our sins, was raised from the dead, and is alive today. A Muslim might agree that Jesus is alive but argue He never died. They might also say Muhammad is the final prophet, and his teachings are the ultimate authority when needed. They may claim that the Bible has been corrupted and that only the Qur'an remains in its original, pure form—that all other translations have been destroyed, leaving only the original Arabic Qur'an.

However, the Qur'an states that Muslims can read the Tawrat of Moses, Zabur of David, Injil of Jesus, and the Qur'an of Muhammad. While Muslims believe the Qur'an is the last word of God, they should be willing to consider the writings of Moses, David, and Jesus. This creates an excellent opportunity to discuss God and Christ.

Seek chances to talk with Muslims about God. When they ask about your faith, be prepared to respond (1 Peter 3:15). They may inquire if you are a Muslim or a Christian. Avoid answering with a simple “yes” or “no”. Instead, guide the conversation by sharing the full gospel and inviting them to follow Christ. Jesus often did not give direct answers but instead focused on what He wanted people to hear. In John 18, when asked if He was the King of the Jews, Jesus responded by talking about the Kingdom of God.

Do Not Ask, Just Share

A mentor and friend once shared a story about having breakfast at an Asian restaurant. When the waiter asked, “One egg or two?” he replied, “One.” His wife questioned why he ordered just one, noting that he was often too cheap to pay for an extra egg with his breakfast. He explained

that the waiter didn't ask if he wanted an egg but asked if he wanted one or two, and since he didn't want to pay for two, he said, "I want one."

The same idea applies to asking people if it is okay for us to share the gospel. If you ask if you can share, the listener has the chance to say no and miss out on hearing the greatest news they may ever hear. But if we just share with them (just bring them an egg), their lives could be changed forever.

Be Culturally Sensitive

When sharing, it is helpful to understand the culture of the people you want to connect with. For example, in Muslim culture, children are considered youth until they marry and have their own homes. Therefore, they remain under their parents' responsibility until as late as age 30. Before talking to or taking any youth anywhere, take time to get to know their parents and show them respect.

This is a valuable lesson when engaging with parents from any culture. Take the time to sit with the parents and accept (eat/drink) what they offer you, as mentioned in Luke 10. Build a relationship with the parent and be honest about your faith and character. Give them your phone number and let them know to call you if they have any concerns. Explain that you want to honor them and that you would never take their children anywhere without their permission. Tell them to call you if their children have discipline issues or face situations in school, and assure them that you will support what is best for the child. This approach can go a long way in earning the trust of the family and sharing Christ with the children.

Understanding cultural norms helps us avoid becoming stumbling blocks to the gospel. For example, Muslim women are to be respected in terms of wanting to be covered and not touched by a man other than their husband. That may mean that a Muslim woman may not feel comfortable shaking a man's hand, and that is okay. It also means that women who want to share with a Muslim woman might be more effective if they dress in a way that aligns with Muslim culture. This does

not mean that a Christian woman must necessarily fully cover but that she could be more effective in communicating while wearing non-form-fitting or modest clothes. For example, a long-sleeved, loose-fitting shirt (covering the shoulders, arms, and neckline) and a dress or long ankle-length skirt are more appropriate than a tank top and shorts.

Eating a meal together is always a wonderful way to build relationships, fellowship, and open up gospel conversations. Therefore, understanding dietary restrictions can be very helpful. For example, Muslims consider alcohol forbidden or unlawful (haram). Also, some foods are halal (lawful) and permissible to eat. This concept is similar to the Jewish practice of kosher foods. Halal meats are lawful because of how the animals are slaughtered and prepared. A Muslim would appreciate your awareness of their preference for halal foods. They would not feel comfortable if they were at a home or restaurant serving alcohol, as this is considered unlawful. Although there may be freedoms in Christ to drink alcohol responsibly, sharing the gospel could be hindered if it causes discomfort. 2 Corinthians 6:3 reminds us to “put no stumbling block in anyone’s path so that our ministry will not be discredited.”

Have expectant faith that when you share the full gospel with someone and invite them to follow Christ, some will say yes. Have a plan to further train and encourage their growth. A Muslim may not feel comfortable going to a church building due to fear of persecution from their community. Avoid discussing the history of the Crusades and cultural clashes between Islam and Christianity. Encourage new believers to read the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives. House churches are often better for new believers, providing a safe space to learn and grow without the pressures of walking into a church building, being paraded on stage, or appearing on internet pages.

Muslim families form the core of their community. In many countries, Muslims rely on their family for food, shelter, clothing, relationships, and support. The community acts as a safety net for needs like weddings, health emergencies, accidents, or schooling. When a

Muslim comes to faith, they may rightly worry about losing that community and support if their family threatens to disown them because of their new belief. Therefore, we should support new believers as they grow and encourage them to share their own stories. Allow them to find trusted communities and avoid risking their safety by sharing their life stories before they are ready. Let them share when they feel comfortable and with whom they trust. Persecution is a reality for Muslims who come to faith.

Train believers from Muslim backgrounds on how to share the gospel and mentor others. When a Muslim comes to faith, we can use a Bible story training process. We employ a set of seven stories to build a foundation for the believer to grow, reach others, and start new house churches.

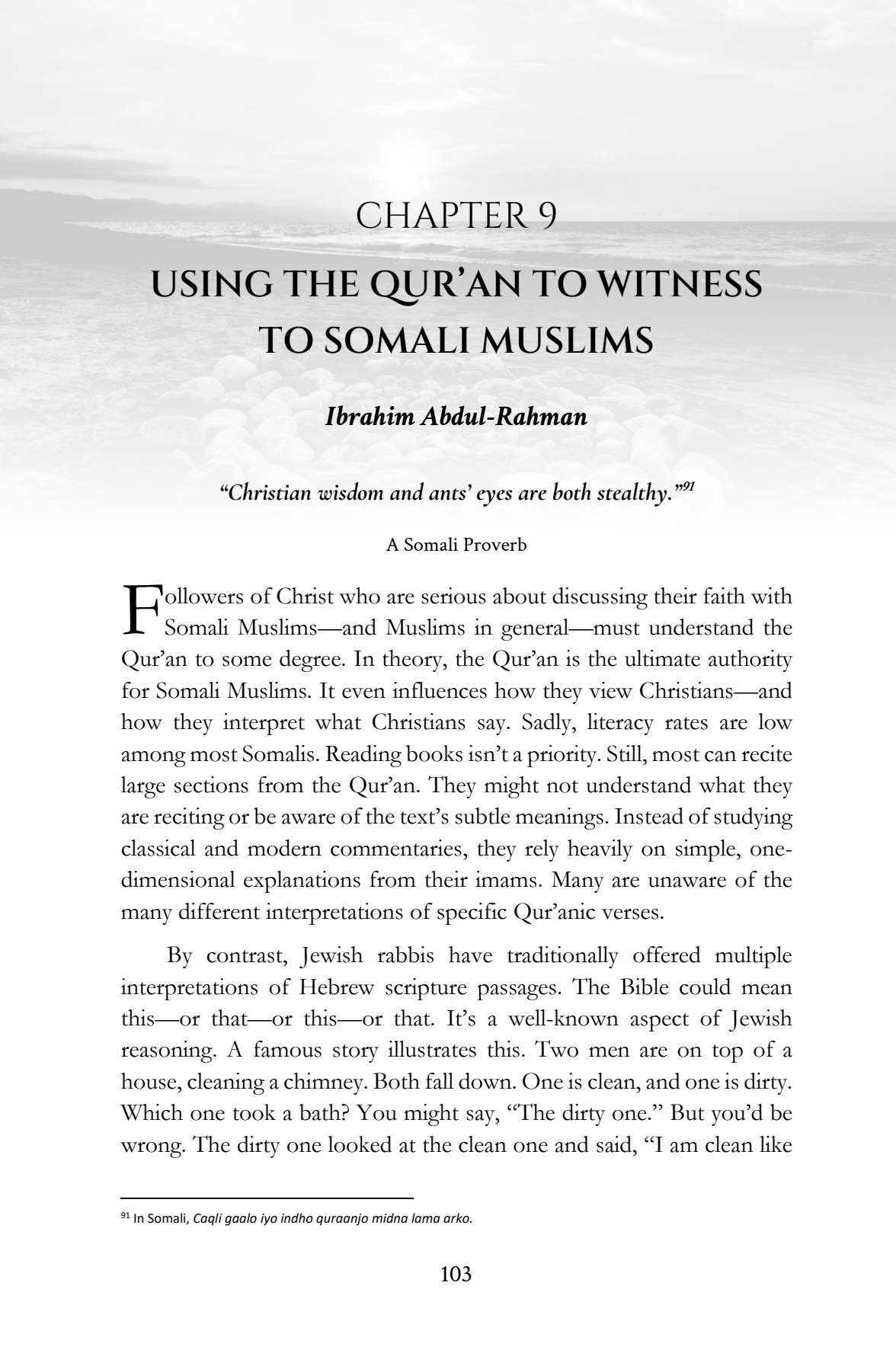
The story set is easy to remember using the illustration of a baby who is born, breathes, eats, knows their family, knows their father, goes to work, and starts a new family. This corresponds with Bible stories and lessons. “A baby is born” symbolizes becoming a new creation in Christ, understanding the gospel, and sharing it. “The baby breathes” highlights our need for continuous prayer. “The baby eats” emphasizes the importance of staying in God’s Word. “Knowing their family” refers to the church body, as described in Acts 2, which meets in homes. This includes being identified through baptism and participating in communion. “Knowing their father” pertains to understanding God’s character. He is a loving, providing, protecting Father who also disciplines us to make us more like Him. “Going to work” signifies our spiritual ministry of sharing and training others. “Starting a new family” means establishing new churches or house groups to reach the world for Christ.

As fellow humans created for a relationship with God, we have a responsibility to reach Muslims for Christ. We are God’s image bearers (Genesis 1:27) and should reflect His love to all peoples around the world. Muslims are people just like us and deserve to be treated with love and compassion. We must love all our neighbors and encourage

them toward a relationship with God. Through this love and verbal proclamation of the gospel, they may come to Christ and influence the world for Him.

About The Author

Scott Johnson has been working with Muslim communities since 2001 in various countries. Following the model set by Jesus in John 1:14, Scott recognizes the importance of living among the people he serves. While he is grateful for the undergraduate and master's degrees he has earned, his intentional involvement in underserved and neglected communities has provided him with invaluable practical experience, knowledge, and lasting benefits. The author can be reached at: info@somalibiblesociety.org.



CHAPTER 9

USING THE QUR'AN TO WITNESS TO SOMALI MUSLIMS

Ibrahim Abdul-Rahman

“Christian wisdom and ants’ eyes are both stealthy.”⁹¹

A Somali Proverb

Followers of Christ who are serious about discussing their faith with Somali Muslims—and Muslims in general—must understand the Qur’an to some degree. In theory, the Qur’an is the ultimate authority for Somali Muslims. It even influences how they view Christians—and how they interpret what Christians say. Sadly, literacy rates are low among most Somalis. Reading books isn’t a priority. Still, most can recite large sections from the Qur’an. They might not understand what they are reciting or be aware of the text’s subtle meanings. Instead of studying classical and modern commentaries, they rely heavily on simple, one-dimensional explanations from their imams. Many are unaware of the many different interpretations of specific Qur’anic verses.

By contrast, Jewish rabbis have traditionally offered multiple interpretations of Hebrew scripture passages. The Bible could mean this—or that—or this—or that. It’s a well-known aspect of Jewish reasoning. A famous story illustrates this. Two men are on top of a house, cleaning a chimney. Both fall down. One is clean, and one is dirty. Which one took a bath? You might say, “The dirty one.” But you’d be wrong. The dirty one looked at the clean one and said, “I am clean like

⁹¹ In Somali, *Caqli gaalo iyo indho quraanjo midna lama arko*.

him.” The clean one examined the dirty one and said, “I am dirty like him,” and then went home and took a bath. Let’s ask the question again. Two men are on a house roof cleaning a chimney. Both fall down. One is clean, one is dirty. Which one took a bath? You might think you know and say, “The clean one.” But you’re wrong. The dirty one saw he was dirty and took a bath. Why would a clean man go home and take a bath? Now, let’s try again. Two men are on a house roof cleaning a chimney. Both fall down. One is clean, one is dirty. Which one took a bath? You might give up and say, “I do not know.” But the answer is simple. Two men cannot fall down a chimney and one gets dirty while the other stays clean. When examining the Bible, Jewish scholars have often used this kind of reasoning to consider multiple interpretations.

Top Muslim scholars also offer multiple interpretations of verses in the Qur’an. However, when you talk to a Somali friend about a specific verse, they might not be aware of this variety. Like many Christians, they often prefer simple explanations, and their understanding of a verse may reflect that. If the local imam or teacher provides only one interpretation, that might be the only one your friend knows. It’s helpful to know what both classical and modern interpreters have said so you can show your Muslim friend that more than one interpretation exists—especially regarding the death of Jesus. Kenneth Cragg reminds us, “Meanings must not be found which defy or dismiss consensus,” but what if there is no real Muslim consensus, especially about the death of Jesus Christ?⁹²

Of course, you need to be careful not to do injustice to the actual verses of the Qur’an—just to prove your point. Have you ever heard Muslims open the Bible and try to explain what it says? It is uncomfortable to listen because you will probably say, “No. You are interpreting it incorrectly.” Muslims often feel the same way when Christians talk to them using the Qur’an.

⁹² ‘Ijma is the Islamic term for consensus on matters within a madhhab, a school of Muslim jurisprudence. There may be ‘ijma concerning legal matters, and even on some doctrinal matters, but no ‘ijma is required for interpretation of non-legal verses of the Qur’an, including verses concerning Jesus.

There are three main approaches Christians workers among Muslims take toward the Qur'an. The first step is to read the Qur'an and attempt to understand certain parts of it—especially those related to Christ and the Bible—and then retain that information, but never use the Qur'an when discussing it with Muslims. These Christians often feel that using the Qur'an gives it too much authority, so they avoid using it in witness altogether.

The second approach is to try to show that the Qur'an is a flawed book. These Christians attack the Qur'an by pointing out apparent contradictions and discrepancies, and they may even claim that the text of the Qur'an has been corrupted. The problem with this approach is that Muslims have learned to use the same techniques against the Bible. This often results in a stalemate, with Christians affirming the Bible and rejecting the Qur'an, and Muslims affirming the Qur'an and rejecting the Bible, leading to hurt feelings that fester on all sides.

The third approach is to respectfully use the Qur'an as a bridge to help Muslims understand the gospel. This chapter is mainly written for those who take this third approach.

On Using What Others Consider To Be Revelation

We find several explicit references in Paul's writings to non-biblical sources. Perhaps the most obvious is when Paul writes to Titus: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." (Titus 1:12).⁹³ This was not just a common proverb. Paul affirmed that this was spoken by "a prophet of their own." The prophet's name was Epimenides. Paul does not label Epimenides as a true or false prophet, but he uses this line from a well-known poem by Epimenides to convey the truth. In fact, Paul references the poem a second time in Acts 17:28 when he speaks to the philosophers of Athens, saying, "In him, we live and move and have our being." Paul also quotes the poet Aratus in the same verse in Acts, stating, "For we are indeed his offspring." When Paul appears to quote Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company ruins good

⁹³ All quotations from the Bible are taken from the English Standard Version. Crossway, 2016.

morals,” he may have been quoting a popular maxim of that era, but my point is that Paul was willing to draw from various non-biblical pagan sources to communicate spiritual truth. He was even willing to quote a pagan prophet and say, “This testimony is true.”

Another non-biblical quote is from the book of Jude, verses 14-15: “It was about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’” This is a direct quote from 1 Enoch 1:9, a Jewish book written between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

Scholars have identified references to non-biblical material in the New Testament. The point I am making here is that respectful, judicious use of non-biblical material in witness has been practiced since the early days of proclaiming the gospel. The earliest church fathers were quite familiar with the writings of others. Sometimes they quoted philosophical and religious writings by non-Christians favorably, sometimes unfavorably, but they did not shy away from using material outside of the New Testament. Therefore, I do not believe it is wrong to use the Qur'an when discussing the gospel with Muslims in a respectful manner.

Respect For Your Bible And The Qur'an

Sunni Muslims believe the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God (Shi'Umm al-Kitab) in heaven. They say it was revealed to Muhammad in stages over 23 years, from A.D. 610 to 632. They do not claim the Qur'an is what Muhammad said; instead, they believe these are the very words of God.⁹⁴ Even when they say the Qur'an is uncreated, they also

⁹⁴ I am here translating Allah as God. Some Muslims say that Allah comes from the Arabic definite article Al meaning “the” and lah meaning “God.” So Allah means “the God” (the one, the only God). Other Muslims say Allah is the name of essence and cannot be translated. The great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides affirmed that Muslims and Jews worship the same God. Even though they would differ on many other issues, common belief in God continues to be the generally accepted Jewish and Muslim position today. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael and all the prophets. Muslims also believe he is the God who caused Jesus to be born of the virgin Mary. Arabic-speaking Christians call God “Allah.” Some Christians

discuss the “circumstances of the revelation.” These are the stories that explain why the revelation was given at a specific time. These events help clarify the meaning Muslims associate with the passage. They also believe the Torah (Taurat), Psalms (Zabur), and Gospel (Injil).

Muslims believe that the word of God should be treated reverently. They store the Qur’an on a high shelf and sometimes tie a copy in a bag and hang it from a nail on the wall. They do not place it on the floor, sit on it, or put other items on top of it. They ensure their hands are clean when handling it. If they see you handling the Qur’an, they will be offended if you do not show proper respect.

How do you handle the Bible? Do you put it on the floor? Or put it in a back pocket? Or sit on it? Are your hands dirty? Muslims will notice the care you give to your Bible, and that helps them decide how much respect you have for your own sacred scriptures.

If you use the Qur’an at all, it is also important to treat the content of the Qur’an with respect. Try to come within an understanding distance. You might think the Qur’an clearly states one thing, but Muslims may interpret the passage quite differently from what you consider the obvious meaning.

Muslim Commentary (Tafsir)

The word tafsir comes from fassara, which means “to expound” or “to explain.” There are two main types of tafsir (interpretation) of the Qur’an. All Muslims accept the first type. It is called tafsir bi-al-ma’tsur or tafsir bil riwaya. This is tafsir using traditional sources. These include using the Qur’an to interpret the Qur’an, relevant hadiths (sayings attributed to Muhammad), and explanations already provided by the earliest companions of Muhammad and their successors, as well as grammar and syntax. The second type is tafsir bil ray. Well-trained scholars employ ijihad (independent reasoning) to explore the deeper

believe Muslims worship a different God while other Christians say they and Muslims worship the same God. Muslims affirm that they and Christians worship the same God (Surah 29:46), but they worry that Christians have tried to make Jesus into a second god.

meaning of a text. In addition to the tools used in the first type of tafsir, the second type may also include logic to resolve apparent contradictions, linguistic studies, consideration of whether a later verse abrogates an earlier one, examination of the circumstances surrounding the revelation, and making applications to current situations.⁹⁵

Many Muslims, especially those who are quite conservative, reject the second type of tafsir. Others accept the second type based on Surah 38:29, which says, “A blessed book we have sent down upon thee, that they may contemplate His signs and those possessed of intellect may reflect.” In your discussions with Muslims about the Qur'an, it's best to support your comments mainly with interpretations by authorities of the first type. You can raise issues or ask questions that aren't addressed by first type interpretations, but avoid speaking as an authority with your interpretations unless you have mastered Qur'anic sciences and can defend your position thoroughly. Whenever you use the Qur'an in discussions, take the verses seriously; don't play mental games with the text.

The Qur'an In Arabic

The word Qur'an means “reading” or “recitation.” The name originates from the first word of what most scholars consider to be the initial revelation: Surah 96:1-5. The Qur'an is known by various names in Arabic, including al-Qur'an al-Karim (the Noble Qur'an), al-Qur'an al-Majid (the Glorious Qur'an), al-Kitab (the Book), al-Furqan (the Criterion), and al-Huda (the Guide).⁹⁶

The Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language around 1400 years ago. It is still read and recited in that language today. Although it has been translated into many languages, these are only considered translations of the meaning of the Qur'an, not the Qur'an itself.

⁹⁵ According to Surah 3:7, some verses of the Qur'an are muhkam and some are mutashabih. Muhkam verses are clear, decisive, unambiguous. Mutashabih verses may be allegorical, may have multiple levels of meaning, or the interpretation is unknowable. Muslim scholars disagree as to which verses are muhkam and which are mutashabih. For a fuller explanation of these two words, go to The Study Qur'an's comments on Surah 3:7. (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al, The Study Qur'an. (N.Y., HarperCollins, 2015).

⁹⁶ Nasr, The Study Qur'an, xxiii.

Qur'anic Arabic is an extremely complex language, and it takes years to understand it well. Most Christians will probably never fully grasp it, even if they want to discuss their faith with Muslim friends. Therefore, they have to rely on translations. The most widely used English translation is *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* by Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali. Yusuf 'Ali has included commentary and essays to provide his Muslim perspective. Keep in mind that the commentary notes are not part of the Qur'an, and they reflect one man's view that not all Muslims share. The King Fahd Publishing House in Saudi Arabia has revised and reprinted it.⁹⁷

Maybe the best English translation is *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and a team of Islamic scholars. Although Seyyed Hossein Nasr is Shi'a, the team offers a balanced view that includes both Sunni and Shi'a perspectives. They also include information about Sufi interpretations, highlighting the mystical side of Islam. The commentary is detailed for a single-volume work, with helpful essays and maps. At 1,998 pages, it's a sizable book, so it might not be easy to carry everywhere, but it's a must-have for your library. All quotes from the Qur'an in this chapter come from *The Study Qur'an*.

When using the Qur'an to discuss key topics, such as whether Jesus died on the cross, the Arabic language becomes crucial to understanding. What if you don't know Arabic—or only know a little? You can rely on experts who know Arabic better than you—famous Muslim scholars from the classical era, modern commentators, and others. We will examine such examples later in this study.

⁹⁷ For example, in Surah 2:138, Yusuf 'Ali says "The baptism of God," but the King Fahd Publishing house revision says, "The dye of God." The original Yusuf 'Ali comment on that verse talked about early Christian baptism, but the revision removes that comment. See *The Holy Qur'an, English translation of the meaning and Commentary*. (Revised & Edited by The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance. The Custodian of The Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Complex, for the printing of the Holy Qur'an, n.d.). I prefer to use *The Study Quran*, but the one printed in Saudi Arabia may carry more weight with some Muslims.

The Qur'an Interprets The Qur'an

You have been taught to examine Bible passages in their context. When you look at a text, you know to consider what was written before and after it. You want to understand how this Bible passage relates to the surrounding texts and the entire book. This is only partly true when looking at the Qur'an. In a specific surah, verses may come from Mecca and Medina, and they might have little or nothing to do with the verses before or after. However, it's still helpful to see if there is a connection. Sometimes, there is one.

The meaning of an Arabic word is often explored in relation to its usage in other surahs and verses. An Arabic word, like words in different languages, generally has multiple shades of meaning. Even if you can't read Arabic, reading commentary translations will give you insight into how Muslims interpret a particular word in a specific verse.

Often, you will notice an identical or similar phrase repeated in multiple places. Then, you can compare the two. The Qur'an becomes its own first interpreter. Ibn Kathir made this clear when he said that one was "to interpret the Qur'an by the Qur'an."⁹⁸

Muslims understand that some parts of the Qur'an have been abrogated (naskh; canceled) and replaced by other parts. Muslims were hesitant to remove the abrogated verses from the Qur'an.⁹⁹

Truth cannot be abrogated. Nor can history. But legal commands can be. For example, drinking wine was not initially prohibited, but it was later banned. (Surahs 16:67; 2:219; 4:43; 5:90). The direction of prayer was originally toward Jerusalem, but then it was changed to Mecca. (See Surah 2:143-144). Abrogation is a complex subject.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir" in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 56.

⁹⁹ "Narrated Ibn Az-Zubair: I said to 'Uthman bin 'Affan (while he was collecting the Qur'an) regarding the verse: 'Those of you who die and leave wives...' (2:240) 'This verse was abrogated by another verse. So why should you write it? (or leave it in the Qur'an)?' Uthman said, 'O son of my brother! I will not shift anything of it from its place.'" See Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *Sahih Bukhari*, (Islamic University; Al-Medina Al-Munawwara, n.d., vol. 6, "The book of Commentary," hadith 53, 40-41, n.d.).

¹⁰⁰ The "Sword Verse" to "slay the idolaters" in Surah 9:5 is said to have abrogated at least 124 other verses in the Qur'an, but it is abrogated by the concluding phrase, "But if they repent..." See David S. Powers, "The Exegetical

Muslims do not universally agree on which verses supersede others. However, when it comes to doctrine, there can be no abrogation.

Applying This To The Question Of The Crucifixion Of Jesus

I believe it is crucial to begin with a warning from Kenneth Cragg to Christians. He wrote, “It is implicit throughout that we must affirm the fact of the Cross always in the same spirit in which Jesus Himself suffered it. We cannot champion the cross by attitudes which, had Christ taken them, there would be no Cross to proclaim. If we say, ‘In this sign conquer,’ it must only be the victory of meekness.”¹⁰¹ So, in love and humility—knowing that no Christian or Muslim fully understands everything about the Cross—let us examine what the Qur’an actually says.

There are three significant references to the death of Jesus in the Qur’an. Let’s start with Surah 19:30-33. According to the Qur’an, Jesus said these words when he was still a child: “Truly I am a servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has made me blessed wherever I may be and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving as long as I live, and has made me dutiful toward my mother. And he has not made me domineering, wretched. Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive!” Because Jesus speaks of his death in verse 33, Muslims must either affirm that Jesus has died or will die in the future.

Since most Muslims believe Jesus did not die on the cross and think he was taken to heaven unharmed, they believe he will return to earth near the end of time. He will kill the Dajjal (the Anti-Christ), and the world will become Muslim. After that, Jesus will die. This scenario is not directly mentioned in the Qur’an, but it is the most popular interpretation regarding the death of Jesus.

Genre Nasikh al-Qur’an” in Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 130-131.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 294.

The next Qur'anic passage is Surah 3:54-55. We read, "And they [Jesus' enemies] plotted, and God plotted. And God is the best of plotters, when he said, 'O Jesus, I shall take thee and raise thee unto Me, and purify thee of those who disbelieved, and place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved, until the Day of Resurrection.'" The key phrase to examine here is *inni mutawaffika* (translated as "I will take thee"). The word "take" appears before "raise." The consensus is that "raise" means "raised to heaven." But what does it mean when God says he will first "take" Jesus?

There are three possible interpretations of this verb: 1. God says, "I will take your soul in sleep." 2. God says, "I will take you from this world." 3. God says, "I will cause you to die." All three interpretations have been discussed in tafsir.

The third interpretation—"I will cause you to die"—was mentioned by al-Tabari. He wrote: "Ibn Humayd told us. He said Salma told us about the authority of Ibn Ishaq on the authority of one who was not suspected of the authority of Wahb b. Muhabbi, the Yemenite, said, 'God received (tawaffa) Jesus for three hours of the day until he raised him to Himself. Ibn Humayd told us. He said Salma told us on the authority of Ibn Ishaq, 'The Christians allege that He [God] received him (tawaffa-hu) for seven hours of the day, then God brought him to life.' Neal Robinson says, "It is difficult to evaluate this material... It is almost certainly wrong to deduce from any of these reports that God caused Jesus to die on the cross," since those authorities quoted by al-Tabari also taught someone else was crucified in Jesus' place."¹⁰²

McAuliffe makes the following comment on Abu Al-Futuh Razi's tafsir for this passage:

"The resultant scenario, exemplified by reference to surat al-an'am (6):60 and surat al-zumar (39):42, is one in which God first puts Jesus to sleep, and then when he is asleep, carries him to heaven. However, the exegete's full approval is reserved for the third option, which takes mutawaffika to be a

¹⁰² Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 120-121.

*synonym of the Persian phrase 'I am the one who causes you to die (man tura bimiranam).' Again, Qur'anic proof is brought in support. The two instances cited are surat al-sajdah (32):11: 'Say, 'the angel of death will cause you to die (qul yatawaffakum malaku al-mawti)' and surah yunus (10):46: 'And whether we show you some of that with which We promised them or we cause you to die (wa-imma nuriyannaka ba'da alladhi na'iduhum aw natawaffayannaka).' The period between Jesus' death and revivification, whether three hours or seven hours, is also discussed.'*¹⁰³

Fakr al-Din al-Razi said that a synonym for mutawaffika could be "to one who brings your appointed span to completion" (mutammimu 'umrika). Then the verse could be read as, "When I do cause you to die, I will raise you to My heaven and my angels will draw you near." Fakr al-Din al-Razi adds another important suggestion, that God is also saying, "I will protect you from their even having the ability to kill you." We will come back to that suggestion when we look at Surah 4:157-158.¹⁰⁴ He also offers another synonym for this term: the fourth-form active participle mumituka, meaning "the one who brings about your death." (This had also been suggested by Zamakhshari). The issue then becomes whether Jesus died before or after he was raised to heaven. McAuliffe notes, "The view that Jesus died at the time of his being raised is supported by a reference to surat al-zumar (39):42, a Qur'anic proof-text cited previously by al-Zamakhshari and Abu al-Futuh Razi."¹⁰⁵

Neal Robinson writes, "Ibn Kathir gives the same information as al-Tabari in a slightly abbreviated form and adds: Ishaq b. Bishr said on the authority of Idris on the authority of Wahb, 'God caused him to die for three days, then raised him.'"¹⁰⁶

Tabataba'i says that the fifth form of WFY means death: "al-tawaffi is taking something in its entirety. It therefore refers to death because God takes, at the time of death, the soul of man from his body." The

¹⁰³ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 134, note 22.

¹⁰⁴ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 137-138.

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 122.

fifth form of WFY carries the sense of “receiving” and “sustaining.” Death is not the end because the soul continues. He contrasts this with the most common word for death, al-mawt. However, he chose not to discuss the issue of the cross at this point.¹⁰⁷

Linked with Surah 3:55 is another form of the verb “take”—tawaffaitani in Surah 5:117, where Jesus says, “But when Thou didst take me [tawaffaitani] [to Thyself], it was Thou who wast the Watcher over them.” Dr. Mahmud Shaltut, former rector of the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo, said, “...the expression tawaffaitani is entitled in this verse to bear the meaning of ordinary death... There is no way to interpret ‘death’ as occurring after his return from heaven...”¹⁰⁸

I have demonstrated here that many Muslim commentators affirmed that Surah 3:55 could mean that God caused Jesus to die and then after that God raised Jesus to himself. But this does not prove that they believed that Jesus died on the cross. This is because of common interpretations given to the most discussed passage related to the crucifixion of Jesus, Surah 4:157:

...and for their saying [the Jewish enemies of Jesus saying], “We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God”—though they did not slay him; nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so unto them. Those who differ concerning him are in doubt thereof. They have no knowledge of it, but only follow conjecture; they slew him not for certain.”

Mawlana Maududi says, “This verse is quite explicit on the point that Prophet Jesus Christ was rescued from crucifixion and that the Christians and the Jews are both wrong in believing that he expired on the cross. A comparative study of the Qur'an and the Bible shows that most probably it was Jesus himself who stood his trial in the court of Pilate, but they could not kill or crucify him, for Allah raised him to

¹⁰⁷ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 143. Tabataba'i in his commentary on this verse in *Al-Mizan* says that Jesus “was given death between the heaven and the earth, then he was taken up to the heaven.” Al-'Allamah as-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabataba'i, (*Al-Mizan*, vol 6. Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1973), 51.

¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1995), 115.

Himself.”¹⁰⁹ We will now examine whether or not this verse is actually “quite explicit on the point that Prophet Jesus Christ was rescued from crucifixion” or not.

The key section of this verse is “but it appeared so unto them (shubiha lahum).” What “appeared so unto them”? Most commentators emphasize the possibility that someone else was changed to look like Jesus. That person died and Jesus was taken unharmed to heaven.¹¹⁰

Ibn Kathir wrote, “Allah has informed us in these verses [Surah 4:155-159] that He raised ‘Eesa (Jesus) up into the heavens and saved him from those who wanted to kill him. These were the Jews who had misled the king of that time against ‘Eesa. Allah enabled another person to resemble ‘Eesa. The Jews were misled and killed him instead.” He goes on to say, based on what Hasan al-Basri and Muhammad ibn Ishaq have said: “‘Eesa’s likeness was put on one of those who were present inside the house with him [Jesus]. ‘Eesa was raised from the house into heaven, as the people watched. When the police entered and saw the youth resembling ‘Eesa, they seized and crucified him. Since most of the Christians did not witness the ascent of ‘Eesa, they believed that ‘Eesa was killed and crucified and it was because of this that they deviated.”¹¹¹

However, there is widespread disagreement over who was transformed to resemble Jesus and was crucified in his place. Some, like Ibn Kathir, say it was a faithful disciple. Others, like Wahb ibn Munabbih, believe it was an enemy of Jesus, probably Judas the betrayer. Both explanations cannot be correct. And if Jesus’ disciples were

¹⁰⁹ Abul A’la Maududi, *The Meaning of the Qur’an*, vol. 2. (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1985), 186.

¹¹⁰ For an extensive study of classical Muslim commentary on shubiha lahum, read Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, chapter 13. The Ahmadiyya have a different interpretation of Surah 3:54-55 (3:55-56 in their verse numbering) and Surah 4:157 (4:158 in their verse numbering). They say that Jesus was hanged on the cross but did not die. They claim he was put in the tomb alive and escaped from it alive. They further claim he then traveled to Kashmir where he died at the age of 120. And they point to a tomb on Khan Yar Street in Srinagar as the final burial place of Jesus. See *The Holy Quran with English Translation and Commentary*, published under the auspices of Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad... (Islamabad: Islam International Publications Ltd., 1988). For a more complete Ahmadiyya perspective on the crucifixion issue, see Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, *Deliverance from the Cross*, (The London Mosque, 1978). One problem with this interpretation of Surah 4:157 is that if they want to affirm that Jesus did not die, then they also should affirm that he was not crucified. For an extensive rebuttal of Ahmadiyya position, see the book by a former member of the Ahmadiyya sect, Steven Masood, *Jesus and the Indian Messiah*, (Oldham: “Word of Life”, 1994).

¹¹¹ Ibn Kathir, *Stories of the Prophets*. (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic Publishing House, 2006, 2011), 563-564.

deceived by this act of God, then how can followers of Christ be held accountable for believing something false? Would God deceive those who strive to be faithful to Him?

Fakr al-Din al-Razi asked, “What then is the purpose of casting his [Jesus’] likeness on another man, except to condemn an innocent man to death to no purpose?”¹¹² Al-Razi had great difficulty accepting the substitution interpretation because of the problems it could create for Islamic law. If we cannot trust our senses to identify people, then how can someone witness to a person’s identity for marriage or other Islamic legal issues?¹¹³ He also wrote:

All Christians in the world, with all their great love for Jesus and their extremist beliefs concerning him, have reported that they witnessed him being crucified and killed. If we were to deny this, we would cast doubt on the principle of tawatur [universally accepted transmission]. Casting doubt on this principle would also necessitate casting doubt on the prophethood of Muhammad and Jesus, and even on their very existence, as well as the existence of all other prophets, and that would be untenable.¹¹⁴

The Study Qur’an discusses traditional interpretations of 4:157, explaining the substitution theory that someone else died in place of Jesus. It also makes a critical comment on this verse.

It does not come in the context of a critique of Christian belief, however, but rather as part of a lengthy passage criticizing historical incidents of Jewish unfaithfulness to their covenant. It is important to note that here the critique is not aimed directly at the belief in Christ’s crucifixion and death, but rather at the Jew’s claim to have killed him.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*. (N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 2017), 153.

¹¹³ The Study Qur’an, 262-263.

¹¹⁴ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, 153.

¹¹⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Dagli, Caner K.; Dakake, Maria Massi; Lombard, Joseph E.B.; Rustom, Mohammed (2015-11-17). *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, <https://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/235036288-should-i-leave-islam/?page=3>, accessed 05 July 2025.

If we allow the Qur'an to interpret itself, there is a striking parallel in Surah 8:17. The context of the revelation for Surah Eight is the Battle of Badr and its outcome. In this battle, the pagans of Mecca outnumbered the Muslims nearly three to one. The pagans aimed to completely destroy the Muslim community. It seemed impossible for the Muslims to win. However, they defeated the pagans with a decisive victory. In verse 17 we read, "You did not slay them, but God slew them, and thou threwest not when thou threwest, but God threw, that He might try the believers with a beautiful trial from Him."

Maududi, who said Surah 5:117 was "quite explicit" that Jesus did not die on the cross, makes no connection between that verse and Surah 8:17. In Surah 8:17, however, he writes about Muhammad throwing sand (or dust, or pebbles): "This refers to an event that happened during the Battle of Badr. After single bouts, when a general fight was going to ensue, the holy Prophet took a handful of sand and threw it toward the army of the disbelievers, saying, 'May their faces be scorched.' At the same time, he made a gesture and the Muslims attacked the disbelievers in a body."¹¹⁶ Now, the verse quoted said that it was not Muhammad who threw the sand, but God. Is it possible that a person can do something, but ultimately it is not that person who does it, but rather a direct result of the will of God? This verse seems to say so.

The Battle of Badr was a decisive victory for the Muslims. Did the Muslims kill the pagan Meccans who wanted to destroy them? On one level, yes. The Muslims wielded the swords. They struck their enemies. Bodies lay dead on the battlefield. But on a higher level, they realized God was in charge. The statement "You did not slay them" continues with the explanation "but God slew them." Whatever happened on the battlefield at Badr, the Qur'an claims that God was ultimately in charge.

Now, the phrase "You did not slay them" in Surah 8:17 uses the same verb in the phrase "they [the Jews] did not slay him [Jesus]" in Surah 4:157. The verb root is QTL. Can we look at Surah 4:157 from another perspective when making this comparison? I believe we can.

¹¹⁶ Abul A'la Maududi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, vol. 4, 130.

When the Jews bragged, “We slew the Messiah,” they thought they were in charge of what was happening to Jesus. But they were not. God was in charge. The very next verse (Surah 4:158) says, “But God raised him [Jesus] up to Himself, and God is Mighty, Wise.” Verse 158 focuses on the power and control of God, not the power and control of the Jews. Whatever happened to Jesus and the cross, it was ultimately an act of God, not of Jesus’ enemies. Remember, we quoted Fakr al-Din al-Razi earlier, where he suggested that God is also saying, “I will protect you from their even having the ability to kill you.”¹¹⁷ This interpretation also fits well with Surah 3:54-55, which talks about the Jews plotting, but they could not outsmart God because God is the best of plotters. God was in charge, not the Jewish enemies of Jesus.

I like to suggest that Jesus himself explained this beautifully in John 10:17-18. Jesus said,

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I might take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

The Jewish authorities, who were enemies of Jesus, thought they executed him at the hands of Roman soldiers. Not even Pilate, the Roman authority who permitted Jesus’ execution, was in control. Jesus told Pilate, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11) At all levels, God was in control.

Christians might be surprised to learn that the Qur’an claims to confirm the Gospel. (Surahs 3:3; 5:48) Surah 5:47 also instructs Christians to judge by the Gospel. Muhammad himself was told in Surah 10:94, “So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask those [Jews and Christians] who recite the Book before thee.” If these verses are true, then how can the Qur’an

¹¹⁷ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 137.

contradict the Gospel? It cannot. Remember that truth and history cannot be abrogated; only legal guidelines can be changed.

The problem is not with the text of the Qur'an—or the Gospel—concerning the crucifixion. The problem is with tafsir of the Qur'an that contradicts the Gospel. Instead of giving interpretations that make the Qur'an look like it rejects the Gospel truths, we should look for ways it can be harmonized with what God has revealed in the Gospel itself.¹¹⁸

Let me suggest some additional support for an interpretation of Surah 4:157 that aligns closely with the account of Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospels. This is not traditional tafsir. It was written by an anonymous group within the Ismaili Shi'a sect; they were called the Ikhwan al-Safa (the brethren of Purity). About a thousand years ago, they wrote:

*Finally, when God the Most High willed to take his [Jesus'] life and to raise him up unto Himself, (an yatawafahu wa yarfa'uhu)..., he said, 'I go to my father and to your father, and I commit to you a charge before the separation of my divinity (mufariqati labuti)...' It was in this manner that his human nature (nasutibi) was crucified. His hands were nailed to the wood of the cross and he remained hanging on the cross from early in the day until evening. He asked for water but he was given vinegar to drink, and he was pierced with a spear. Then he was buried in a rough unfinished place and forty men were on watch at the grave.'*¹¹⁹

Dr. Kamel Hussein wrote a fascinating fictional book about the last day of Jesus on earth called *City of Wrong: A Friday in Jerusalem*. The book primarily deals with the people around Jesus on the day of the crucifixion, rather than the crucifixion itself. But Hussein does say, "...the idea of a substitute for Christ is a very crude way of explaining

¹¹⁸ Some Muslims claim that the real Gospel is the Gospel of Barnabas, because the Gospel of Barnabas denies that Jesus is the Messiah while the Qur'an affirms that Jesus is the Messiah. The Gospel of Barnabas has numerous internal problems that show it was probably written between 1300 and 1350, far later than the original Gospel. The original Gospel is comprised of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible. But the biggest problem with the Gospel of Barnabas from a Muslim perspective is that the Gospel of Barnabas clearly contradicts the Qur'an at several points.

¹¹⁹ Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa. No. 44. Section 6, trans. Dwight M. Donaldson in "An Ancient Muslim Appreciation of the Messiah." (Aligarh: The Bulletin of the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies November-December, 1941, 4-5.

the Qur'anic text. They had to explain a lot to the masses. No cultured Muslim believes in this nowadays. The text is taken to mean that the Jews thought they killed Christ but God raised him in a way we can leave unexplained among the several mysteries which we have taken for granted on faith alone.”¹²⁰ He does not affirm Jesus' crucifixion—but he does not deny it either.

Conclusion

I have recommended a respectful way for Muslims to interpret the Qur'an as a witness by focusing on one main point: the death of Jesus. When examining verses in the Qur'an, there is no consensus ('ijma') among respected Muslim scholars, both classical and modern, about tafsir (interpretation). Some believe Jesus was taken to heaven unharmed and will die in the future, while others say Jesus died before ascending. Some say Jesus died in three hours, others in seven hours, and still others believe he died in three days. Some argue that someone else was transformed to look like Jesus; this person was crucified and died. But there are differing opinions about who this person was—Judas or a loyal disciple. Fakr al-Din al-Razi even questions, “What then is the purpose of casting his [Jesus'] likeness on another man, except to condemn an innocent man to death to no purpose?” If we cannot trust our senses to identify people, then how can one testify to a person's identity for Islamic legal matters? The simplest answer is that the Qur'an does not deny Jesus' death before he returned to heaven, regardless of what many Somalis and others believe. The simplest—and most accurate—interpretation is found in the gospel record. I suggest that the Qur'an does not conflict with the gospels on this point; only some tafsir, which often contradicts itself, does.

¹²⁰ M. Kamel Hussein, trans. Kenneth Cragg, *City of Wrong: a Friday in Jerusalem*. (Oneworld: Oxford, 1994), 231.

Issues For Further Research And Discussion

Now this analysis has not answered all basic issues concerning the Qur'an and the Gospel. Some remaining questions include:

- If Jesus died on the cross, why did he do so? How could Jesus carry our sins when the Qur'an says several times, "No bearer of burdens can bear the burdens of another"?
- How can we accept that Jesus is the Son of God according to the Bible, and yet the Qur'an says Jesus is not God's son? Are these statements irreconcilable?
- What is the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit the angel Gabriel or something/someone greater?
- How should we interpret the Qur'anic denial of "three" concerning God?
- How do we explain differences in stories about prophets that are found in the Bible and the Qur'an?
- Is Paul the great corrupter of the gospel, as some Muslims teach?
- How should we handle the Muslim claim that Muhammad is prophesied in the Bible?

Although I haven't attempted to answer those questions, this study provides you with some guidelines—a suggested starting point—for figuring out your own way of respectfully using the Qur'an when talking about the gospel to your Muslim friend or neighbor. The journey isn't easy. Answers can be hard to find at times. But we must always remain respectful and loving when witnessing to Muslims.

About The Author

Ibrahim Abdur Rahman has over 30 years of experience working with Muslims, earning a Master's degree in Islamic Studies and a Master of Philosophy in the Sociology of Religion. He is the author of 19 books and booklets, which have been published in seven languages. One of his works was printed by a major Christian publisher, and over 90,000 copies were sold. The author can be reached at info@somaliBiblesociety.org.



CHAPTER 10

DISCIPLING FOR THE FUTURE

Fuzzy Bear

“Discipleship is not a sprint. It’s a marathon. Perseverance is an essential element.”

– Francis Chan

For security reasons, I can’t share too many details about my work with Somalis. I can tell you that I have lived in two countries represented by the five-pointed star on the Somali flag and have traveled through most of them for various reasons. My journey began in 2013, when I was called to focus on the Somali Peninsula and its people. I set foot on Somali soil in 2015. After many trips and several years, I finally moved there in 2018, only to have to move again a few months later. I haven’t lived in any one city for many years; instead, I’ve moved around the region until recently, in 2023. Although I remain active in the region, I wouldn’t say I truly live in the Somali Peninsula anymore. I still dedicate most of my time to building Christ’s Kingdom among the Somalis.

Over the years, I’ve been blessed to walk alongside devout Somali Muslims and believers. It’s been a privilege to learn so much about people who are not truly my own, from both sides of the fence. I wouldn’t say sharing the gospel with Somalis is difficult, nor is discipleship if you are willing to have honest conversations and face some backlash. My time in the region has been filled with both. Jesus is worth it all. In this chapter, I will make some hard statements. Please don’t confuse them with expressions of frustration. They are, however, hard-learned observations from years of experience. When Dr. Aweis

Ali approached me to write about this subject, my first thought was that he had lost his mind. I'm not the politician to speak eloquently or softly on a challenging topic.

As I was writing, I realized that maybe that was why he asked me, because I would rather make you angry by telling the truth: that you can come to the table informed and with a game plan rather than risk being the next lamb to the slaughter. It is, in any case, truly an honor and privilege to write about a subject I have spent over a decade focused on, for which I am very grateful for the opportunity. Most Somalis, even leaders, have had little to no discipleship because of security risks. This is a red flag for anyone coming in, even a near-culture worker. This should let us all know we're in for a bumpy ride.

Every tribe has special gifts the Lord has given them, but only Somalis were called "The Protectors of Islam." The Bible calls the Cushitic clans warrior clans. Somalis are Cushitic. God made them warriors. Jesus said a thief doesn't break into a house with a strong man inside. Somalis are the strong men for the house of Islam. We need to steal souls from hell that are stored in the house of Islam, waiting to die and suffer for eternity in hell. We need "the strong man" on our side to lead the offense. We need Somalis to come to faith and act like the brave warriors they were created to be, now for Christ's glory. I hope this chapter can help make that happen. God bless You.

Evangelism and discipleship are common words in the broader body of Christ. I'm unsure if they are correctly understood in how we often use them. While this chapter focuses on evangelism and discipleship among Somalis and within the Somali church, I believe we should start by examining what evangelism and discipleship truly are. Having attended church as a young child, then gotten saved, and later returning to church as a young adult, I have encountered these words but have rarely seen them applied, especially when compared to a more biblical representation of these concepts. To understand them properly, we should look at some scripture related to these concepts to develop a

shared yet accurate understanding of this important subject concerning the Somali Church.

What Is Evangelism?

Some say it's about living your life well, focusing on Love and Kindness. Others believe it's a mercy ministry, where you provide for relevant needs, such as clothes or food. Some think evangelism is limited to open-air preaching, such as the Billy Graham crusades. I know many who enjoy distributing gospel tracts and going door-to-door. Some even see teaching a skill or offering fair employment as forms of evangelism. I believe these are all partial truths. While we won't examine scripture exhaustively, we should consider why our society has such a broad view of this topic and what our understanding should be to align with a healthy biblical perspective for our shared knowledge.

Eph 4:11 and he gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (ESV). So, what is an evangelist and evangelism? According to Strong's Dictionary,¹²¹ this word is used as a verb meaning to announce news. In simpler terms, it means to speak. Out of 55 instances, 45 are directly related to preaching or sharing the Gospel. This is not merely an act of kindness. These findings make it clear that evangelism always involves sharing the gospel verbally. While different methods may be used to open opportunities for sharing, the Gospel must be explained in a way that the listener can understand. This allows them to genuinely accept or reject Christ based on their response to the gospel.

As God's Word is like a fire and like a hammer, if we have used it upon ourselves, let us try to use it upon others. I think that there are a great many people in this world whom we give up as hopeless, who have never been tried and tested with the gospel in all their lives. I am afraid that there are people of whom we speak as unlikely to be converted, who have never been fully brought under the influence of the fire of God's Word or beneath the fall of

¹²¹ G2097 Euangelizo (Blue Letter Bible, Thayer Greek Lexicon).

the hammer of the gospel. "I brought one person to church," says somebody. I am glad you have, but have you ever spoken faithfully to that person about his soul? "Well, I don't think that I have. I have only spoken a little to him about these things." Have you ever plainly put the gospel before him? "Well, I do not think he was the type of person to be spoken to in that way." Ah! I see. You thought you were going to burn him without using fire and to break that rock without lifting the hammer. The fact is, you believed that something better than the gospel fire was needed in his case, or that something gentler than the gospel hammer was needed. Will you not try that old-fashioned hammer upon him? Will you not try that old fire upon him?"¹²²

Now that we have understood what evangelism is, we need to understand what the gospel is. Without understanding the biblical perspective on the gospel, we can't honestly assess the situation of Somalis and the Somali church regarding evangelism and discipleship, as both concepts are closely tied to the gospel. This is where I want to highlight the book of Galatians. This is where Paul discusses much of how we teach and grasp the gospel. He discusses the context and relationship of the Abrahamic covenant and its connection to the gospel. The idea of multiple gospels is mentioned. Even the promise about what is received from accepting Christ is discussed. Since I can't cover all of Galatians in this chapter or address its main purpose, I will paraphrase what we need to understand. Still, I urge you, the reader, to stop and read the book of Galatians, as it is crucial to this topic and your walk with Christ.

The gospel is both specific and broad because it isn't just about rules; it's good news. It's most clearly seen in a self-sacrificial lifestyle that genuinely reflects righteousness, motivated by love for God and a thriving relationship with Him (Gal 2 ESV). There is only one gospel, so any version that is hyphenated is not the true gospel Paul preached, and anyone who preaches that hyphenated gospel is cursed (Gal 1 ESV). To understand the gospel, we must examine the story of Abraham. Paul

¹²² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Following Christ [Annotated, Updated]: Losing Your Life for His Sake, (Aneko Press. Kindle Edition), 92-93.

points out that the first time the gospel was preached was to Abraham by God, that all nations would be blessed through his seed. This refers to all the tribes of the earth coming into a relationship with God and receiving His Spirit through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The promise to Abraham is that the Messiah would come through his lineage (Gal 3 ESV). This doesn't mean heaven isn't an eternal reward; rather, it means heaven isn't the main purpose of the gospel. Heaven is more like an extra blessing. The Spirit of God within us should be enough. When the gospel stops being just an escape from life and becomes a call to live with the one true Living God, who offers eternal life because Christ defeated death on the cross, it should change how we respond to life. It's not about seeking death, but about not fearing it either.

Evangelism among Somalis can be challenging, and both locals and foreigners should use the same general methods. However, there are a few differences. Somalis don't need a reason to build a relationship with other Somalis; however, everyone else, even those from nearby cultures, needs a reason to establish Somali relationships. We will divide evangelism methods into two categories: Somali and everyone else.

Somali To Somali Evangelism

There is a significant risk for Somalis to share their faith, including family rejection, loss of employment, physical abuse, and even death by any horrific means imaginable. We must remember that in Romans 8, Paul states that we are children of God if we suffer. Therefore, sharing their faith must be done regardless of the cost. I will likely reference a story more than once in this chapter. Once, I studied Matthew with a relatively new Somali believer. During his early discipleship, he was told not to share the gospel to avoid persecution, as he was receiving death threats. It's common for new believers to become aggressively evangelistic because they see Christ as the truth, and believe everyone else is destined for hell due to a lie. I was given the opportunity to study with him even though those who disciplined him knew my belief is, as I've said many times, "take your opportunities to share the gospel; if you die,

praise God, and if you live, praise God!” So, we studied together. When we reached about halfway through Matthew, he looked at me and said, “if God is our Father, and Jesus is from God, and Jesus commands us to share the gospel, and I don’t share it, then I shame the face of my Father,”

I will not live in a way that shames my father. We discussed evangelism, and he asked how he could share with his people without facing persecution. I told him you can’t, but there are ways to share that are less likely to lead to persecution than standing in the street talking to people or going door-to-door. I pointed out that his culture is communal—tea, stories, poetry, meals, and work are all natural access points within the culture, and there are often public avenues that can be used, especially with stories. Scripture can be adapted into a story form, and many principles can be embedded into cultural stories; even in Islamic culture, most people accept the importance of prayer.

The opportunities are there; you just have to take them. Shortly after, someone came to faith, and he began to disciple that person. This process has continued and occurred multiple times. I only accompanied him for a short season; other foreigners have continued to walk with him afterward. Evangelism among Somalis, by Somalis, is relatively straightforward. It simply requires good discipleship of believers and accepting that some people will die. Therefore, we must all maintain an eternal perspective and aim to make the most significant impact while we’re here.

Evangelism From Everyone Else To Somalis

Working with Somalis presents a unique challenge. You are told you will die; you believe you will die, yet more often, you survive. The world claims they are the most dangerous, but I don’t find that to be true. Somalis can be dangerous, but not more so than many other Islamic cultures that produce terrorist cells. The Somali government is perceived as tough because it is suspicious of everyone, including itself. They are also greedy, which fosters dishonesty throughout the region.

Historically, the culture has been very generous, but this generosity has been harmed by the poor management of resources by nonprofits in the area. This greed appears in their laws, along with suspicion. This means even if you are independently wealthy, you would need to find a job locally to build relationships with Somalis.

Additionally, you must learn the language because they prefer their native tongue, and foreign languages are often misunderstood. Or, you can befriend the five people who speak your language. All these challenges need to be addressed so we can try to share the gospel with Somalis, facing the same risks that locals do. Much of it looks different. The Somali Peninsula is underdeveloped, so essentials like medicine are lacking. Your family might disown you, and life insurance may not cover you. If the political environment is right or you make a significant impact, all the risks that Somalis face can also become yours. No matter how much you have in common, if you come from a similar culture, you must adapt to theirs. I've seen what happens when nearby cultures ignore assimilation. Trust me, you want to assimilate.

When evangelizing Somalis, some methods aren't wise. I've mentioned going door to door, but another is tract evangelism. Most Somalis can't read their own language. The only thing you'd accomplish with that is irritating people and attracting unwanted attention. Open-air events, or "Crusades," are inherently impractical from the start, and they're even less effective and riskier among Somalis. I'd only consider open-air evangelism if someone directly asked me what I believe in a parking lot, and then a spontaneous translation happened when someone asked for clarification. This has happened, and idle threats followed. So, if you plan to evangelize Somalis, be prepared for the costs and seize natural opportunities.

Don't waste a year building a relationship; instead, take the first genuine open door and let the relationship develop naturally. Don't manipulate the conversation to force the gospel; instead, where Jesus can be the answer, make Him the answer. This way, you'll foster more open discussions later and deepen authentic relationships now. Once

they understand what you believe, they won't question much, except whether they want to get to know you better or if they should report you. Most will avoid you, but with those who listen, you can share freely, regardless of whether you are Muslim or not. This approach will set you up for meaningful discipleship with Somalis.

One approach I have found effective regarding Somali communities is to direct them towards understanding pre-Islamic belief systems, such as Waaqism. This is where their culture truly resides, not Islam, and even for Islam, Sunni Islam is relatively new. Sunni practices are quite superficial compared to their culture. They love the camel, which comes from Waaq, the ancient creator God. The story of Waaq shares more in common with the Magi in the Bible than the Asian projection we often hear from scholars. Their gifts are all native to the Somali Peninsula, and only the Somali Peninsula has all three that I am aware of. A tribal king would have brought gifts from his homeland, not from the market. The Magi read the stars to find the baby Messiah, and Waaq's story was in the stars. While it cannot be proven or disproven, it is the most logical explanation. It provides a natural way in their culture to point to Jesus.

National Development

Somalis come from a war-torn region, have been conquered and divided by foreigners, and are often embroiled in tribal conflicts and efforts to establish new nations, sometimes dreaming of creating a new America if you speak with former freedom fighters in the area. Islam functions within a theocratic government maintained through fear. In contrast, America and most first-world countries have a different story: one of religious freedom, as their laws were traditionally based on the principles of the gospel. Jesus, who loves and seeks to have a relationship with people so that they may know and serve Him through love, does not require a government to control the people, but instead serves and reflects them. The "glory days" of America were when the nation was primarily Christian. That is what they aim to restore, and therefore, the

solution is not theocracy, which is inherently an Islamic concept. This also creates space to speak naturally about Christ.

Secular Leadership

Somalis desire to be powerful leaders and want to understand how the world achieves this. Many don't realize that even the military has adopted forms of servant leadership. Servant leadership is a style based on the life of Christ, emphasizing empowerment rather than authoritarianism. This also provides an easy way to transition into talking about Jesus.

The Name Messiah

Islam teaches that Isa al-Masih is a holy prophet. He was born of a virgin, performed miracles, was sinless, and will return as a king and judge. This is the common belief and teaching in Islam. It's important to note that this teaching is not entirely accurate in terms of Masih or Messiah. Teaching what the prophets taught about the Messiah is a meaningful discussion. He is God's eternal king who performed miracles, was sent by God as a prophet, and serves as our example for life. He paid for our sins through His death, burial, and resurrection before ascending, just as all the prophets foretold. This can lead to discussions about the validity of scripture. I prefer to quote the Qur'an, which states that the Torah, Zabur, and Injil are God's words—essentially the Bible—and that God's word does not change according to the Qur'an.

Humor

Every culture has an aspect of God within it. For Somalis, I believe it is humor. If you find a way to be humorous, they will like you, and difficult conversations will become easier. The joy of the Lord is our strength, and it attracts Somalis. I was once asked about my Joy in such a challenging place. I told them about my relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It was a very natural conversation.

Marriage (Primarily Women)

It is common for Muslim women to ask why foreign men have only one wife. The answer is simply our faith. This is a conversation I, as a man, have had with Somali women when they bring it up. They usually don't like the answer, but they keep talking.

Bribes

One of the easiest ways to share the gospel is by refusing bribes, especially from high-level government officials. Following Jesus doesn't allow for dishonesty or encourage it. You will eventually get arrested for refusing to give bribes... but it's worth it.

What Is Discipleship?

Before we examine discipleship, it's essential to take a moment to understand what it truly means, as it's often a misunderstood buzzword. Discipleship isn't just a program or even a small group. It means to learn from someone. The concept originates from early Jewish culture, where one would follow a teacher for many years, living with them and learning through their daily life and teachings. This is exemplified by Jesus and John the Baptist in the New Testament. The disciple surrendered their life to follow their teacher, serving alongside them and living by the teacher's instructions. This shows that discipleship isn't just about attending sermons. It also requires accountability from the teacher regarding the disciple's actions and choices. Now that we understand the background of discipleship, we can discuss how it relates to foreigners and Somalis, as well as how Somalis view themselves.

Discipleship Of Somalis By Foreigners

Discipleship among Somalis by foreigners is difficult. They have a distinct culture and a different understanding of many things. For example, pride is often considered a sin, but in Somali culture, it is viewed as a strength. Pride affects ministry because usually, locals can't receive teaching from one another, other clans and tribes, or foreigners.

So, pride must die for these relationships to grow. This only happens through studying scripture and applying God's word. Discovery Bible study is the most effective tool I've seen for addressing and resolving issues. When God's word says something, it's not up for negotiation; Somalis live to negotiate. There is context that must be considered. Many teachings in the Western world are far from accurate in the biblical context. Many aspects of Somali culture exhibit greater continuity with biblical principles than Western interpretations of scripture. Some concepts, when portrayed accurately, are difficult for both Westerners and Somalis; integrity is one such concept. The more we understand a Hebraic view of integrity, the more we should narrow our perspective, not loosen it. The early church likely shared a common understanding of this.

As Glenn Penner says in *In The Shadow of The Cross*, "Bones provide the skeletal framework for the body. In Hebrew thought, they were considered an index of health and became a synonym for oneself. In the harsh world of the Old Testament, it was common for the righteous to endure many fractures, not to mention death itself. The proverb paradoxically asserts that there are no life hardships severe enough to strip the righteous of their character or break their integrity, no matter how many broken bones they may have to endure in their struggle. His reference to Psalm 34 offers some insight into how Jews and the predominantly Jewish early Church maintained unwavering convictions on issues where we might justify compromise. We must be careful not to become so lax in our discipleship of a tribe still unreached—like the Somalis—that we neglect to strive for accuracy. This involves allowing cultural gray areas, as permitted by biblical principles, to be decided locally, while remaining firm on principles where scripture is clear and narrow.

Although we sometimes think about training locals and making disciples of them, the better approach often avoids this because it can cause cultural tensions and limit their potential influence within their community. The model that best handles evangelism and discipleship is Harvest Multiplication Training (HMT), a type of DMM, or Disciple

Maker Movement training. I have undergone DMM training extensively. Harvest Multiplication Training is the only model I've seen that effectively addresses spiritual warfare in a way that is culturally understandable for most Africans and fully reproducible within their culture. When discipling others, we must remember that effective disciples make more disciples. This is the model shown by the early church and is what all DMM models aim to replicate.

What I love about DMM is not just that it represents a natural progression from the Protestant Reformation—an effort to return to the church's state before the Roman Catholic Papacy—but also that it makes discipleship more impactful and simple. Remember, I had the blessing of spending time with a relatively new Somali believer. I wasn't his first or last mentor, but there was clear fruit from our time together. I'll share more about that season later. DMM uses a straightforward church model that employs Discovery Bible Study as a tool. We studied the book of Matthew. He was very eager but had been told to keep his faith quiet to avoid persecution. He was denied baptism because it increased persecution from Muslims and for some other minor reasons. This is the very opposite of what is biblical and what DMM encourages. Go all-in on complete obedience to scripture.

As the weeks passed, the man asked questions as Scripture prompted them, and the Holy Spirit worked in his heart. He realized he couldn't threaten his wife with divorce anymore. He also asked about sharing the gospel. He had been told not to, but Jesus says we should. His reasoning became clear: "If God is my Father and Jesus is from God, and Jesus says to share the gospel, and I don't share the gospel, then I shame the face of my Father, God. I cannot live without sharing the gospel. I will not live shaming my Father." I showed him a culturally appropriate way to evangelize using tea and stories, one that fit his culture and Jesus' culture. Later, he wanted baptism because it's expected in scripture immediately after conversion and is arguably part of the signs pointing to a true change in heart. Since then, the man has seen several come to faith. He has helped reproduce new believers,

though not on a large scale. He could serve as a case study—an example of the potential of DMM.

As foreigners, we face many challenges in discipling Somalis. One thing I have never done and do not encourage others to do is pay for people to attend Bible study or do it on billed hours. Our goal should be to develop committed followers of Christ. If they don't love Him more than money, then they only love money. Don't fall for the sob stories. Biblically, a person was never too poor to give to the body or too poor to be personally invested in Christ's kingdom. When we, as foreigners, pay for everything or cover the cost for Bible study, we create a relationship based on financial dependency. This can lead new believers to put their faith in a paycheck rather than in an all-powerful God. I have only seen moral decay and profound corruption in Christ's Kingdom from engaging in such behaviors. In no way does this help! True movement comes when all its funds come from within the community because believers are as generous as the kingdom of God expects — self-sacrificial in every way, including financially. That's why the early church was unstoppable, and why the modern church's motives are so questionable. The gospel and its expansion were the only priorities. They had an eternal perspective, and we need to share it too.

Somali To Somali Discipleship

The idea of Somali discipleship is similar but also different from that of non-Somalis. All the points I mentioned apply to both groups. However, there are specific issues that must be addressed for the Somali community. Your clan and family are not sacred, not even hooyo (mom). Remember, Jesus states that the gospel can divide families, and He is worth more than fathers, mothers, or even your own life (Matthew 10:37-39). For Somalis, family and clan are deeply sacred and complex to navigate, a trait seen in all tribes. When we join Christ's family, we are no longer only part of our earthly tribe. We become members of a new tribe. This means the only reason to value the old tribe is to see Christ's family established within it. Our loyalty should be based on Christ's benefit, not clan loyalty.

I once attended a meeting with Somali believers from two different clans. One brother had access to significant resources and was supposed to use the money to help all believers. Instead, he prioritized helping only those from his own clan. Others only received help if they joined his organization to boost his prestige—a requirement not needed for his clan. Such actions are tearing apart the body of Christ, whether foreign or local. This must stop. Tribes should be used as a tool to evaluate strategies for Christ's body, not as political groups within it.

Once Somali believers overcome this, it will eliminate many obstacles to unity and create a foundation for integrity. Without tribal pride, what is there to take pride in? If you're Somali reading this, you might be thinking, "If he knows us, he knows we can find something to take pride in." Yes, I know you often find pride in righteousness or leadership. This is part of the human condition. Somalis are not alone in this struggle; we all suffer here. I want to remind us all that we are deserving of hell, so we are equal, and scripture says not to lord leadership over one another. All our lives are fleeting, so we must store up treasures in heaven. I remember when I first lived in a Somali community, I had to ask the Lord, "What is with these people and why do you love them?" At that moment, I saw the patterns of redemption for Somalis. You have within you God's fingerprint for a spiritual war, a reckless abandon to faith, the nomads' ideal to be missionaries, and the generosity to send missionaries.

Don't let fear, a desire for earthly legacies, greed, or clan conflicts hold you back. Store up treasures in heaven and hold each other accountable. You are the key to what's remaining. You are not the worst in history or in what is left, but you are strategic in seeing God's glory and completing the Great Commission. You won't fulfill that mission by hiding to save your life. You must hold onto your warrior spirit, the trait you are known for, and go to war for Christ. You must evangelize and disciple in order to evangelize. Leave nothing to sin but lay every perceived right at the foot of the cross, and I believe we will see not only the Somalis reached but also, through their discipleship, all of Islam, Judaism, and certain communist countries come to Christ—if they begin

disciplining each other well. What's the worst that can happen from accountability? Death? Praise God for death, for in leaving this life, we step into eternity if we truly follow Christ.

Bring It All Together

Whether you are a foreigner or a new Somali believer, there are some things you should understand about the Somali body.

The first is that there are two main factions within the Somali body. They wouldn't call themselves factions, I don't think. I call them that because they hold two different views on almost everything.

The Old Generation (Risk Takers)

The Old Generation is unique. Many have endured unspeakable hardships and hold the mentality of doing anything for the spread of the gospel—death, persecution, whatever happens. Be sure to share the gospel as often as possible and be prepared to face the risk and potential backlash. Dr. Aweis Ali is well-known among them,¹²³ as are some others. This perspective explains why he is the most prolific Somali Christian author in the history of the Somali church.¹²⁴ These are the believers I prefer. I may not always agree with them, but if I had to choose a faction, I would choose them because that “risk it all” spirit is essential for kingdom growth.

The Middle Generation (Hiders)

I understand that the Middle assumes three factions, but I don't believe this new generation is yet its own faction. They will either align with one of the existing two generations or create their own. That said, the middle generation claims DMM while delaying baptism, discourages aggressive evangelism, shows little to no accountability in discipleship, takes pride in power and titles, and emphasizes safety and foreign funding. They see

¹²³ Editor's note: You can find Aweis Ali's biography, *Courage, Conviction and Character*, on his website, <https://aweisali.com/biography-of-dr-aweis-a-ali.html>, accessed 03 July 2025.

¹²⁴ Editor's note: Most of Aweis Ali's publications can be found on his website, <https://aweisali.com/>, accessed 03 July 2025.

themselves as more strategic. These views contradict DMM, which calls for immediate obedience to Scripture and baptism, mutual submission through humility, high accountability, internal funding (self-sufficiency), embracing risk, and aggressive evangelism.

Both factions have their merits. Internet strategies can be very effective when used correctly, and foreign partnerships are not inherently bad. This group also believes you can compromise integrity for unity, but that is unbiblical—criminal organizations know better. True unity comes from trust, which is built on integrity. Where there is integrity, there is unity, generosity, and a true reflection of Christ's kingdom. When integrity is compromised, Christ's kingdom suffers. Sin always takes you further than you want to go and affects everything.

My Belief

As I mentioned, I believe that the new generation will either connect to an existing one or become its own distinct group.

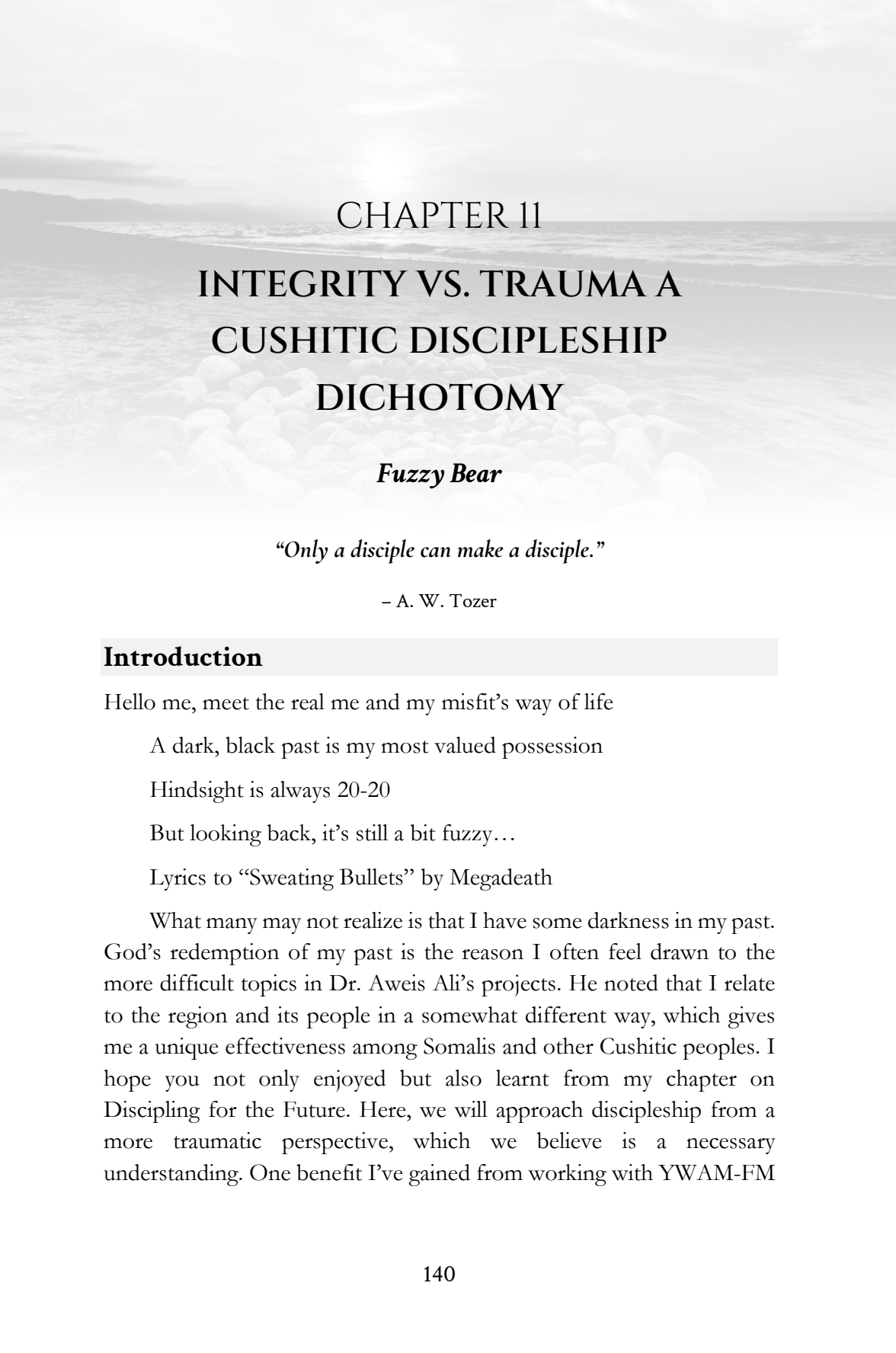
To bring both factions together with a new vision and strategy, I propose Harvest Multiplication Training (HMT), which unites the two groups. Real DMM incorporates the biblically grounded perspectives of risk takers, such as evangelism, and the strategic mindset of hidere. The next generation will develop in line with this, as DMM functions more as an organism than a tradition. It will naturally foster a new generation in unity. This strategy has proven highly effective in Islamic and tribal contexts.

The new generation: Whoever you are, go learn HMT. Use the DMM strategy it teaches and become like grains of sand on the beach. Your numbers will soon surpass the Old Generation (Risk Takers) and Middle Generation (Hidere), strengthening the Somali body and fostering greater unity than ever before. Both projections will create a scenario where the Somalis are reached and provide them with the tools to send missionaries effectively. Through mission training and how perspectives become part of the natural church DNA, as was the case

with the early church, Somalis will become the powerful force for God's kingdom against Satan that they were always meant to be.

About The Author

Fuzzy Bear grew up in North America. In his 20s, he joined Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and moved to the Horn of Africa to work with the Somali community. Along with his wife, Fiona, he has dedicated his life to improving the local community through initiatives that focus on education, healthcare, and supporting local businesses, despite facing numerous challenges. Their passion for creating sustainable change is evident in their collaborations with local leaders and international organizations. Fuzzy and Fiona's resilience has earned them respect and admiration in the region. Living in the Horn of Africa has enriched their lives and deepened their appreciation for the local culture. Their journey inspires others to engage in humanitarian work and make a positive impact. The author can be reached at *info@somalibiblesociety.org*.



CHAPTER 11

INTEGRITY VS. TRAUMA A CUSHITIC DISCIPLESHIP DICHOTOMY

Fuzzy Bear

“Only a disciple can make a disciple.”

– A. W. Tozer

Introduction

Hello me, meet the real me and my misfit’s way of life

A dark, black past is my most valued possession

Hindsight is always 20-20

But looking back, it’s still a bit fuzzy...

Lyrics to “Sweating Bullets” by Megadeath

What many may not realize is that I have some darkness in my past. God’s redemption of my past is the reason I often feel drawn to the more difficult topics in Dr. Aweis Ali’s projects. He noted that I relate to the region and its people in a somewhat different way, which gives me a unique effectiveness among Somalis and other Cushitic peoples. I hope you not only enjoyed but also learnt from my chapter on Discipling for the Future. Here, we will approach discipleship from a more traumatic perspective, which we believe is a necessary understanding. One benefit I’ve gained from working with YWAM-FM

is the close relationship with the Member Care ministry, a department within most agencies that focuses on addressing and preventing trauma.

While not limited to trauma, Member Care often involves leadership evaluations, as organizations realize that the more influence Member Care has on leadership and teams, the less likely abuse or trauma will occur. The more involved they are, the healthier the teams tend to be, and often, the fruit in the mission field is healthier too. I struggle with Member Care because I don't enjoy paperwork or emotions. However, their training and close relationship have empowered us to serve the Somali community more broadly, opening doors for discipleship. Although many Somalis often don't see the need for discipleship, they usually acknowledge that they have experienced trauma and need help with that. As the song states, "I'm in trouble for the things I haven't got to yet." While that isn't true while I'm writing this chapter, I'm sure it will be after publishing. So, please bear with me as we explore the Cushitic peoples of the Horn of Africa, their trauma, and what that means for us as those called to serve them, mainly focusing on Somalis.

Cushitic Discussed

What is Cushitic? Great question: I wish I could provide more detail; unfortunately, I can't offer the depth they deserve, just as they can't fully communicate it due to linguistic and cultural gaps. I can offer a rough framework. I'm doing this because I believe understanding this is key to serving this region. To do that well, we must make an effort to understand the people and their trauma. If we can't see them through their lens and as themselves, how can we serve them effectively?

Cushitic is an ancient tribal designation that is mostly unknown to the Western world. There are only five markers I know of that can be linked to Cushitic tribes to define their boundaries, if you will.

Region: The natural Cushitic tribal territories extend from eastern Egypt to Tanzania through Somalia, depending on the source. Currently, not all tribes in this area are Cushitic in this modern age;

however, many are, and in the Horn of Africa, most of them are. The three most prominent Cushitic tribes in the Horn are the Somali, Afar, and Oromo. This is why Somalis have a more East African nuance in their mannerisms and approaches to life. The handshake of the Somali is East African, as it is the same handshake common in Tanzania. However, I would say it's simply traditional Cushitic behavior. This region is also mentioned in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who served Queen Candace (Acts 8:26-40 ESV). Ethiopian is interchangeable with any Cushitic tribe name, as the original language is unique to the broader Cushitic region, and Candace was the title of the Cushitic queens who ruled the ancient Cushitic kingdom. They were from Sudan and ruled from Sudan and Egypt.¹²⁵

Warriors: Scripture identifies them as warrior clans, and history has documented this pattern.

An Oracle Concerning Cush

Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush, which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide. All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear! For thus the LORD said to me: "I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he lops off and clears away. They shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them. At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a

¹²⁵ Heather Preston, *The Kandake: A Missing History*. Priscilla Papers, 37(4), 2023, 16-18.

<https://www.cbeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-Kandake-A-Missing-History.pdf>, accessed 22 July 2025.

people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts (Isa 18 1-7, ESV).

Cushitic tribes only get along with their mother, and they're even afraid of her. This also contributes to their trauma and survival mentality.

Waaqism: is the only shared religion among the Cushitic peoples. It has various denominations that become noticeable when you ask different tribes about Waaq, the name of the creator God and the only God in that ancient faith. This is often reflected through the tribal relationship with the camel. Consistently, Waaq—the God—is seen as reading the stars and giving the camel. Somalis say Waaq gave the camel as a gift to provide for the people. Therefore, Waaq is generous and the sole owner of everything. Everyone shares this gift, often to an excessive degree, which can be unhealthy. They eat the camel and drink its milk but rarely ride it unless it's an emergency, and even then, it's somewhat shameful for a Somali man to ride a camel, as it is considered disrespecting Waaq's (God's) gift and, in a sense, disrespecting God. The Oromo, however, might differ, as they believe the camel should not be eaten but can be ridden since Waaq (God) gave the camel to help carry burdens because life is hard. Thus, disrespecting the camel by eating it or killing it is also seen as disrespecting Waaq (God). I would suggest each tribe has its own variation, and all tell attributes of Waaq (God). Waaqism, regional resources, and the relationship between gifts and tribal kings also support the idea that the Magi in Matthew (Matt 2:1-12, ESV) are primarily of Cushitic descent, specifically Somali.

The Camel: In any country, I talk to someone about the Cushitic people. The response is we have those... they always have camels. We can see that the relationship stems from Waaqism, NOT Islam.

Semitic genealogy, history, language, and maybe divination: Yes, I said it, Semitic, let the Muslims hiss and scream (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). If you find an honest or educated Somali, especially around Somaliland, they will tell you they are of Jewish descent. Some

Ethiopian tribes take pride in this. This means the best way to describe Cushitic peoples, which include Somalis, is that they are Jewish warrior clans who went to East Africa, acclimated but didn't assimilate, who became feral, only loving their mothers and their camels. It sounds terrible, but it does give a suitable generalization of what to expect, especially for foreigners. This reality encompasses the ancient languages within regional languages, such as Somali, their complex history, and genealogy.

The part I can only consider a hypothesis is Divination. Somalis have been driven primarily by radical Sunni Islam since the 1990s; it's similar to the Calvinism of Islam overall. Somalis claim to be among the earliest converts to Islam in Africa. Historically, they were predominantly Shia, which is a very spiritually charismatic form of Islam. Ibn Battuta, during his travels to Zeila in northwest Somalia in the 14th century, described it as a town with a Shia majority.¹²⁶ Between 1623 and 1639, the city of Zeila underwent a gradual delineation from its Shiite identity, a process driven by the Ottoman authorities' increasing perception of local Somali Shiite practices as heretical. This shift was significantly influenced by the broader context of the Safavid-Ottoman conflict, particularly the war against Safi of Persia, which contributed to the Ottoman Empire's ideological and political stance towards Shiite communities.¹²⁷ Similarly, the Muzaffarid dynasty, which ruled Mogadishu in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, consisted of rulers of Persian origin, many of whom practiced Shia Islam.¹²⁸ As a result of this, many Somalis in Mogadishu and its environs converted to Shia Islam.

This also suggests that the early years of Islam, from a spiritual point of view, were more charismatic and somewhat resembled the early patterns of Christianity before the development of Roman Catholicism

¹²⁶ Raphael Chijioke Njoku, *The History of Somalia*, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood, 2013), 38

¹²⁷ Jaavad Haghnavaz, "Islam and Islamic Civilization." *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5.1 (2014): 10-16.

¹²⁸ H. Neville Chittick, "The East Coast, Madagascar and the Indian Ocean". In Oliver, Roland (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 3: From c.1050 to c.1600*, (1977), 230.

in the 3rd century.¹²⁹ Remember that Paul warned against worshipping angels and other forms of Semitic superstition. What we observe in rural Somalis, especially in the Oromia region, and what I hear about in Sudan are different forms of what we would call witchcraft.

We don't know much about Waaqism, but we do know East Africa has a lot of witchcraft. What if the divination rumored among Somalis and other Cushitic tribes is what Paul warned the early church against engaging in? "... (Col 2, ESV). Another piece of evidence points to a Semitic history and tradition. If Ethiopia is correct about the book of Enoch being from Ethiopia,¹³⁰ it would make it a Cushitic text that influenced Semitic superstition, meaning we have two points of divination that conflict with scripture as part of the cultural layers before being incorporated into an Islamic historical context. Some of these involve human sacrifice.

This must be understood alongside efforts to navigate the people's trauma. It is also part of the culture that almost all locals hide, regardless of their current faith. We should also note that most Somalis are Sunni now, although the youth and diaspora often put on a facade rather than truly embracing Islam. Beneath all these perspectives, there are rural pockets practicing Judaism and Waaqism, mostly at home, while publicly following Islam for safety since the Arab Spring.

Now that we understand what Cushitic means, let's talk about trauma and the region.

Trauma And The Region

Let's define trauma. Trauma is the impact of harsh experiences on the brain, which can cause mental, emotional, physical, and even spiritual struggles in daily life. Trauma results from experiencing hardship; this hardship can be verbal or physical abuse or witnessing such hardships that one perceives as a potential threat to injury, sexual safety, or life.

¹²⁹ Oscar Skarsaune, *Possession and Exorcism in the Literature of the Ancient Church and the New Testament*, 2000. <https://lausanne.org/content/historical-overview-1>, accessed 22 July 2025.

¹³⁰ R. H. Charles (Trans.), *The Book of Enoch*. Chicago Defender: Academy for Ancient Texts 1906). <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/ethiopian/enoch/index.html>, accessed 22 July 2025.

For example, witnessing someone being killed can cause trauma. Trauma is relative to each individual; some people might be traumatized by being yelled at, while others might kill someone and not be heavily affected. It all depends on the person and their personality. That's why we cannot assume that one trauma is worse than another. It varies from person to person. Prolonged stress and unresolved trauma can lead to illnesses such as PTSD.¹³¹

When considering trauma in the Cushitic Region, a land marked by death, theft, lies, manipulation, war, rape, and abandonment—common issues in war zones—it makes sense that such experiences would be prevalent in a place of “Warrior Clans.” In my view, when discussing trauma in the Somali context or the broader Cushitic tribes, we must not forget physical brain injuries, such as being shot in the head or stoned. Nor should we overlook moral injury or trauma resulting from betrayal. The kind of betrayal that causes moral injury isn't minor—it's not the typical lying and stealing candy kind. Instead, moral injury stems from large-scale trauma involving the betrayal of ethical principles that uphold the relationship, often through the compromise of community moral standards.

A good example could be an imam in a mosque who teaches that Islam is a religion of peace but then shoots someone or orders a murder. Since the victim believed they were in a peaceful faith and then experienced murder, it can be a traumatic violation of core values, leading to what's called moral injury. Although not often discussed, moral injury is well documented and can develop into PTSD or even more severe mental health issues.¹³² Regarding trauma types in the region, the healing process is similar. One might wonder, what if someone suffers from physical brain trauma? There are roughly six stages of recovery.

¹³¹ I. T. Kolassa, & T. Elbert, Structural and Functional Neuroplasticity in Relation to Traumatic Stress. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(6), 2007.

¹³² L. B. Carey, T. J. Hodgson, L. Krikheli, R. Y. Soh, A. R. Armour, T. K. Singh, & C. G. Impiombato, 2016.

The first involves managing physical damage—swelling, neuron destruction, and paradigms. Once the person is stabilized and out of the hospital, the road to recovery from traumatic brain injury resembles that for someone with PTSD.¹³³ It requires loving accountability through consistent actions. This approach is similar to discipleship that addresses integrity issues—loving someone enough to set clear boundaries, like saying no to theft, lies, and cheating. Defining integrity based on a shared standard is crucial. Believers can turn to the Bible, starting with Psalm 15, which provides a solid moral foundation.

Integrity Examined

What happens when you deal with a culture that has a different view of integrity? This is the nature of the Horn of Africa, including Somalis and other regional tribes. Let's examine the culture of integrity. Tribal integrity is often viewed through a specific lens. My local friends describe it as what benefits my family, my clan, or myself as true integrity. So, if a foreigner comes and says, "Have integrity!" and I, the local, stole \$100 from the foreigner that morning, I, the local, believe I was acting with integrity. Since no one redefines my understanding of integrity, I continue to engage in unrighteous activity unknowingly. When considering the region, we must also take into account religious ethics. Islam is not a shared belief among all Cushitic tribes historically. Most Somalis practice Islam. Islam teaches a similar concept of tribal integrity, but instead of benefiting the tribe, it benefits the mosque and Islam itself. Any action done to benefit the Islamic faith is viewed as integrity. Now, we have two layers of integrity that do not align with scripture.

Most foreigners trying to engage with Somalis and other Cushitic tribes are unaware that these layers influence their interactions and make it difficult to see biblical integrity take root locally. Local sources say that if Islamic integrity conflicts with tribal integrity, tribal integrity always wins. This shows that to navigate this region and Somali tribes

¹³³ L. Turner-Stokes, ed, Royal College of Physicians and British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine. *Rehabilitation Following Acquired Brain Injury: National Clinical Guidelines*, (London: RCP, BSRM, 2003).

effectively, we must look beyond Islam. We need to understand what it means to be Cushitic, not Arab. First, we must establish a healthy definition of integrity. This chapter primarily aims at Somali believers and foreign workers willing to serve among Somalis. As mentioned earlier, Psalm 15 likely offers the best overall and definitive biblical standard for integrity. The only caveat is that the term “Swear” or “Oath,” depending on the translation, is better understood as “commitment” in that context. The Christian Standard Bible is the only translation I am aware of that makes this distinction while upholding other moral standards in the text. With integrity now defined as a common ground, we have a basis for holding people accountable.

Who Shall Dwell On Your Holy Hill?

A Psalm of David. O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved. (Ps 15:1-5, ESV)

Solution

One of the known side effects of trauma of any kind is the development of a survival instinct, which can create additional patterns of integrity issues. When people are taught to lie and steal during trauma, this survival mentality deepens a core paradigm of dishonesty. This makes ministering to Cushitic tribes, especially Somalis, particularly challenging. Often, ministers, especially those with a theological background, believe that pointing out integrity issues will prompt the Holy Spirit to convict them, leading to a transformation in which integrity is consistently maintained. If problems arise, they think they can tell members to leave the fellowship. But that’s not reality, especially

for a traumatized demographic. Is the Holy Spirit active? Yes. Can he heal people so thoroughly that they no longer show signs of trauma or dishonesty? Yes. But scripture shows us otherwise.

Even during Jesus's ministry, we see Judas. Since we are dealing with a traumatized demographic, the solution is both simple and challenging. This may explain why the fruits of the Holy Spirit include long-suffering and patience. For traumatized individuals, neural pathways and mental paradigms must be completely re-established, especially for those raised in dishonesty and trauma. Paradigms are reformed by repeatedly engaging in a specific thought process.¹³⁴ Every time an idea is thought, it fires between neurons, creating a rut in the brain similar to a ditch by the road. The deeper the ditch, the more natural the thought process becomes, which means the new paradigm is more likely to be favored over the old. This replaces the old pattern with a new one through consistent practice. The only practical approach is loving accountability. Paradigms are reshaped by taking thoughts captive, much like Paul suggested, through repetition.

During loving accountability, you might hear someone justify their actions with the phrase, "It's my culture." I've learned that this phrase is a RED FLAG. When it appears, it often masks a known cultural sin issue. Culture tends to cling to these issues for reasons linked to trauma and survival. Some involve foreign abuses. If these weren't recognized as sin within the community, responses would differ—they'd probably ask, "How is it a sin?" When people react instinctively, it's helpful to gently revisit the conversation later, depending on the severity and urgency. Trauma must be addressed at its root, not just the symptoms. You need to deal with the core issue; ignoring it only prolongs the damage. If someone runs away kicking and screaming, that's okay. It would be a greater disservice to them and God's Kingdom not to confront the issue.

¹³⁴ L. Turner-Stokes, ed, Royal College of Physicians and British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine,, 2003.

Some issues may require dismissing people, especially in cases of false repentance. However, if there is genuine repentance, continue to minister to and work with them. The only way to change that pattern is through an ongoing relationship—loving and patient companionship—working together to restore a Kingdom mindset. Whether approached from a mental health perspective, science, or scripture, the solution remains the same: discipleship. It's not just about a small group but about doing life with someone—lovingly holding them accountable and walking with them through both relational and instructional processes—to see holistic discipleship grow in their lives. The fruit will be much slower with someone who has experienced trauma. Allowing sin—whether incidentally through foreign money or by neglecting the issues because we want to preserve the relationship or boast of having fruit—is a sin known as pride. What we build for God's Kingdom with such actions is like wax fruit. I don't know about you, but I don't want to eat waxed fruit. On judgment day, I don't want to offer that rubbish to my Lord and Savior. I want to present Jesus with a feast like this:

A table of gold and a throne of emerald, handpicked by the followers of the Sheikh. The sitting room is full of frankincense and myrrh, awaiting the King foretold. Camel meat piled high, with the hump beside him — the best is reserved for the bold. Milk of the camel in Somali tea, a delight fit for our King. Pasta, bananas, watermelons, papayas, pomegranates, and grapes the size of donkeys — freely given, as lives laid down, a feast worthy of Christ our King and His suffering.

Is The Dichotomy Real?

Is there a dichotomy among Cushitic tribes regarding trauma and integrity? Yes, there is at least some. I also believe the solution is the same as previously described. It's genuine, raw accountability and discipleship. No enabling—since enablement leads to fruit that becomes waxy and inedible. So, if we love them, we will be patient while still providing loving, constructive accountability in every situation, whether they like it or not.

Remember, when a foreigner hits a sore nerve, the response, “It’s my culture,” often comes out. That response is a warning sign indicating a possible sin issue. If they wanted accountability or didn’t see it as a sin, they would ask, “What is the biblical response?” Hoping that biblical culture matches theirs, trauma is preserved; it sustains the individual through specific actions—this is how the survival mentality around trauma develops. Everything needs to be examined closely—like weeding a garden or building a house. This is the context of biblical edification (Eph 4:16), and if we’re in ministry, it’s what we’re called to do—even if it takes a lifetime to help one person understand.

About The Author

Fuzzy Bear grew up in North America. In his 20s, he joined Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and moved to the Horn of Africa to work with the Somali community. Along with his wife, Fiona, he has dedicated his life to improving the local community through initiatives that focus on education, healthcare, and supporting local businesses, despite facing numerous challenges. Their passion for creating sustainable change is evident in their collaborations with local leaders and international organizations. Fuzzy and Fiona’s resilience has earned them respect and admiration in the region. Living in the Horn of Africa has enriched their lives and deepened their appreciation for the local culture. Their journey inspires others to engage in humanitarian work and make a positive impact. The author can be reached at info@somalibiblesociety.org.



CHAPTER 12

DISCIPLING THE PEOPLE OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

Stephen Thompson

*“Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity
without Christ.”*

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Through studying Jesus’ teachings and example in the Gospels, we find a manual for disciple-making. In this chapter, we will share some principles and cultural background to help anyone interested in discipling the peoples of the Horn of Africa. Based on Matthew 28:19-20 ESV: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The task can be broken into several parts. First, there is “Go,” which involves evangelizing and is a process, not an event. Then there is “baptizing,” which is a specific moment in a person’s life when they publicly acknowledge an internal change—they are born again. The rest of the verse, which deals with “teaching to observe,” also involves discipling and is a process.

Evangelism Is A Process

Any ministry begins with evangelization, which is helping those without Jesus find Him. We are like beggars showing others where to find food! Evangelizing involves guiding people from their current understanding of God and salvation to a Christian understanding, until they receive

Christ and their lives are transformed. In evangelism, how we live among people is just as important as what we say.

Based on the Engel scale,¹³⁵ the people of the Horn of Africa have some understanding of cultural Christianity but little or no awareness of the gospel or the personal implications in their lives.¹³⁶ If there is no recognition of personal need, then they are not prepared to respond to the challenge of accepting Jesus. Someone has said a follower of Islam needs to hear the gospel 150 times before believing. I would suggest it is more about helping them understand the gospel and its implications in their own life.

Samuel Zwemer felt that one would not be able to intelligently communicate the Christian idea of God to a Muslim without a clear understanding of the Muslim idea of God. On the one hand, the strength of Islam is Monotheism. On the other hand, the Trinity is one of the most complex concepts for a former Muslim to accept.¹³⁷

Westerners have understood the Muslim concept of God as rather gruesome. Zwemer understood their prophet's idea of God as having too many of the attributes of Jehovah to be put with false gods but that their concept of Him was insufficient in four ways: "no fatherhood of God," "conspicuously lacking in the attribute of love," "not absolutely and eternally just," and there is "a lack of harmony in Allah's attributes."¹³⁸

Other attributes that influence their acceptance of the gospel include their understanding of His holiness and justice. God is regarded as the creator of both good and evil. One Hasan hadith demonstrates this unpredictable nature of the Muslim God.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ The Engel Scale, developed by James F. Engel in his 1975 book 'What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?' published by Zondervan, views evangelism as a step-by-step developmental process. It suggests that people move through various stages as they work toward conversion and discipleship.

¹³⁶ Evangelical Alliance <https://www.eauk.org/great-commission/what-is-the-engel-scale> accessed 31 March 2025.

¹³⁷ S.M. Zwemer, *The Moslem God*, (New York: American Tract Society, 1905), 7.

¹³⁸ S. M. Zwemer, *The Moslem God*, American, 107.

¹³⁹ A Hasan hadith is a trustworthy type of hadith attributed to Prophet Muhammad, considered credible but slightly less authentic than Sahih hadiths due to minor weaknesses in the narrators. They are accepted in Islamic law as valid evidence.

Abud Darda’ reported God’s messenger as saying, “God created Adam when He created him and struck his right shoulder and brought forth his offspring white like small ants. And he struck his left shoulder and brought forth his offspring black as though they were charcoal. Then He said to the party on his right side, ‘To paradise, and I do not care’ and He said to the party in his left shoulder, ‘To hell, and I do not care’.”¹⁴⁰

On the positive side, Christ holds an important place in Islam. Although many aspects are denied, such as His deity, His death on the cross for sin, and His lordship, much about Him is also acknowledged. Zwemer sees a lot in the Muslim understanding of Christ that can be useful for witnessing. For example: “Islam, ... admits His coming, His supernatural birth, His high office as the bringer of a special revelation from God, His sinlessness, His compassion and His power to work miracles. His very names afford so many points of departure to lead from the Koran and Tradition to the Gospels.”¹⁴¹

The concept of sin and the need for the cross, and how to communicate these, need also to be understood. A paper by Larry Vanderaa has a good section on sin, salvation, saviour, and sacrifice.¹⁴²

	<u>Fulani/Muslim</u>	<u>Bible</u>
God's character	remote impersonal	close personal
	good/evil	good
Man's nature	good	corrupted
Sin against God	ritual law	moral law
Salvation by:	ritual law	grace

Many people believe they are transitioning from one religion to another or from one community into another. Their families often see this as a rejection of them and everything they stand for. There is little

¹⁴⁰ Mishkat al-Masabih. Faith. Hadith 119. Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:119>, accessed 04 July 2025.
¹⁴¹ S.M. Zwemer, The Muslim Christ, The message for Muslims Trust (reprint), 1912, 181.
¹⁴² Larry Vanderaa, Strategy for Mission among the Fulbe, 1999, 11-14.
https://ijfm.com/Archives/PDFs_UFM/17_3_PDFs/10_Vanderaa_2.pdf, accessed 20 July 2025.

understanding that they are gaining something good and valuable. Christianity is about a relationship, not just a religion, and the inquirer needs to understand this (John 17:3). They still expect that certain works must be fulfilled to be truly saved. Often, they call themselves believers but haven't fully understood salvation. I sensed this with one guy I tried to follow up with after he professed belief through the radio.

Evangelism Is A Lifestyle

Evangelism is a lifestyle, and it requires living close to those you are trying to reach. It involves building friendships. As the inquirer becomes a believer, they should transition from being a friend to being a brother or sister. The dictionary defines a friend as: a person for whom one feels affection and whom one knows intimately. The book of Proverbs offers much advice on developing friendships. The level at which we can share and challenge depends on the depth of the relationship. A chart I came across somewhere (I am not sure of the source) illustrates this something like this.

<u>Levels of friendship</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Respect</u>
1. Acquaintance	Occasionally meet, discuss general issues	Questions general Treat the contact as a divine appointment
<i>(if you proceed too fast from this level to the next, you are seen as "nosey.")</i>		
2. Casual	Common interests or activity	Specific questions Able to discuss specific issues (Discern what God is doing)
<i>(if you proceed too fast from this level to the next, you are seen as "pushy.")</i>		
3. Closer	Mutual life goals - projects	Sense area of potential Achievement, Develop projects.
<i>(if you proceed too fast from this level to the next, you are seen as "not on.")</i>		
4. Intimate	Commitment to development of his character - mutual correction	a) Openly honest b) Discern causes of deficiency

Culturally Sensitive Lifestyle And Witness Among Muslims

(adopted from notes by another missionary who works with this people group)

What does it mean? – adopting as much as possible the cultural (and religious) forms without adopting the meanings associated with false beliefs; this is not new (e.g., Paul in 1 Cor. 9:19-23) and has been done to varying degrees throughout missionary history.

Why Do It? Why Adapt Our Approach?

To avoid/remove unnecessary stumbling blocks to the gospel (e.g. dress, food, “three gods”) and let the cross be the only stumbling block (1 Cor.1:22-24; 2:2). Also so that the converts won’t be extracted from the community as “foreigners” but will continue to live as much as possible in relationship with their people; so they won’t be seen to have rejected their culture but live as a witness back to their people (Mark 5:18-20; John 4:28-30,39-41). It can be argued, however, that there may be a need for a period of time away from the culture for the new convert to reflect and become grounded in their new faith (cf. Paul in Gal. 1:15-17).

How Do We Do It? (Some Suggestions)

In external forms (e.g. food, way of dress, worship forms):

- i. **Food:** Since ministers to Muslims, it is better not to eat or drink what they find offensive, such as pork and alcohol, especially when in the Muslim community. If they know you do not serve these in your home, they will not hesitate to accept your hospitality and eat with you. Some Muslims fear that we might secretly try to feed them these unlawful foods. On the other hand, if we want to get close to Muslim people to share the gospel, it is important to accept their hospitality and eat with them, including their meat (Mark 7:17-20; Acts 10:9-35; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:23-33).

- ii. **Way of Eating:** You should never use your left hand but only your right hand for eating, greeting, and giving gifts; the left hand is customarily used for unclean things.
- iii. **Dress:** Muslims have specific requirements for modest dress, and although we are free as Christians, we might choose to limit our freedom in this area to avoid causing unnecessary stumbling blocks to our message and to maintain respect. Adult Muslim men rarely wear short pants (only for certain types of work or sports); violating this norm could cause us to lose their respect or be considered boys. Muslim women who are considered modest are required to cover most of their bodies except for the face and hands; they usually cover their head and wear a long, loose-fitting dress down to the ankles. To preserve their respect, we should try to dress in a way that respects these sensitivities while among them.
- iv. **Worship forms:** We should consider whether our prayer practices as Christians are more based on biblical principles or cultural customs. The Bible does not specify exact postures for prayer; examples of standing, prostrating, kneeling, lying down, and “lifting up holy hands” are all recorded. Muslims typically do not see loud shouting as a form of prayer; we need to remember that God knows our prayer needs even before we pray (Matt.6:5-8).
- v. **Home decoration:** pictures or scriptures/prayers? Muslims generally consider it wrong to depict any prophet or holy person in a picture; if you have pictures of Jesus or angels on the wall, they might assume you are “worshipping” them. Muslims usually decorate their homes and artifacts with scripture quotations from the Qur’an in Arabic rather than pictures; similarly, we can decorate with appropriate biblical quotations (e.g., Deut. 6:4 or John 17:3) to prevent misunderstandings and even provide a positive witness.

- vi. **In our Attitudes:** (also adopted from materials produced by my friend)
- vii. **Hospitality and time:** It is very important to invite Muslim friends to your home and to accept invitations to theirs; be ready and willing to take time to talk. This gives many opportunities for them to see your life as well as to answer their many questions.
- viii. **Dependence:** Recognizing God's greatness and our reliance on Him: Muslims often acknowledge God's greatness through creation and rely on Him in daily life; it can be helpful to seize opportunities to pray with and for them naturally when needs arise.
- ix. **Names:** What about the idea of "Muslim" and "Christian" names? As an expression of acceptance, Muslims may give you a name that is familiar to them (since our names can seem strange to them); if they give you a "Muslim" name, will you accept it? On the other hand, should we require converts to Christianity to change their names? Usually, we don't encourage it because it can lead to rejection and misunderstandings from their Muslim families.
- x. **The poor:** We must respond with biblical compassion to the poor and needy (Luke 6:30-31; 10:25-37). In many Muslim communities, there are numerous people with physical needs. We should remember that Jesus did not always simply give everyone who approached him whatever they asked for, such as healing, food, or power (cf. John 6:34-41; Mark 10:35-44). Instead, while recognizing their real physical needs, he aimed to let his compassion shown to them in their physical or emotional needs lead to addressing their deeper spiritual needs (Mark 7:24-30; 9:17-27). Sometimes, Jesus even placed himself in a position of dependence on others to serve them; for example, he began his encounter with the Samaritan woman (John Ch.4) by asking her for a drink (vs.7).

Our Approach To Christian Witness (Also Adopted From Materials Produced By My Friend)

The Person and Character of the Witness: - It is not only what you are going “to do or say” as you live among Muslims, but who you are going “to be” that will be a witness to them (Read Surah 57:27).

Above all Have Love: “for love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8); their sins against us as well as ours; people can sense if you really love them or not and will forgive cultural mistakes (within reason) if you have love; on the other hand you can do all the right things culturally and in giving but if not done in love you will have no effective witness (1 Cor.13:1-3). You can say much if it is told in love (Eph . 4:15) – the message we have to give to Muslims about salvation only through God’s gift to us in the suffering and death of his only son, Jesus on the cross, will be offensive to them at times.

Love the person as a whole human, not just another soul to win; show love in practical ways by breaking down barriers (1 John 3:16-18); present yourself in a friendly manner. This means we need to avoid using impersonal, mass evangelism approaches and spend enough time with individuals to get to know them and their needs. We are to love our enemies and those who mistreat us, as well as our neighbors and those who treat us well (Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:17-21). What often first draws a Muslim person to Christ is the practical love shown by a Christian (even when mistreated by him/her). Love compels us to share what is important to us with those we love; therefore, we cannot help but share the gospel with Muslim people if we truly love them.

Have a Proper Self-Image: We must avoid an attitude of superiority—Muslims resent this (“don’t think of ourselves more highly than we ought” – Romans 12:3). Muslims are generally proud people; they take pride in their own history and achievements. However, we also must avoid an attitude of inferiority; we should understand who we are in Christ (John 14:12-21; 15:5-17; Acts 19:13-16). Jesus served but was not “servile”; he washed the disciples’ feet yet was respected as their teacher. He served not because he was inferior but because he knew

who he was and what his mission was for the Father (John 13:1-17; Mark 10:42-45).

Be a Person of Spiritual Maturity (1 Pet. 1:15-16) “Be holy as I am holy.” We need to be people who know the Word of God: - we are among those called “People of the Book” in the Qur’an; we must understand our “Holy Book.” We should be people of prayer: (Col. 4:2-4) “Devote yourselves to prayer.” Muslims generally believe that we do not pray; without being “Pharisaic” (Luke 18:9-14), we must pray to know God, and also so our Muslim friends can know Him. Pray for households, parents, and children by name; it also helps to remember their names. We should maintain high moral standards: (1 Pet. 2:12). Muslims are often raised to think that Christians are drunkards, immoral, and profane; we should live in a way that contradicts this misconception. Especially in male-female relationships, Muslims tend to assume the worst; we should avoid giving any reason for reproach that could damage our witness. If we want to show what Christians are really like, we must live openly among them; we must live close enough for them to see our lives. The message we share is often judged by our character.

Have a willingness to learn: We must start by listening, as half of good communication is listening. Listen and ask questions as well as speak. Earn the right to talk by first understanding; unless you listen, you will miss opportunities to connect points of common knowledge and experience to build upon.

We Need To Learn About Islam

We need to learn about Islam, not to criticize it, but to understand it; ask relevant questions and give thoughtful answers (Col.4:5-6).

Building Bridges: Starting where they are and guiding them toward truth; build on common ground that fosters trust.

By living among them: It is very difficult to be an effective witness if you isolate yourself from people. Instead, live among them and be friendly—greet them in culturally appropriate ways, learn how to buy

things at the market, visit teashops, and so on. Mutuality in hospitality is crucial; be willing to accept invitations and extend them, share meals, and be open to giving and receiving. Engage in daily life and cultural celebrations to be seen as part of the community and to understand their meaning. Visit the sick, attend weddings and funerals when invited. Living close to Muslim people can be challenging but offers many opportunities to witness. Be prepared for their attempts to convert you to Islam and for their many questions. Responding to these appropriately can be excellent opportunities for witness (1 Pet. 3:15).

In your daily interactions: Use dialogue instead of monologue—ask questions as Jesus often did to discover the views and thoughts of your listeners; this will help you start with familiar truths and then move to the unfamiliar. Avoid unnecessary controversy early on (for example, arguing over “Trinity”); remember, our struggle is with Satan, not people (Eph. 6:12). The attitude with which we discuss and answer questions can be as important to our witness as the cleverness of our responses. Be as well prepared as possible, but also be ready to admit when you honestly don’t know the answer to a tough question. Still, stay committed to researching and returning later with the answer to an honest question.

Witnessing involves sharing what we have experienced (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15); our motivation: the Lordship of Christ – “in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” Our message includes truths from God’s word and our testimony – “always be prepared to give an answer ... the reason for the hope that you have.” Our method: “Do this with gentleness and respect.” One of our key witnessing tools is our “Book” (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Use the Bible to support your answers; encourage others to read the scriptures along with you. Help them read the Bible for themselves: “faith comes by hearing the word.” Share “the Word” through storytelling; it fits well as many cultures pass on important knowledge through stories, which people enjoy.

Be patient when correcting and be honest about the truth. Stay calm, even if Muslims ask many irritating questions, as they often look for how we will respond; however, don't forget to point out essential mistakes.

Application

Identify three or four of your closest “friends” and start praying and planning for them. Consider how you can strengthen your relationship with each one. Assess their spiritual state and plan ways to help them grow in faith, such as showing the Jesus film. You might also keep a 3x4 card record for each person. Meet with others to pray for them.

Materials For Evangelism

1. Chronological Bible storying series by New Tribes Missions (<https://www.ffmna.org/product-page/the-way-of-righteousness-good-news-for-muslims>, accessed 31 March 2025)
2. Various chronological approaches
3. Navigators Backpack (<https://navigators.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Backpack.pdf>).
4. Various series used by NoloshaCusub (<https://noloshacusub.com/qoraallo>)
5. Al-Kitab and other materials prepared by Life Challenge Africa (<https://www.life-challenge.org/>).
6. Seven Muslim-Christian Principles¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Accad F. E., Building Bridges, (Navpress, 1997), 71 ff

Discipling

For the purposes of this chapter, we are dividing discipleship into three sections: follow-up, establishing, and equipping or training.¹⁴⁴

Follow-up (sometimes a gray area between evangelizing and discipling)

What is a convert?¹⁴⁵

- he gives evidence of possessing the new life (2 Cor. 5:17).
- his attitude towards Jesus Christ is now favorable (1 Cor. 2:12; 1 Peter 2:1,2).
- his attitude towards sin is now unfavourable (1 John 2:3-5).

Often, before a person is converted, the Bible seems incomprehensible, but later, as they read it, it comes alive. Trying to follow up with someone who is not a convert is futile and leads to frustration. Prayerfully evaluate where a person is before proceeding.

Initial follow-up

Atmosphere – assurance, acceptance, protection, security

Follow-up objectives

For him/her to ... begin a devotional life and feeding himself from the Word

- have assurance of salvation, forgiveness, guidance, victory, answered prayer
- value fellowship with other believers
- begin to live a holy life before his community (witnessing)
- begin to share his testimony (witnessing).

Attitude of the helper

¹⁴⁴ These ideas are primarily taken from LeRoy Eims's book, *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*, 1978.

¹⁴⁵ Adapted from L. Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*, (Zondervan, 1978), 184.

“Like a mother” 1 Thessalonians 2 (especially 7 and 8), available, gives them attention, listens, guides, protects, and smothers them with love (T.L.C.). “Building the bridge of relationship that takes the weight of truth.”

Developing follow-up conversations

1. What is it that needs to be communicated, and what do I want to see him/her do as a result of what is shared?
2. Why? (motivation).
3. How?
 - Verses and key thoughts related to the topic
 - Illustrations
 - Resource materials
 - How can I get them established in this thing and continue in it?

Application: Gather resource materials and illustrations into a convenient collection so they are readily available when you want to use them, e.g., collect illustrations and pamphlets.

A Story From Warren Modricker

Islam still engages in a SLAVE TRADE. It was this fact, along with Christ's raising the dead, that convinced D. Ahmed Afara of Aden, when he was about 20 years old, after he had vigorously opposed Christianity, to accept Jesus as his Savior. Incidentally, after his conversion, he still attended the mosque for prayer. BUT as he testified many times, “I went through Muslim motions, BUT said Christian prayers.” He also lost his wife after his conversion and baptism. She was taken away from him. His mother tried to poison him but did not succeed. He was not very victorious regarding his sexual nature, and at times visited brothels.

Dr. Petrie, a Scottish missionary, went straight into the brothel and pulled him out. The missionaries did not give up on him. Later, he was sent to India, where he graduated from university. He proved to be an excellent student. Then, Christian relatives of one of the missionaries in Scotland paid his way through the Edinburgh School of Medicine. He became a surgeon, returned to Aden, married a fine Arab Christian girl from Palestine, and did remarkable work for Christ until his death. I tell this story so that if you are “called” to Muslim work, you will be very patient with the converts when they “backslide.”¹⁴⁶

What Is A Disciple?

1. As a follower of Jesus Christ, he/she puts Christ first in the major areas of his/her life and is taking steps to separate from sin (Luke 9:23; Rom 12:1,2).
2. He continues in the Word,¹⁴⁷ including applying it to his life with the help of the Holy Spirit (John 8:31, James 1:22-25, Ps. 119:59).
3. He maintains a consistent devotional life and is growing in faith and intercessory prayer (Mark 1:35; Heb. 11:6; Col. 4:2-4).
4. He attends a fellowship of believers regularly and demonstrates Christ’s love by identifying with and serving other believers (Ps 122:1; Hebrews 10:24, 25; John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:20-21; Gal. 5:13).
5. He lives a holy life before non-believers and discreetly shares his faith when applicable. He gives his testimony clearly and can share the gospel (Matt. 5:16; Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15).
6. He is a learner who is open and teachable (see Acts 17:11).
7. He is a visible follower and learner of Jesus Christ, and demonstrates consistency and faithfulness in all the above areas (see Luke 16:10).

¹⁴⁶ W. Modricker, *Helpful Points for Reaching Islamic Peoples*, early 1990s, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Le Roy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*, 185 (adapted).

Atmosphere – growing convictions, commitment

Establishing objectives – focus on WHY and going deeper¹⁴⁸

Obedience and lordship of Jesus in his life

Separation from sin, victory over sin, and dealing with sin

A deeper understanding of the doctrines of God and salvation

Understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in his life and the world

Deepening in his knowledge and applying the Word to his life

Prayer

Satan – know your enemy

Living a holy life of love and faith

Lifestyle evangelism

How to share his testimony and the gospel

Basic follow-up

Giving

Use of Time

Understanding the will of God

Attitude of the helper

Encouragement and Help 1 Thess. 5:14

Encourage, exhort, charge, teach 1 Thess 2:11,12

More than a guide – like a father 1 Cor. 4:15

Committed emotionally – more discipline

Not possessive Eph. 6:4

¹⁴⁸ Le Roy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*, 75.

“Not trying to force them to do things they are not ready for yet,” “not unreasonable or petty,” “when discipline exceeds desire, you have legalism.”

Materials for follow-up and establishing: Navigators Bible studies translated into Somali but not published.

Equipping and Training

Some may be selected for this. They might be those who would participate in an “Open University” approach to training. Le Roy Eims’s book from chapter 7 contains some good ideas that could be modified and expanded here.

Not every believer will be a gifted soul winner or discipler, as these are almost apostolic gifts. It is important for the discipler or leader to help the person determine what their gifts might be. A couple of good questions to ask are: What do I enjoy doing when I help people? What do more mature believers think my gifts might be?

Romans 12:3-8 (NIV) is an important list of motivational gifts that may help in determining where one’s gifting may lie.

For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophecy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Just because a person is not an evangelist or a giver or an encourager does not excuse him or her from doing these things also as they are able but their focus should be to develop in the areas they have strengths.

Vocation Training

Since many are young men, they need to learn how to work and earn a living. Any support we provide should be short-term. Some thought should be given to their traditional vocations. Many are better at business and talking than manual trades. Some may be suitable for a mechanics or truck driving course.

Often, the temptation when someone becomes a believer and shows signs of being a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ is to send them to Bible college. However, better options might include training and mentoring where they are.

Conclusions

Disciple-making and discipling should be fundamental to the ethos of the ministry and the foundation of the church among the diverse communities of the Horn of Africa. It is essential that current ministry leaders deeply consider these principles, seeking ways to adapt and apply them effectively within their specific cultural and social contexts. By doing so, they can foster a vibrant, reproducing faith community. I pray that God Almighty will raise up a dedicated and effective band of disciple-makers and leaders from among the peoples of the Horn of Africa, equipping them to advance His kingdom with wisdom and humility.

About The Author

Stephen Thompson grew up in East Africa until he was 13. Later, as an adult, he served with his wife (Rachel) as a global partner with SIM in NEP Kenya and Eastern Ethiopia, where he helped the people with water and agricultural projects. Later they lived in Addis Ababa where he managed the Codka Nolosha Cusub radio programme. At present Stephen and Rachel live in a multicultural suburb in Auckland, New Zealand where they seek to reach out to their neighbors.

CHAPTER 13

BUILDING BIGGER BARNs

Dennis Dyvig

“A faith in God is filling.”¹⁴⁹

A Somali Proverb

The Bible says a lot about money. Since the Bible is 100% God’s word, with no errors in the original manuscripts, and because God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and always good and kind, we should listen to what God (Jehovah/Jesus) says about money and eternity. God is on our side. He proved this beyond any doubt through the Cross. There is no logical reason to reject the truth our God shares with us.

I believe many people are very focused on their short life on earth but don’t take eternity and heaven seriously enough. By God’s grace, I will try to help us understand what I think God is saying about this.

“Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to

¹⁴⁹ In Somali, *limaan Allaa uur buuxiya*.

what you will put on. "For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing (Luke 12:18-23, NAS95).

I suspect all of us human beings pay far too much attention to this life and not nearly enough attention to eternity.

No One Ever Dies.

No one truly dies, ever. Our bodies die (unless we are alive at the rapture), but our inner being, which is the true person and the essence of life, never dies. The inner person is the soul (or some may prefer to say spirit). The inner person is invisible and simply exists inside our bodies from birth until our bodies die. As soon as our body dies, our inner life (the soul) is released and leaves the body, which then becomes nothing more than a collection of chemicals or worn-out clothing.

The inner being never dies. Your inner life will live forever. Let's assume 70 years as the normal life expectancy. Your body will live about 70 years. Your inner life will live forever! Your inner life is eternal. Your inner life (whether you call it your soul or spirit, for believers, I think it is both) will live forever. Your inner person is the real you. It is your inner person that thinks, feels, decides, and either believes or rejects what God says. Your current body is like a house or clothing that you are living in or wearing until your physical death. Then, you shift houses to an eternal home. Sometimes, after bodily death, you put on new, eternal clothing —your resurrected, eternal body. This is true for both believers and unbelievers.

So, each of us must decide where to place our priorities: on our body, which will last about 70 years and then end, or on our soul, which will never end and will continue for thousands, millions, billions of years, lasting forever and ever and ever and ever and ever....

God's perspective is that 1,000 years in this life is like one day in His thinking. We are far too preoccupied with the time we have on this earth. God is thinking of life beyond this earth.

Most people devote all (or most of) their efforts to their 70-year bodies rather than to their eternal inner life—the real you, the soul. The soul is the genuine you. The body is just where you live temporarily, in comparison to eternity.

Eternal Suffering Or 70-Year Suffering?

Everyone should consider this question: What's more important to you? Trying to reduce suffering and discomfort for 70 years, or spending eternity enduring a suffering so great it can't be compared to any pain experienced on earth?

There are only two choices:

- Seek as much as possible a party-like life now, which might for a time take your mind off your problems and suffering, but while partying, you give little or no thought to eternal suffering.

OR . . .

- Accept your lot in this life while making sure you will spend eternity NOT suffering AT ALL!

Which Suffering Is Worse?

Everyone suffers in this life on earth, whether rich or poor. The idea that having more money will end suffering is not true. Rich people also worry about money, as well as relationships, security, joy, peace, and even death. They also get sick and face relationship problems. Rich people also desire a more meaningful life. Like poor people, they seek love, joy, and peace.

Psa. 90:10 The span of our life is seventy years— eighty for those who are strong— but their whole extent is anxiety and trouble, they are over in a moment and we are gone (New Jerusalem Bible).

Psalms 90 was written by Moses. Moses, who also said that if Israel obeyed the law, they would prosper, indicates here that the reality of life for all people is suffering. This is true for everyone living on Earth. No

one escapes suffering until they reach heaven, if they go there. Suffering is not the only thing in life. Thankfully, we all experience times of joy and peace, too. But the fact remains that no one escapes suffering in this life on Earth. Believing you can escape suffering is an illusion and probably a lie from Satan.

Again, and don't miss this vital truth—NO ONE escapes suffering in this life on earth, BUT SOME people will escape suffering in the next life, the life that never ends.

So, the choice is:

- 70 years of suffering + eternal suffering.
- Only 70 years of suffering.

Or a better way to describe the two choices is:

- 70 years of suffering + eternal life, joy, peace.
- 70 years of suffering + eternal suffering.

Christianity And Money

What does Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (most of us), say about Christianity and money?

If anyone advocates a different doctrine (teaching) and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness; he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions. and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some

by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1Tim. 6:3 -9 NAS95).

The Bible is God's Word. Culture encompasses the ideas, words, and beliefs of people—usually unbelievers. Most cultures around the world are based on human thinking rather than on God's revealed truth—the Bible. Culture is what we learn, often outside of formal education. We learn culture by observing and listening to our parents, relatives, peers, and through experiencing life. Culture is what we accept as true, whether it is actually true or not. It's a blend of our beliefs. Beliefs are ideas and thoughts we've accepted as true. These beliefs influence all our decisions. Consequently, our decisions shape our behavior. Behavior always stems from a person's personal beliefs—what they accept as true, whether it's true or not—and these beliefs often originate from culture.

We must listen to God rather than man, especially unbelievers, who make up the majority of almost any culture. That is what the Bible is about—changing my beliefs to increasingly align with God's truth. As an individual's beliefs change, the group's culture also begins to change. The culture of any group reflects the individual beliefs of its members. It is what the members, for the most part, agree is true and important. If an individual's beliefs are radically different from his group, the group will try to correct his beliefs, gently or forcefully, until he conforms once again to the group culture, or he will be removed from the group.

In 1Tim. 6:3 (above) Paul says there is only one correct answer to the issue of money for Christians. We MUST NOT let culture (human thinking, human wisdom) replace God's clear teaching about money.

In 1Tim. 6:4 Paul says that anyone who takes a different teaching than the words he is writing (the Bible) knows nothing. The person who knows nothing turns out to be the one who thinks becoming a Christian is a way to gain, to make more money.

In 1 Tim. 6:5, Paul clearly states that those who believe becoming a Christian is a way to make money have a depraved mind and are lacking in the truth. These are very strong terms, and Paul was not trying to make friends but to correct his friends. Paul means that those who try to make money through the Gospel simply do not understand the truth. Since Jesus is The Truth and the Gospel is the word of truth, those who attempt to profit from their “Christianity” make me doubt whether they ever truly became Christians in the first place. How can someone be a Christian without knowing the truth?

Are they like the farmer who is building bigger barns (Luke 12:18) but is foolish about their eternal salvation and is, in fact, lost? Are there people who call themselves Christians but are not going to heaven? Yes! Indeed. In fact, I believe Jesus suggests many call Him Lord, Lord, but He will say to them, “Depart from me. I never knew you.” Matt. 7

Godliness

What is godliness? The New Living Translation 2nd ed. has: To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy. The New Living Translation 1st ed. has: To them, religion is just a way to get rich. The KJV has: supposing that gain is godliness: Christian Standard Bible footnote has: 6:5 Referring to religion as a means of financial gain. The literal Greek is: Thinking that gain is the religion. In other words, some people believe they adopt a particular religion in order to earn more money and eventually become wealthy. That choice (using religion for personal gain) may, for a while, seem to be working, but in the end, all who make that decision will regret it later.

The word translated as gain is only used in this passage of the New Testament, but in this context, it means to earn money or increase one’s wealth.

So, putting all this together, it seems the Holy Spirit, through Paul, is saying that

- those who think making money is what the Gospel is about,

or stated another way . . .

- those who think making money is what becoming a Christian is about,

...those are the people who have depraved minds and do not know the truth. Unfortunately, I have met many people who seem to think that making money is why someone should become a Christian. I fear many become pastors or other Christian leaders for the same motivation—gain, and money, at least partially if not entirely.

The True Benefit Of Godliness

In 1 Tim. 6:6, Paul says there is a benefit from godliness, and it is an actual gain, but not a financial one. Godliness is often misunderstood among many Christians. It does not mean boasting about having better behavior than others. Instead, godliness means learning and accepting God's truth. It involves believing the gospel, being born again, and experiencing inner change through the gospel. One of the benefits or gains of godliness is contentment or peace. Ultimately, it is not money, wealth, or possessions that bring peace. It is true godliness, which involves a genuine belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That change in belief gives us contentment. This contentment or peace is what everyone is searching for, but many never find it.

Note that Paul is saying those who seek contentment by using religion, even Christianity, to make a profit, will not find peace (contentment).

In 1 Tim. 6:7, Paul reminds us of what should be obvious, but we often forget—that we had no money or possessions when we came into this world, and we will have none when we leave it. Paul, like Jesus, makes it clear that we don't truly die; we simply leave this world. That means we still exist after this life, but we are taken to a different place. The question is, which place will we continue our eternal existence? The joys of heaven or the pain of hell? After this life, everyone will be in one of these two locations.

In 1 Timothy 6:8, Paul elaborates on the contentment he mentioned in verse 6. Both come from the same root word in Greek. What is necessary for contentment (peace)? Food and clothing. That is simple. In reality, very few people live this life with only food and clothing. God usually provides more than just the basics for survival. But if all we have is food and clothing, we can get by with that, and God says that is enough for contentment, which, as I mentioned, I believe is all any of us are searching for—contentment (peace).

Who Is Happier?

I come from the West (USA) but have lived in Africa for 44 years. That is long enough to compare Westerners and Africans in terms of contentment. Americans usually have many more possessions than most Africans. I have known many Africans who had little more than food and clothing. Who has more peace and contentment? Americans or Africans? I believe peace is more a mindset than a circumstance in life. I would say I have seen more smiles and more peace in many poor Africans than in many wealthy Americans (or wealthy Africans). To me, that confirms what the Holy Spirit says through Paul here in 1 Timothy.

Does Wanting Money Decrease Peace?

Is it possible that wanting more money could decrease peace and contentment? Paul clearly states, “Yes!” in 1 Tim. 6:9-10. First, notice that the warnings Paul is about to give do not apply to rich people, but to those who WANT to get rich. This means that poor people who desire to be wealthy face these stresses and tests in their lives. So, it is not the amount of money someone has that causes trouble, but the desire for money that creates problems. This is a warning for all who become Christians or seek leadership positions within the Christian community for financial gain. The result of wanting more money is damaging to the very person who desires it.

The word “want” in “those who want to get rich” means to desire and to decide. Ultimately, it is our desires that influence our decisions

(to will to do something). Our wills are controlled by our desires. For example, if someone desires to steal money and believes he can succeed, that is a desire for more money. But he also has other desires. He desires not to get caught. He desires not to be punished. He desires to keep his good name. He desires not to feel guilty. He desires to act in accordance with His Savior's desires. So, if his desire for more money is stronger than his other desires, he will attempt to steal the money. But if his desire for more money is weaker than his other, more significant desires, those stronger desires will lead his will to decide against stealing.

Back to 1Tim. 6:9-10. Does the desire for money cause you to sin? Maybe. Or is the desire for money the actual sin? Is desiring money the sin referenced here? The sin is a false belief that money will bring you joy and peace, when only God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, can give you true joy and peace. So, the issue here, as in almost every part of Scripture, is more about belief than behavior. Bad behavior always follows bad beliefs. By bad beliefs, I mean believing something to be true when it is not. Here, the false belief is that having more money will give more security and a better life. Otherwise, why would people want money? You can't eat money. It's not good for sleeping on. Trying to wear money as clothing would be ridiculous. Money itself does not give security. Money is only useful because it gives us power. But we mistakenly believe money has enough power to save us or improve our lives.

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, is conveying that money does NOT lead to a better life. In fact, craving wealth and choosing to prioritize money over God's truth does not improve your life; instead, it brings temptations, traps, and harmful desires.

Temptation Or Test?

I believe that temptation is better understood as testing. The core idea behind the word temptation is some kind of pressure to commit a sinful act. Testing, on the other hand, is more about faith. Testing is part of the learning process. I used to be a flight instructor, and the training

required by the US government for me to become an instructor stated that testing is part of education. A test reveals what someone knows and what they do not know. Therefore, tests are used to identify areas of misunderstanding and false beliefs. This is very true in our spiritual lives.

Here's how I think it works.

1. Those who want to get rich means those who desire and decide (meaning of the word want) that getting rich will make their lives better.
2. That is the wrong answer to the test. Getting rich will not necessarily lead to a better life.
3. So, God sends a test to reveal to that person (whose belief is wrong) that he made the wrong decision.
4. The wrong answer to God's tests results in a loss of joy and peace. That's how we know we have believed and made a poor decision. The outcome of choosing to seek wealth, Paul says, is not joy and peace but even more problems.
5. The result of the problems that come from making the wrong decision teaches the individual that next time they ought to trust God to give them joy and peace, rather than trust in money. His wrong answer to the test has taught him more about God's truth.

I believe that God's testing is what's meant rather than tempting, which is confirmed by the context. We should never assume we understand scripture without considering the context. Wanting to get rich in 1 Tim. 6:9 is equated with loving money in v. 10. The end result of such false love is wandering away from the faith. In the Bible, 'faith' means believing what God says is true. Faith doesn't mean just believing something; it means believing that what God says is the truth. Everyone believes something; everyone has some kind of faith. In the Bible, 'faith' specifically refers to believing the truth of God. Therefore, those who trust in money to give them a better life have not truly believed in God's

truth—they have wandered away from the faith, the truth, which is the gospel.

This is again about testing people's beliefs. Wandering away from faith means that person does NOT believe God's truth. They believe in money instead. They have failed the test. The proof that they answered the test wrongly is that they pierced themselves with many griefs. They wrongly believed that money would give them joy and peace, but instead, it brought them much grief, various kinds and levels of sadness. That is precisely how God set up His world. If we believe what God says is true, we are quickly filled with joy and peace. If we believe anything other than God's truth, we are quickly filled with sadness, stress, worry, or anger.

The most important decisions we make aren't about what we do (behavior), but about what we believe. Tests aim to reveal false beliefs and, in turn, guide us to His truth. This process of spiritual growth applies to those who have truly been saved before.

Christianity—The Easy Life?

Many people choose to become Christians because they (wrongly) believe it will make their lives easier on Earth. They are doing what Paul warns against in the passage from 1 Timothy above. Now, let's consider Jesus' teaching about bigger barns (Luke 12:18-23). Paul's statement that some want to get rich is the same as Jesus' discussion about building bigger barns. The person who builds larger barns is thinking he will... relax, eat, drink, and be merry. Relaxation means peace and a sense of security, while merry implies joy. Jesus and Paul are both addressing the same question: Can money truly bring happiness? The rich man who built bigger barns believed his wealth would give him peace and joy. But Jesus called him a fool. The Greek term could be translated as "You brainless person!"—a significant insult. It indicates, as Paul taught in 1 Timothy above, that this barn builder was not wise or intelligent. He did not believe the truth and did not understand eternity. Instead of trying

to make his earthly life easier—a futile effort in the long run—he should have focused more on eternity.

Let's think again about the two choices all people have:

- 70 years of suffering + eternal life, joy, peace.
- 70 years of suffering + eternal suffering.

The barn builder chose 70 years of suffering plus eternal suffering, while he foolishly believed he was choosing 70 years of ease and merriment. Nobody receives 70 years of ease and merriment on this earth. Everyone who believes the gospel receives far more than 70 years of ease and merriment here. They get eternity of ease (peace) and merriment (joy) in heaven!

As I write this, I notice conflict within the Somali Christian community here. I think the conflict revolves around money and power. It seems no one is really thinking or talking much about eternity. It appears people are focused on a better life on earth—building bigger barns. That is precisely what Jesus warned against in Luke 12 (above).

I am saddened to see more alcohol and drug abuse in the MBB community than in most other Christian communities I know. Why is that? Maybe because those people become Christians for gain (money), but when it doesn't work out, they get depressed and turn to alcohol or drugs to hide their pain.¹⁵⁰

Prosperity Gospel?

The prosperity gospel is not truly the gospel or the truth. Any study of the Bible clearly shows that God's people often suffer more than the general population. Why is that? We don't know all the reasons, but when Hawa and Adam abandoned God's truth and believed Satan's lie instead, the entire universe was plunged into corruption. I believe this

¹⁵⁰ Editor's note: The editor proposes an additional hypothesis. Abdi Walalo, a prominent Somali church leader, accurately describes the Somali church as "a perpetual first-generation church." As depicted in the New Testament, many members of the first generation to profess faith in Jesus Christ struggled with their sins. Likewise, many Somali Christians lead worldly lives. Insufficient discipleship may be the biggest reason.

corruption—aging, suffering, sickness, death, and so on—is a testimony to all intelligent beings that rejecting the creator God leads to negative results.

Jesus said that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). Paul stated that everyone who wants to live Godly in Christ will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). Hebrews says that if we don't experience suffering, we are not true Christians (Heb. 12:6-7, 11).

Jesus suffered not because of mistakes; He made none. He seemingly didn't own a house or even a bed. If God's plan is prosperity, wealth, and easy lives for us, why didn't Jesus have that? Becoming a Christian to gain money and an easy life does not align at all with the Bible, which, after all, IS God's truth for all people, at all times.

Most people have always been more focused on physical needs than on eternal truth and eternal life. This was true in Jesus' time, but that does not make it right, John 6:27. Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal, NAS.

Security On Earth

Life on earth is important to our God and Savior. He fully understands our problems, suffering, worries, fears, and anxieties. He has also made promises about this life and how to get to heaven. I call these the Bible's five 100% promises. I suggest you memorize them.

1. Jesus also promised 100% that if we believe His gospel, we will go to heaven. (John 10:28-29, and other places).
2. Jesus promised 100% that we will have problems and suffering in this life on earth, so we should not be surprised, but see it as normal. (John 16:33, and other places).
3. Jesus promised 100% that He would never leave us or forsake us. (Heb. 13:5)

4. The Bible promises 100% that God (Jesus) controls everything. (Eph. 1:11, and other places).
5. And He promises 100% that the result or end of all things is something good for us. (Rom. 8:28, and other places).

Jesus also incorporated truth into the help He offers in this life at the end of His “building bigger barns” discussion.

Luke 12:22 And He said to His disciples, *“For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on”*

Luke 12:23 *“For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing”.*

We must never forget:

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: *“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”* (NIV11)

I firmly believe God’s plan is for us to work to earn money for food, clothing, rent, and everything else. But we must also trust Him while we are working. I see no Biblical support for becoming a Christian just to get more money or to have an easier or more enjoyable life on this earth.

Depending On Prayer?

Prayer is valuable, but it is not the primary way to obtain food and clothing. Some of the people who pray the most are the poorest. I believe the following formula shows God’s way for us to provide for ourselves:

God’s truth + wisdom + work + faith + prayer = success (enough money to take care of yourself and your family).

Prayer is part of that, but not the main part. God’s truth, wisdom, and work are the main factors. Some of the richest people in the world are not Christians, and they don’t pray! So why would someone become a Christian to gain wealth or expect to survive by prayer rather than working? It simply doesn’t make sense.

Correct Faith Is Very Important.

Faith in becoming a Christian just to get money and an easier life is misguided. God did not promise that. Faith in prayer instead of work is also misguided.¹⁵¹ But we must NEVER let any concern about life on this earth overshadow the much greater issue of life AFTER this life—eternity.

The man who is intent on building bigger barns is foolish, according to Jesus, and it is He Who knows the truth and Who IS The Truth! The one who is not foolish is the one who is prepared for eternity in case his soul is required of him much sooner than he expected before he accepted the gift of salvation and eternal life.

Do Not Worry!

Luke 12:22 And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life (on earth)....

What Is The Gospel?

John 4:10 says it very well:

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” (NAS95)

Here Jesus gives:

- Two things the person must know if they want heaven for eternity.
- One response by the person.
- One promise from the Savior.

¹⁵¹ Editor’s note: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’” 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

The two things a person seeking a happy eternity must know are:

1. Salvation (eternal life) is a gift. That means there is nothing I am required to do or can do, or should do to get eternal life, other than receive His gift of eternal life. If I think I must do something, then I do not believe, I do not KNOW that eternal life is a gift, totally free, bought and paid for by Jesus' death on the Cross, AND NOTHING MORE!
2. Jesus is the True God and Savior, Jehovah. Jesus is Jehovah in a body to save us by His sacrifice on the Cross.

The one response a person must make is to ask Jesus for His free gift of eternal life and salvation from hell. This is what the man who wanted to build bigger barns failed to do. Perhaps he did not know the two required things (above), or maybe he thought he had more time, or perhaps he simply rejected Jesus' gift of salvation. This step involves a simple prayer in which the person asks Jesus to give him the gift of eternal life (salvation).

The one promise is that Jesus will give eternal life, 100%, to the person who knows (accepts the two truths) and requests that gift.

Are you truly saved? Are you 100% certain that you will go to heaven if your soul is called upon to you tonight?

Do you believe that going to heaven is a free gift? Or do you (wrongly) think you must do something in addition to what Jesus already accomplished on the Cross for you? The Bible says you are a sinner and that God is perfect. You can't do anything good enough to earn your way to heaven or help you get there. Jesus has already done everything for you to receive eternal life. All you need to do is align your belief with God's truth—Jesus said: If you knew the gift of God. Most people think they can partly save themselves by repenting of their sins (which is not true), confessing their sins (also not true), stopping sinning (which is not possible), or reducing sinning (which is not enough).

Do you believe that Jesus is fully God? Or do you think He is somehow less than fully God? During His time on earth, He proved beyond any reasonable doubt that He, Jesus Christ, is 100% God, the only true God. The Jews in His time understood that He claimed to be God. That was one reason they sought to kill Jesus.

If you are unsure, I encourage you to pray this simple prayer. This prayer will not save you, but belief in Jesus alone will save you, and this prayer is how you express that true faith:

Please pray a prayer similar to this: “Jesus, I believe in You. I believe you are the true God. I believe Your death on the Cross is the only way I can have eternal life and go to heaven. Please give me that gift of eternal life. Thank You, Jesus! Amen.”

If you know the two things and you just asked Jesus to give you eternal life, then he promises that you now do have eternal life 100%!

Please do not be deceived by the false power and distraction and false security of money. Please abandon those ideas about money now and accept eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross!

Conclusion

My wife and I have dedicated ourselves to missionary work in Africa for 44 years, an extensive period during which we have actively engaged in spreading Christ’s teachings and providing spiritual support. Over the past decade, our primary focus has been on serving the Somali community, a group that presents both unique challenges and opportunities for ministry. Sadly, throughout our interactions, I have encountered numerous individuals identifying as Somali “Christians.” However, I am increasingly convinced that many of these individuals may not genuinely possess saving faith, and I fear they might not be destined for heaven. This concern arises because I have observed that they are often so preoccupied with the pursuit of money and material wealth that they scarcely, if ever, contemplate spiritual matters or their eternal destiny. While the desire for money in itself is not inherently

sinful, the danger lies in allowing that desire to overshadow one's spiritual priorities. When a person becomes so fixated on acquiring wealth that they neglect or dismiss the importance of understanding, learning, and believing the Gospel message, that obsession can hinder their salvation. It's a reminder of the importance of maintaining a proper balance between material needs and spiritual growth, ensuring that the pursuit of earthly riches does not come at the expense of one's eternal soul.¹⁵²

About The Author

Dennis and his wife, Susan, were born in Iowa, USA, in 1948 and 1952, respectively. They both grew up on farms. Susan accepted Christ at an early age, while Dennis did not experience his conversion until he was 22. The Gospel was new and wonderful to him, as he had been baptized as a baby and raised in a church. He identified as a Christian but was unaware of what the Bible teaches about how to truly become a Christian. For 33 years, Dennis served as a missionary pilot in Africa. He flew evangelists, pastors, teachers, Bible translators, and others across East, Central, and Southern Africa. Although he has flown to several locations in Somalia, he has never been to Mogadishu. Susan trained as a nurse and assists people they know and love in various practical ways, alongside evangelism and discipleship efforts. Both Dennis and Susan are volunteers and have not received a guaranteed salary for 45 years. Throughout this time, God has been faithful in meeting all their needs. The author can be reached at ddyvig@gmail.com.

¹⁵² Editor's note: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

CHAPTER 14

BOOK REVIEW: TEATIME IN MOGADISHU

Aweis A. Ali

“When something is written, it benefits future generations.”¹⁵³

A Somali Proverb

Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam. By Ahmed Ali Haile, as told to David W. Shenk. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2011. Pp. 140. USD14.63

Somalia is a nation where approximately 98% of the population adheres to Islam. The country is predominantly recognized for its history of societal disintegration, lawlessness, maritime piracy, and the activity of radical Islamist groups. These issues primarily arose following the collapse of the central government in 1991.

Ahmed dictated the book to his longtime missionary colleague, Dr. David W. Shenk, near the end of his life because he was too weak to write it himself.

Teatime in Mogadishu recounts the autobiography of Prof. Ahmed A. Haile (1953-2011), arguably the most prominent Somali Christian in the Protestant branch of the Somali church. Ahmed, a beloved peacemaker and ministry leader, died of cancer. Ahmed also lost a leg in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1991, while reconciling warring factions in the capital. This injury almost cost him his life.

¹⁵³ In Somali, *Wixii la qoraa quruuma hara*.

Ahmed dedicated his life to serving as a respected ambassador of Christ's peace across different regions, including Africa, Europe, and the United States. His efforts involved mediating conflicts, promoting dialogue, and fostering mutual understanding among diverse communities. He saw Islam as a vital part of his cultural and spiritual heritage, which deeply influenced his personal journey and ultimately led him to follow Jesus Christ.

Unlike many Christians from Muslim backgrounds, Ahmed deliberately avoided demonizing Islam or antagonizing Muslims, instead emphasizing coexistence and respect. His notable restraint, genuine respectfulness, and commitment to peaceful dialogue are widely recognized and admired in both religious and secular communities. These qualities highlight his dedication to bridging cultural and religious divides and embody the spirit of reconciliation, which is a true reflection of his Mennonite heritage.

The book honestly recounts Ahmed's life journey and spiritual pilgrimage. It explores his upbringing in a Muslim family in Islamic Somalia, along with his experiences in the US and his mission work in Kenya and Somalia. The book is openly honest and transparently straightforward. For example, he shares his tense relationship with two missionaries.¹⁵⁴ These two missionaries indeed attempted to separate Ahmed from the Somali Christian fellowship in which he was the leader:

*My counsel could not be heard. Some missionaries advised my assignment in Nairobi was a professor at Daystar, not involvement in the church. I should leave the Somali church matters to missionaries appointed to work with the church, it seemed, and not meddle in their affairs. I should worship elsewhere and not with the Somali church. This suggestion astonished me.*¹⁵⁵

The book also chronicles tensions between Ahmed and a few Somali believers, a conflict that was engineered by one of the two missionaries cited above.

¹⁵⁴ 110.

¹⁵⁵ 110.

When Ahmed became a disciple of Christ, he initially struggled to gain acceptance in both the Muslim community and certain missionaries.¹⁵⁶ He eventually overcame these obstacles with sheer determination and unquestionable Christlikeness.¹⁵⁷

Ahmed highlights in the book that following Jesus felt like coming home. “Don’t forget that when I met Jesus, I knew I had come home. So whether I live or die doesn’t really matter, for my calling now and in eternity is to glorify Jesus Christ. This is what my memoir is all about.”¹⁵⁸

Wherever he went, the Somali church emerged. His talent for organizing Bible study groups, fellowships, and house churches was well-known. He was a skilled minister who contextualized the good news.¹⁵⁹ He also served as a longtime Professor at Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya.

The book portrays Ahmed as a dedicated and steadfast follower of Christ, showcasing his deep commitment to his faith. Throughout his ministry, he faced significant opposition from Muslim communities and encountered various challenges; however, he remained firmly connected to Jesus Christ. His unwavering devotion highlights resilient faith, demonstrating strong spiritual conviction despite external difficulties.

In his scholarly efforts to create a comprehensive contextual framework, Ahmed carried out detailed studies of various pre-Islamic religions that historically existed in the Somali Peninsula. These included Waaqism, an indigenous spiritual tradition centered on worshiping Waaq, as well as Abrahamic faiths like Judaism and Christianity, which have had a longstanding presence in the region. He systematically identified and utilized diverse connections—whether cultural, religious, or linguistic—to support effective evangelism to Muslim communities, making sure his witness and testimony were clearly understood.

¹⁵⁶ 110.

¹⁵⁷ For more details about the challenges Ahmed faced in the hands of these few missionaries, read, *Courage, Conviction and Character: The Biography of Dr. Aweis A. Ali*, Blaze Goldburst, Cuttack, India, 2023, 89-93. <https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/courage-conviction-character.pdf>, accessed 20 July 2025.

¹⁵⁸ 13, 34.

¹⁵⁹ 35.

Ahmed's talent for forging alliances with Christians from various denominations and local Muslim groups is renowned. Like a magnet, Ahmed attracted and united people to promote peace and harmony.

Teatime in Mogadishu is an insightful and compelling book that is destined to become one of the most important publications on the Muslim world. It offers a nuanced look at the complex social, political, and cultural dynamics within the region. Additionally, the book highlights the vital role of peacemaking efforts and diplomacy in promoting stability and understanding, aligning these initiatives with the broader goals of the Great Commission and its mission of peace and reconciliation with God. Through detailed analysis and heartfelt stories, it makes a meaningful contribution to discussions on faith, conflict resolution, and intercultural dialogue.

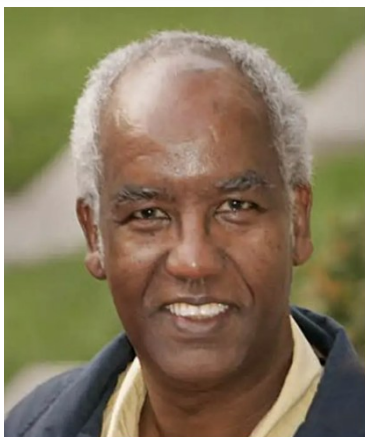
CHAPTER 15

AHMED ALI HAILE IN POETRY

Aweis A. Ali

“Unlike his poetry, the poet is not immortal.”¹⁶⁰

A Somali Proverb



Prof. Ahmed Ali Haile
Photo credit: The Free Press

Intense emotional expression is often more effectively conveyed through poetry within oral traditions, a phenomenon particularly evident in Somali culture. In Somalia, love is predominantly articulated through songs and poems rather than through narratives or parables. The rich tradition of Somali oral literature, passed down through generations, utilizes poetry as a vital means of communication that reflects collective sentiments and personal feelings. This oral tradition not only facilitates emotional expression but also reinforces communal bonds by sharing shared experiences and collective emotions.

Within this cultural context, Somali Christians have specifically employed this poetic tradition to commemorate expatriate missionaries and esteemed local believers within the Somali church. Composing poetry in memory of these figures serves both as a form of tribute and as a means of preserving their legacy within Somali cultural memory.

¹⁶⁰ In Somali, *Gabyaa geeryoo gabaygiisuna har.*

Despite the numerous contributions of these individuals to both community life and the church, only a select few have been honored with poetry, underscoring their enduring impact and status within Somali history and society.

A notable figure in this area is Professor Ahmed Ali Haile (1953-2011), widely acknowledged as an influential Somali Christian minister. His life was marked by unwavering commitment and faith, displaying spiritual maturity, humility, and significant accomplishments within a relatively short time. Recognized as a natural leader, he promoted inclusivity and aimed to bridge societal divisions. His ability to connect with people from diverse backgrounds made him a peacemaker, and he was known as a compassionate and relentless contributor to community development.

The legacy of Ahmed Ali Haile endures as a powerful and lasting testimony. After his death in 2011, he is remembered as a hero within the Somali Christian community. His memory is celebrated through heartfelt poetry written by Somali Christian poets and through songs performed by well-known Somali Muslim artists. This interdisciplinary and interfaith collaboration demonstrates his profound influence across religious lines, reflecting the community spirit he promoted, which was centered on compassion, love, and understanding.

The following five Somali poems, composed by three Somali Christians, serve to commemorate his legacy. While translations may not fully encapsulate the original poetic beauty and essence, they nevertheless communicate the core meanings and sentiments expressed in the original compositions in the Somali language.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ All the poetry in this chapter was previously published in the series, *Maansada Masiixa: Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry*, in which its editor is Aweis A. Ali.

Axmed Xayle Geerida Ku Timid

Aweis A. Ali

*Axmed Xayle geerida ku timid
Ee galbisay manta
Geyigeena waxay uba ahayd
Guuldariyo hooge
Nabadoon gar gala buu ahaa
Geesi gacan wayne
Agoon gaawa maran baynu nahay
Ginina aan haysan
Afar uu gob ku ahaa balaan
Goobta ka caddeeyo*

*Dadkoo gees u kala boodayoo
Nabadu geed fuushay
Hubkoo laysu guranahayoo
Gawrac laysla maagay
Garaad iyo islaan iyo malaaq
Midiba gees raacay
Isagoon gabanahayn haddana
Ridayn gartii eexo
Geeshkii gulufka u fadhiyay
Qoloba gaarkeeda
Garansiyyay inay kala galbadaan
Nabadu waa guul e*

*Nin ragoo gabanno uu dhalay
Uu gambo u waayay
Gurigiisu uu maran yahoo
Gaaridi ay yaabtay
Gurbood aan wax garano aqoon
Gaajo lagu seexdo
Axmed Xayle yaa loo guda
Guriga kiisahe
Wixii guule siiyay buu yira
Buuxso gacantaada*

*Cilmi kii la garan waayo oo
Galti bixin waydo
Isagaa loo gayn jiray xaajadii
Garasho loo waayo
Jaamacado nin galay buu ahaa
Oo gunaanadaye
Masaladi la garan waayay buu
Gaanka ka caddayne*

The Ahmed Haile We Lost

Aweis A. Ali

The death that took away Ahmed Haile
Which made him disappear today
It meant catastrophic disaster
For our motherland
He was an elder and a peacemaker
Known for his courage and generosity
We are now poor orphans
We are indeed empty-handed
Let me mention four things
For which he was respected

People girding up their loins for war
When peace vanishes away
People arming themselves to the teeth
To be ready for a mass slaughter
When chiefs, elders, and other leaders
Add fuel to the fire
He was there fearless and determined
Just and impartial
He counseled the warring factions
Reasoning with each group
Convincing them to disband
For victory is in true coexistence

A father unable to feed his own children
Who is penniless and empty-handed
When there is no food in his home
His wife is bewildered
Little hungry children
Unable to sleep
That is when Ahmed Haile's home
Receives such destitute visitors
He gives to them sacrificially
Until they are not hungry anymore

When an academic solution is needed
And novices are confused
That is when they called him
For he was well-prepared
He attended a number of universities
And graduated with honors
He provided the solution needed
With clarity and eloquence

*Aqoon gaamurtay buu lahaa
Garasho dheeruhuye*

*Kaftan aan gedaafe lahayn
Gogosha uu joogo
Googaalaysi iyo sheeko ay
Guud caddu bilowdo
Gebi aftahan intii isu fishaa
Goobta wax ka sheegto
Guurow iyo wixii gabay halkaa
Geeraar laga sheego
Gebagebada isagaa lahaa
Guubaabiyo sheeko*

*Maantase haddii uu galbaday
Waa xaq geeriduye
Nebiyadii Eebbaheen ee go'uu
Gogol la joogaaye
Inna sida gobti yaan u caban
Guulaha awoodda le
Ummadduu gargaarka u aha
Yaa guhaad badane
Geyigooda nabad uga yeel
Goor iyo ayaanba*

The wise man we lost
Was well educated

When it was time for lighthearted jokes
And he is there with the people
Elders start with riddles and stories
These are the respected sages
When all the gifted people speak
In idioms with a figurative meaning
Poems with evocative qualities
Are well recited
The conclusion was rightfully his
With stories and commendations

But he left us today
For all will die as ordained by God
He is fellowshiping today
With the departed prophets of God
And we mourn in dignity
For God is almighty and powerful
The nation whose succor he was
Is in great anguish today
God, bestow peace and stability
On our motherland

XOG WARRAN

Aweis A. Ali

*Xalay aniga oo ladi
Xayndaabka hooygiyo
Xeradeena jooga*

*Riyo xiiso badan loo
Oon weli xusuusto
Xaakim ila wadaagee*

*Axmed Xaylihi tegay
Xigmad badane weeye
Ee Xaakim oofsaday*

*Xaajaggal ahaayee
Xushmo nagu lahaayee
Aad loo xurmayn jiray*

*Xamar iga waraystoo
Sida xaalku uu yahay
Xuduudaha dalkoo dhane*

*Xornimaan u hadalnoo
Xaal waraysi dheer baan
Xaraf xaraf u siiyee*

*Xiisad iyo colaadiyo
Abaar xaaluf keentaa
Kumanaan xijaabteen*

*Xagaldaacday xaafoo
Xigaalkaa is dilayee
Waa xaraarug xaalkuye*

*Wuxuu Xayle igu yiri
Qof hadduu xisaabtami
Xasuuq iyo ma gaysteen*

DISCOURSE

Aweis A. Ali

I was sleeping last night
Home was cozy and safe
I was home with family

A fascinating dream
Of which I still remember
The Lord shared with me

The departed Ahmed Haile
The sagacious one
Whom the Lord took away

He was a peacemaker
Whom we honored well
He was widely respected

Asked me about Mogadishu
He inquired about any updates
About the entire country

We communicated freely
I gave him the updates
In great details

Conflicts and wars
Devastating droughts
Thousands have perished

The situation is out of hand
Brothers killing one another
The condition is really dire

Haile said to me
If someone is responsible
He will not commit genocide

*Xeebaha sun kuma shubo
Dhirta xaaluf kama dhigo
Xoolo dhedig ma dhoofsheen*

*Dalka muu xumeeyeen
Xabaalaha ma faagteen
Xadgudub ma gaysteen*

*Abti laga xishoon jiray
Xoolihiis ma booben
Xinjirtiis ma daadsheen*

*Wuxuu yiri xumaantaas
Colaadaha xad dhaafkaa
Xal ayaa uun loo heli*

*Xilahaan ka tegay iyo
Ilma Xayle oo idil
Xaalkooda ii sheeg*

*Marrastaadi Xayloow
Xaakim baa ilaalshoo
Way ku wada xusaayaan*

*In ay Xariga Eebe
Ay xoog u haystaan
Reer Xayle gaarsii*

*Adigey xilsaaraye
Anigoo ku soo xigan
Xasil yaan u gaarsiin*

*Isagoo xaraga socon
Ku xerooyay janadii
Xeeldheeraheeni*

He does not poison the seas
He does not deforest
He does not export female livestock

He does not injure the country
He does not desecrate graves
He would not commit violations

The venerated maternal uncles
He does not rob them
Or shed their blood

He said these abhorrent actions
The endless civil wars
Will one day cease

The beloved wife I left behind
All the Haile children
Tell me about them

O Haile, your entire family
The Lord is protecting them
They fondly talk about you

To hold fast to the rope of God
Without any distractions
Convey the Haile family

O Haile, you sent me
As a messenger
I will quote you with accuracy
I will convey this message

Haile strolled away with dignity
And returned to paradise
The cherished expert

Xerow Xusuus Mudan

Mohamed Gurhan

*Xigaalkii nabaddee
Xiisaddiisa samihiyo
Xal uhelid masiibada
Xarafkeeda dhigayee
Xarbigaa colaadaha
Xaladhaleyda raadshee
Xumahoo la diidiyo
Xurguf ka dhawrsiga
Xaal in loo mastuuriyo
Xaajo-gal ahaayoow
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbiiisee
Xulashada walaalaha
Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

*Xulafadiisa Eebbahay
Xiise kii u badiyee
Xajinaayay qirashada
Xarafkii Waqiisee
Xubbigiis ahaayeen
Xadhiggiisa gooynee
Xarakada Masiixiyo
Xamdigiisa badiyee
U xadreeyay dhaaxee
Xubin wayn ka qaatoow
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbiiisee
Xulashada walaalaha
Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

*Xaasaan miskiiniyo
Xafaare taag daran
Xanfaf nimuu helay
Xantiire qoys galay*

He is Worthy of Remembrance

English translation by Aweis A. Ali

The cherisher of peace
You taught benevolence
How to solve conflicts
You taught them all
In times of war and enmity
You counseled the fighters
You told them to reject evil
To shun clashes altogether
To strive toward reconciliation
You were a peacemaker
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters
You were a true liberator
You are respected amongst us
We will always remember you

You were a patriarch
You loved your people
You were strong in your faith
And the Word of God
You loved with all your heart
You did not abandon any of these
Among the believers
You praised the Lord
You praised the Lord with hymns
You were the pillar of the community
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters
You were a true liberator
You are respected among us
We will always remember you

Those who are really poor
The weak and the destitute
The unfortunate ones
The poor and the insolvent

*Isagoon u kala xilan
Xurquunkii daruuriga
Xagagab wuxuu helo
Kii u xaasinaayee
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbihiisee
Xulashada walaalaha
Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

*Xigtada kuwuu baday
Xalli yidhi amuurtood
Xinif iyaguna qabay
Xubintii laxaadiyo
Kaa xuubshay xooggii
Lama aad xintaminee
Xeerkii Injiilkiyo
Suu Xaakimkeen qiray
Xabadka kii ka saaree
Xugmay caafintoodow
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbihiisee
Xulashada walaalaha
Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

*Xaruntiisa reerkiyo
Hadba xerada uu dego
Kii loo xoomi jirayee
Xirgida cuqaashiyo
Xaajoodka sheekhyada
Xigmadoo la qaybsado
Xifaalaynta guudiyo
Xogwaranka mooyee
Iyadoon xanaaq jirin
Doodda xaalín jirayow
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbihiisee
Xulashada walaalaha*

You were impartial
You gave away your daily bread
Even the money you needed
You gave freely with love
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters
You are a true liberator
You are respected among us
We will always remember you

His own beloved clan
Whom he wanted to help
They were filled with enmity
Even though your own leg
You lost it in the process
You sought no revenge
The guidelines of the gospel
The way God taught us
You forgave them
It was unconditional forgiveness
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters
You are a true liberator
You are respected among us
We will always remember you

Your own home
Or wherever you were
People flocked to you
The wise clan elders
Sheiks brought cases to you
The sagacity you shared
The lighthearted discourse
Confiding in one another
Without frustration
You settled all issues
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters

*Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

*Xile Maarta Xayliyo
Xayi Afraxii curad
Xubbidaa Safiya iyo
Xuur Geeddi yarihii
Qoyskaad xannaaniyo
Xoojinaysay kaalmada
Rabbigaa xawilayee
Xuska adiga mooyee
Xagal daaci maayaan
Ka xijaaban baalluhu
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbihiisee
Xulashada walaalaha
Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

*Xaggii loo badnaa iyo
Xudinteeda aakhiro
Xukunkiisa Eebbaha
Xalaal baad ahaydoo
Xisbigii Masiix iyo
Xaqii aad rumaysaa
Xisaabtaada qaadayo
Ku xarootay jannadee
Xugmadiisa Rabbigaan
Xallad naawilaynaa
Xayow Axmed Xayloow
Xerowgii Eebbihiisee
Xulashada walaalaha
Xilbax loo nisbeeyee
Xurmo nagu lahaayee
Xusuusteenna mudanow*

You are a true liberator
You are respected among us
We will always remember you

Martha Haile, your wife
Brilliant Afrah, your first-born
Your beloved Sophia
Lad Geeddi, the youngest
The family you loved
You supported for life
The Lord will take care of them
They will keep your memory alive
Nothing bad will happen to them
They are protected from evil
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters
You are a true liberator
You are respected among us
We will always remember you

You departed from us
You went to the hereafter
In the Lord's judgment
You are found to be a saint
You belong to the Messiah
You believed in the Lord
The Lord is your advocate
You are at home in Heaven
And we wait for the Lord
In faith and prayerfulness
Ahmed Haile, eternal life is yours
You are a disciple of God
You witnessed to brothers and sisters
You are a true liberator
You are respected among us
We will always remember you

AXMED KALE ALLOW KEEN

Faisal Hassan Jama

*Dad Allow ogaada
Adhaxdaan u liitaa
Afka yaa i awdan
Aarankaa dur duriyee
Anigoo ildaran baan
Joogaa Itoobiya*

*Alla yaabkan nagu dhacay
Allaylkii markay tahay
Arrin ban la taahaa
Miyaan kuu imaadaa
Axmedow walaalow*

*Addis baan ku raagee
Agagaarka laabtaad
Axmadew ku taalaa
Ku amaani maayee
Arrinkan an leeyahay
In uu runtey yahay
Aadmigoo dhan baa garan*

*Anna daacadnimadii
Waan yara asqaysnoo
Abaar baan dareemaa
Abaal badan inoo gashay
Abid aanan gudi karin
Balse adi xusuustaa
Waannu xusi doonnaa*

*Addis dacadadeedaan
Ubax kuugu beeree
Alfa iyo Omegaha
Aad agtiisa joogtaa
Arrinkayga garanoo
Araxdaan ka jabanahay
Geeridaada awgeed*

Balse aniga iimaan

GOD, GIVE US ANOTHER AHMED

English translation by Aweis A. Ali

Let all people know
That my back aches
I am unable to articulate
Only the healthy walk well
I live in Ethiopia
Unwell and awfully sick

We are in utter shock
Even in the darkness of night
I grieve because of your death
May I come and join you
O Ahmed, my brother?

I have been in Addis too long
In the center of my heart
That is where I keep you
I am not lionizing you
What I am stating
The veracity of it
Is known to all people

I am being honest
Fatigue has seized me
I feel famine in me
You bestowed favor upon us
We will never be able to repay it
But your memory
We will always commemorate

In the environs of Addis
I planted flowers in your memory
The Alpha and the Omega
In whose presence you dwell
Knows my deep anguish
My backbone is broken
Because of your death

But I have a Faith

*Yaa Ilaah isiiyee
Muslimiinta gaanka ah
Aan Eebe garanayn
Kuu ooyi adigaan
Aad ugu ilmeeyaa
In ay Erayga raacaan
Injiilka ay rumeeyaan*

*Balse adiga Axmedow
Ardaydaad daryeeshaa
Amaan kuu hibaysee
Intii aad arsaaqday
Ama aad difaacday
Cilmi aad u tira badan
Uurkooda gelisaan
Ku ilaabin abidkood*

*Adna inan Ilaahoo
Eed la' baad ahaydoo
Ilaahay agtiisiyo
Aadanaha kaleetaba
Waad ku eed la'dahay
Dhammaan agahooda*

*Injiilkaad akhrisay baa
Ummadeena gaaroo
Nabadaad dhigaysaa
Aan u wada riyaagnoo
Oon kugu xusuusani*

*Ilaah baan baryaayaa
Axmed waa na deeqee
Haddii uu inaga tegay
Axmed kale Allow keen
Innoo dhiga Injiilka
Agoontana difaaci
Amba qaadi nabadana
Aargoosan abidkiis
Cafis lagu aqoonsado
Aamiinna ila dhaha
Ilaah yaa aqbaliye*

Given to me by God
The multitudes of Muslims
Who do not know God
Who are lamenting for you
I shed tears for them in prayer
That they embrace the Word
Accepting the Gospel

But you, O Ahmed
The students you educated
Dedicate praises to you
All the people you fed
Or the ones you defended
The indispensable knowledge
You instilled in their hearts
These will never forget you

You are a son of God
Blameless in every way
The Creator Judge
And the created judges
Declare you blameless
In unanimous agreement

The Gospel you proclaimed
Has penetrated our nation
The peace you taught
We accepted it with delight
We will always remember you

I beseech God with all my heart
Ahmed has blessed us
Since he departed from us
O God, give us another Ahmed
To teach us the Gospel
To defend the orphans
To maintain peace
Who will never take revenge
Whose trademark is forgiveness
Say "Amen" with me
For God to accept this prayer

GUHAAD

Aweis A. Ali

*Geeridu xaq weeyee
Intuu uumay Guulana
Nafta geliyay oo idil
Way wada go'aayaan
Goorti ay ahaataba*

*Anigoona taa garan
Guhaad iyo caloolyow
Gocashaan dareemaa
Gama'ii la ii diid
Gogoshaanba hiifaa*

*Muu gaboobin Xaylee
Guxush muuna noqon weli
Mana uu gu' waynayn
Gadh madaw han qaadiyo
Geesi buu ahaayee*

*Axmed Xaylihii go'ay
Nabaddoonki guushiyo
Gobanimo u dhaladkiyo
Gacanwaynidiisaa
Qabigayga kaba go'in*

*Geeridiisi awgeed
Gaawaheenu maranoo
Guunyana ma aan lihin
Afar uu gob ku ahaa
Goobta yaanba soo dhigi*

*Dadkoo gees u kala baxay
Geed fuushay nabadduna
Laysu guran gantaalada
Gourac laysla maagay
Gardaradu hanqaadday*

*Isagoon gabbanahayn
Ridahayn gar eexaad
Geeshkiyo gulufkii*

ANGRY AND HELPLESS

Aweis A. Ali

*Death is a divine decree
All God's creatures
The creatures he gave life
They will all-day
It is just a matter of time*

*I already know this
I feel pain and sadness
I sense the immense loss
I am unable to sleep
Insomnia is my middle name*

*Haile was not an old man
He was not frail with age
He was not that old
He was still young
A brave man, indeed.*

*The Ahmed Haile we lost
The victorious peacemaker
He was of noble birth
A generous man, indeed
I am unable to let him go*

*Because of his death
We are very broke
Without livestock
Let me state four things
He was known for*

*When people gird up for wars
When peace vanishes
People get armed to the teeth
To slaughter one another
Aggression becomes the norm*

*Without any fear
With no injustice in him
The warring factions*

*Uu qolaba gaarkeed
Garansiiyay nabaddoo*

*Gabanadi uu dhalay
Gambo kaan u haynin
Gurigiisu maran yahay
Gaaridiisi yaabtay
Gurboodkiisi gaajoon*

*Gacal iyo danlayba
Axmed Xayle gurigiis
Yaa loo gurtaaye
Wixii Guulle siiyuu
Gacmaha u buuxshaa*

*Cilmigaan la garanayn
Galti bixin waydoo
Isagaaba garan jiray
Gaamurtay aqoontiis
Jaamacado yuu galay*

*Cilmi yuu gunaanaday
Tii la garan waayana
Ka caddeeyay giirkee
Aqoontiisa gaarka ah
Waa garasha dheeree*

*Kaftan aan gef lahayn
Isku riixo gacalku
Googaalaysi gaariyo
Guud caddu bilowdo
Goobtuna camiran tahay*

*Geeraar aftahaniyo
Guurowga lala dhacay
Gabayadu bilowdaan
Gebagebada isagaa
Guubaabada lahaayee*

*He would reason with them
To put down their arms*

*The empty-handed man
Unable to feed his children
As his home is devoid of food
And his wife is bewildered
And his children are famished*

*Loved ones and the rest
Ahmed's home is the destination
They all go there for help
Ahmed would give them
Whatever he could give*

*When knowledge is needed
The unlearned are helpless
Ahmed was the expert
He had an immense knowledge
He graduated from universities*

*He gained so much education
Anything unknown
He would explain clearly
He has special knowledge
He was a farsighted man*

*When lighthearted jokes
The loved ones unleash
Special riddles
The elders speak
Amidst multitudes of people*

*When eloquent poetry
The much-loved poesy
When poems are recited
Ahmed had the last word
He was an encourager*

*Maantase galbadayoo
Geeridu xaq weeye
Nebiyadi horuu go'ay
Yuu gogol la joogaa
Guullaha agtiisee*

*Ummadduu gargaarkiyo
Garabkuu ahaana
Geyigooda nabad sii
Gees mari colaadaha
Goor iyo ayaanba*

*But today Ahmed is gone
Death is a divine decree
Ahmed is relaxing with
The prophets who preceded him
They are all with God*

*The nation he supported
The communities he stood with
Make their country a peaceful one
Divert all enmities from them
Do this for them all the time*

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

Rev. Aweis Ali, PhD, is an outspoken African missiologist, poet, and paremiologist. He has an impressive work history, having previously worked with employers such as the Somali Government, EU, UNICEF, UNOSOM, and Samaritan's Purse. Aweis became a follower of Christ in 1986, thanks to the ministry of SIM.

Aweis is a student of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and is the first person to ever translate the Qur'an into English and Somali (with transliteration). His translations are set to be published by 2025. He is also the first Somali churchman to earn a ministry-related doctoral degree. Aweis is a multifaceted author, editor, lyricist, and hymnodist. He is a passionate advocate for ministering to nomadic pastoralists.

Aweis is a recognized expert on the persecuted church in the Muslim world, with a particular focus on the Somali Church. He has been ministering in the Muslim world for over 30 years and has lived and served in various world areas, including the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and the United States.

Aweis completed his Bachelor of Theology degree at the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa, his Master of Divinity degree at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO, and holds a Doctor of Philosophy from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia."

Aweis is the Series Editor of "Maansada Masiixa" (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry) and the Editor in Chief of the Somali Bible Society Journal.

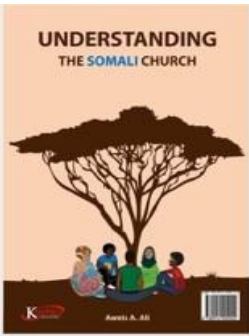
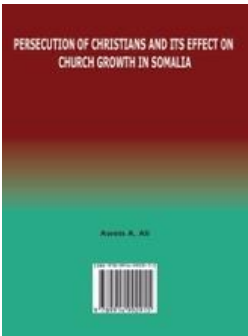
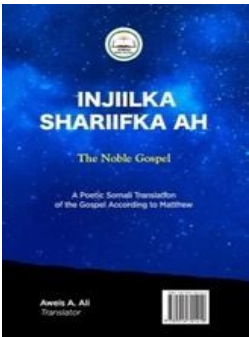
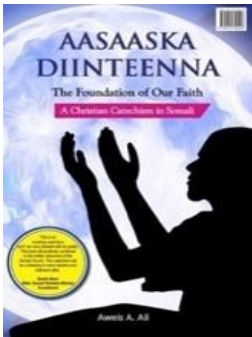
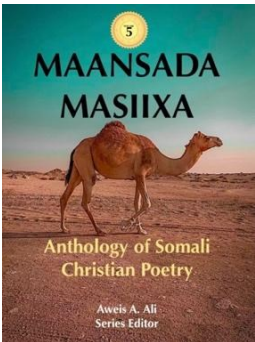
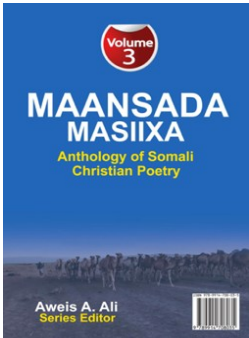
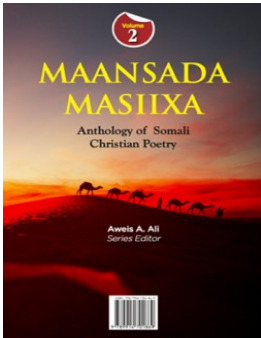
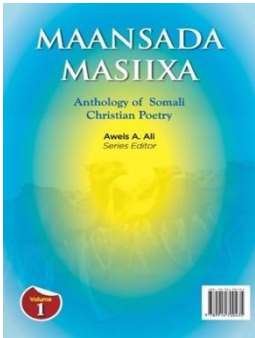
Aweis' research interests include persecution of Christians, church history and church growth in the Muslim world, Waaqism, Judaism,

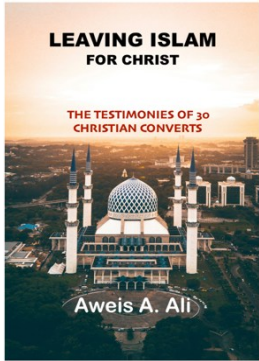
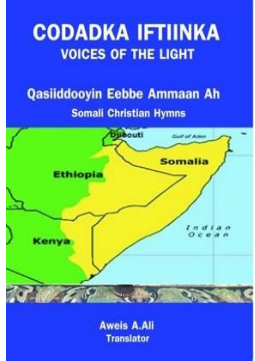
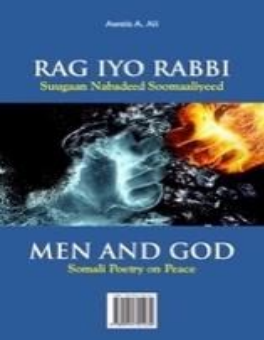
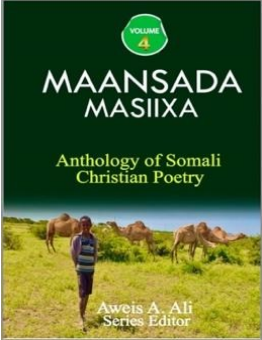
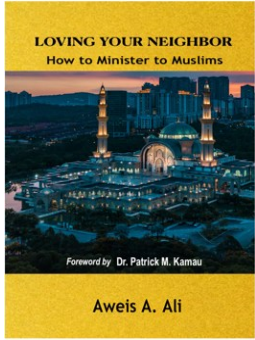
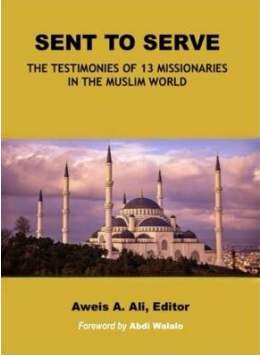
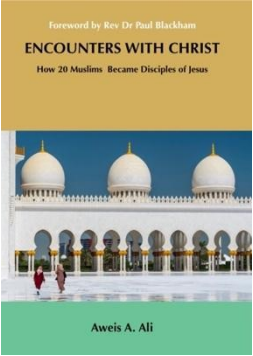
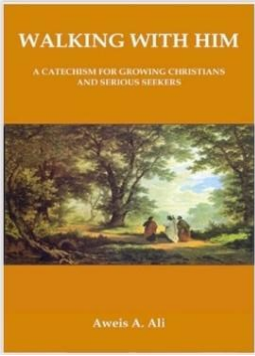
Christianity, and Islam in the Somali Peninsula, global paremiology, and Somali poetry.

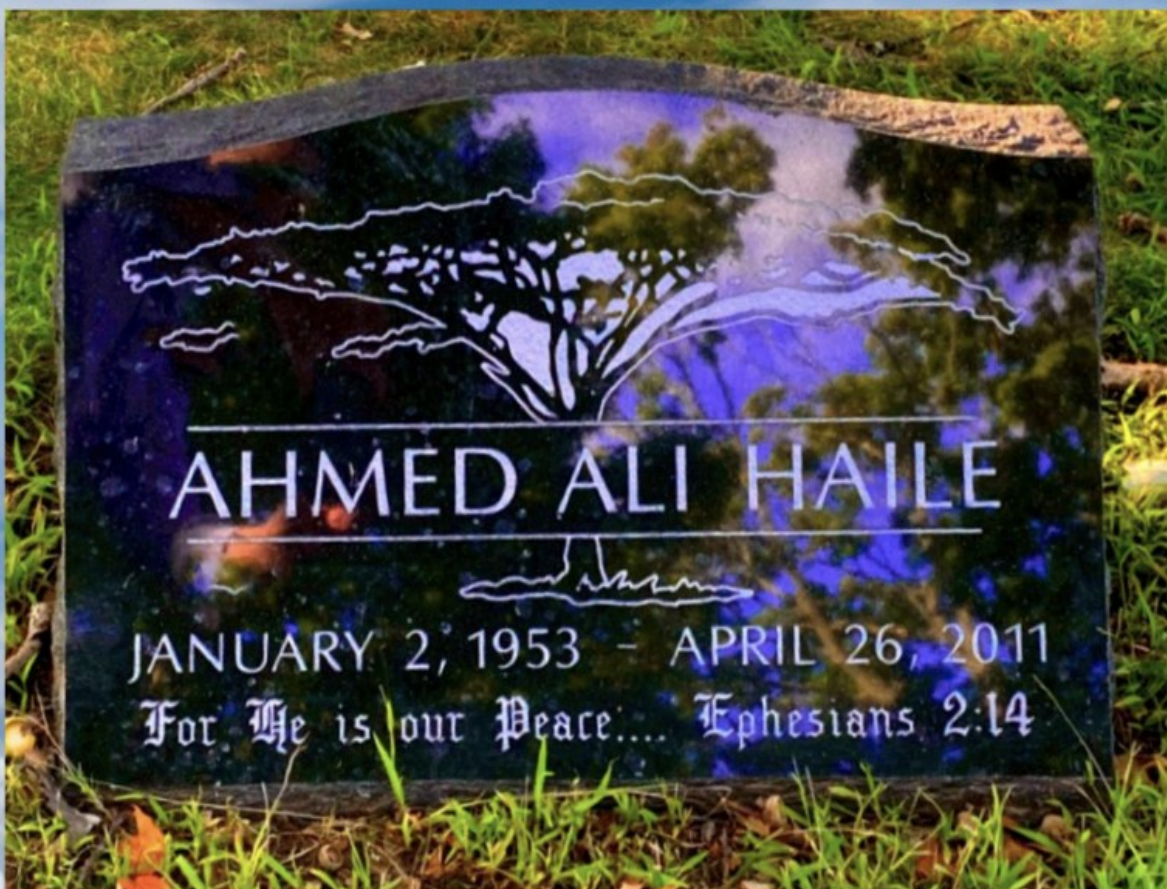
The editor can be reached at *AAli@AweisAli.com* or *amazingwisdom@gmail.com*

OTHER BOOKS

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