

## THROUGH THE NARROW GATE

A story of perseverance and courage



I got to know K through shopping regularly at the local market – I like to meet women there as it helps with my language learning. As our acquaintance developed, I made a special effort to go to her stall - we exchanged greetings and talked a little. One time she told me that she would love to learn to read and wondered if I could help her. I wasn't sure, but agreed that if she were able to meet me two or three times a week, then I'd try.



**Friendship grows**  
K is a busy woman, working at the market and looking after her husband, seven children and two grandchildren (who live with her). Amazingly though, she kept all our appointments and despite the considerable difficulties getting to grips with the learning, she persevered. Right from the start, I would end every lesson by reading K a passage from the Old Testament. This helped me to improve my ability to read in her language and was also to introduce her to the word of God. Later I would move to the New Testament. Over time, our sessions become very precious to us both,

and we shared more deeply with each other and about what we had read.

### **Bitter poverty**

One day I felt I should see where she lived so paid her a visit. I was startled to see her spartan mud hut home and their impoverished existence. Soon afterwards, I left the field for a period in my homeland. After several months, I returned and on my first visit back to the market, K fell around my neck; she was so glad I had come back. Then she told me that her house had collapsed during the rainy season. Miraculously none of her family were harmed, but they had lost everything. I went to where she had been taken in by a neighbour and was moved to tears - she and all her family were sleeping on the bare floor. I did what I could to help with basic things, such as some foam mats to sleep on.

A little while later, K became seriously ill, so I set out to see her. She had a high fever and she clung to me tightly, sobbing. She thought she was going to die, and was desperately distressed about

what would happen to her children. I said: "No, you will live!", then prayed for her and arranged for her to be taken to hospital. Eventually K recovered and resumed her work and our reading lessons.

### **The narrow gate**

At this time I had begun reading from the New Testament and had come to the story of the narrow gate and the wide gate. I tried to explain what Jesus meant by this before moving on. Then at Christmas, to my great surprise, K asked if I'd take her to the Christmas service at church, so we went to church together that Christmas Day. After the sermon, we sat quietly on a bench in the yard. There she said "I want to go through the narrow gate now". At first I wasn't sure what she meant, but then remembered what we had read together, so I said "Do you mean that you want to follow Jesus?" "Yes", she replied. It was very moving, very special, so we continued to meet three times a week, reading the Bible together and to pray in her language.

### **Dreams of Jesus**

It seems that for a long time, God had been preparing her to receive the gospel. She had seen

Isa (Jesus) several times in dreams, without understanding who He was. One day she told me that Isa had appeared to her again asking "Would you like me to forgive your sins?" "Yes", she replied, and then she woke up, with a tear-drenched face. Another time Isa said to her "I want you to let yourself be washed". She was confused by this, so I explained baptism to her as best I could. Then she decided that she wished to be baptised.



For a few weeks we considered this: on the one hand we did not want to delay baptism, but on the other we wondered how to do this wisely without drawing negative attention to ourselves: many people around K would disapprove. There was also the

question of what would happen to her in a society where women are not free to act independently. I asked if there were a man in the family whom she could tell what she had seen and heard in her dreams, and give permission even if he himself did not agree with her. She thought of her husband and approached him. I was amazed at her courage, and then

her husband's, as he surprisingly gave his consent. So shortly after that we filled a children's pool in our yard, and after a simple sharing of her testimony, K was

baptised by two mature believers from her own people group.

#### Opposition

Since then though, K has

experienced much hostility despite people not being aware of the actual baptism itself. Some uncles were especially nasty - cursing her, threatening to kill her, and hitting her with a stick. They have also excluded her from having any access to the extended family. Her neighbours no longer let her children watch TV with their children and refuse to let her get water from them, and she is bullied in the market place. Yet amazingly K endures all of this in silence and with courage, forgiving these people and even praying for them.

It is not an easy thing to follow Jesus in a Muslim culture. We would like to support K wisely and encouragingly. I pray and hope that God will continue to lead her and protect her as she seeks to follow Him.

## REACHING MUSLIMS JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

Christ's death by crucifixion is denied by most Muslims, the common belief being that Allah rescued Jesus, taking Him up to paradise, and substituted someone else in His place giving him the facial appearance of Jesus. This is generally believed to be Judas Iscariot. However, this traditional interpretation of 'they slew Him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them' (surah 4:157-159) isn't wholly convincing. Alternative interpretations are that the Jews killed Jesus, but did not know Him to be their Messiah, or that the Jews killed Jesus but cannot take the credit: it was Allah's doing.

Believing that Jesus did not die poses a possible dilemma as it suggests that Jesus is superior to Mohammed, who Muslims acknowledge was not rescued from death. However, this passage is also linked to a saying of

Mohammed about Jesus returning to earth, establishing Islam as the one true religion, and then dying, before being raised on the Last Day. Not all Muslims believe this though. For example the Ahmadiyya sect believe that Jesus was crucified, but then revived and went to live in India. Elsewhere in the Qur'an Jesus talks clearly of his death: 'peace unto me the day I was born, the day I died and was taken to heaven' (surah 19:33)

Talking openly about the Easter story is a good opportunity to ask your Muslim friend about their own beliefs around Jesus – remembering to show respect to them and be genuinely curious. Questions could be explored with them such as: if God really wanted to rescue his prophet, why do it secretly? Surely a show of power would have been more awesome and convincing? If the



substitute only bore Jesus' face, why didn't any of the witnesses, including his own mother, notice that it wasn't Jesus' body, and why didn't the substitute himself shout out that there'd been a mistake? When looking at the statements recorded in the Gospels, spoken from the cross, these can only have fitted Jesus - only Jesus would have prayed while on the cross, or shown deep concern for His mother, and promised salvation to the criminal executed alongside Him. If we have respectfully listened to their beliefs about the crucifixion, hopefully our Muslim friend will listen as we share what we believe, that Christ's death was a necessary part of God's plan of redemption for all who would believe, and that we too believe He is alive today.

# MY UNFORGETTABLE INTRODUCTION TO MUSLIM MISSION



Hester was looking for a programme that would comprehensively inform, equip, and prepare her for mission to Muslims. Here she tells us of her time on the ReachAcross Internship in the UK.

What are the differences between the Muslim faith and my own? How can we build bridges between us? How can I really get to know and make friends with Muslims? These, and many other questions, accompanied me as I started my internship with ReachAcross.

Right from the start I was fascinated with the rich variety: the many different Muslim people groups, new exotic smells, delicious foreign foods, strange tongues being spoken. There were many different colours, unfamiliar dress, the call to prayer from the loudspeakers over the mosque. So many things were new and different.

We were received and cared for by ReachAcross mission workers who were amazingly warm and demonstrated gracious hospitality. We had plenty of opportunities to engage with Muslims: at mums-and-tots, kids classes, youth work, international student meetings, men's drop-ins, door-to-door evangelism, book-table ministry - an almost endless-seeming menu of programmes were available.



We also had to think and reflect on the differences between Islam and Christianity, and watched

the apologists at Speakers' Corner, weighing for ourselves the pros and cons of different styles of evangelism. We rolled up our sleeves and got to work by building practical bridges, as we renovated rooms that would serve as places to meet Muslims, or picked up litter on the streets where the immigrant community live, or helped with sports outreach and recreational activities. We learnt to open our hearts to Muslims, by beginning with times of team prayer: prayer was the key to everything else.

My time of internship was full of the sort of experiences and challenges that form and shape one's life. There's a lot I could mention, but I think the three most important aspects have been:

1. God. As I spoke with believers from Muslim backgrounds, I saw how God works so individually and uniquely in each person, and what it means to be freed to follow Christ and be a child of God.
2. Prayer. It really is amazing how easy it is to speak with Muslims about faith, and pray for them. One day we were going from shop to shop, and offered to pray for them, and many responded positively - I was astounded.
3. The mission workers themselves. I was deeply impressed with the faithfulness and love - how they have laboured decades among

Muslims and shared their faith with them. What they shared with me about their own experiences, joys, and challenges will stay with me.

So what remains after my internship with ReachAcross? While I've definitely been shaped by new knowledge and experiences, most importantly, I now have an answer to my question of how can a person best relate to Muslims and invite them into a relationship with Jesus, and it is this: 'pray for them, love them, and always plant a seed of the truth of the gospel.'



**THE REACHACROSS INTERNSHIP** is an extensive, flexible programme that can be tailored around each participant's needs, whether this is for a formal block placement or simply for personal mission experience. The programme can run from four weeks to two years, although its sister programme for international students, Mission Assist, is capped to six months. For more details about either programme, email Steven Green on: [ukcontact@reachacross.net](mailto:ukcontact@reachacross.net)



# HARD GROUND

Hank has just completed his time of service as an English teacher in one of the Arab states, and shares some of his experiences.

This deeply conservative country presents significant challenges spiritually, culturally and personally to the Christian mission worker, and unsurprisingly has a high mission attrition rate. The strict form of Salafi Islam practiced here is highly zealous in teaching against the gospel and Christian beliefs. For example in its promotion of the Qur'anic account of the crucifixion that claims that it was not Jesus on the cross, but Judas with the likeness of Jesus.

Living in isolation, particularly as a single person, is also something that I hadn't anticipated affecting me so deeply. Conversely, I noticed that although married missionaries did not suffer the same levels of isolation, they were much more cautious in their mission activities as there was more at risk if a job were lost as a consequence of proselytising. You can only access this country through having a commercial job.

With these observations, on balance, I think that single people

are probably best-placed to do the most effective gospel work here, but it's not for the faint-hearted. As well as isolation, unmarried mission workers are under stress partly because being single is a source of shame in this culture, and also because singles are pressurized by the gay community. Gay culture is one of the unspoken facets of the Muslim world that is little known about or acknowledged, but very present.

In this stronghold of Islam, I was very aware that I was tilling hard ground. In my spare time, I attempted to reach the Bedouin out in the desert. I visited them many times but they were firmly closed to the gospel. In my job, I faced death threats from some students. Other students pretended to have knowledge of Jesus and the New Testament to try to gain as much advantage from me as possible. In one case I spent a long time teaching one young man the story of redemption beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. I was deceived into

thinking he was a believer until I grew suspicious, and he eventually admitted he did not believe in any of it.

I also became deeply concerned for the women in this country. They are locked in, chaperoned, and often don't even have access to public spaces (e.g. being shuttled about via back entrances and service lifts rather than be allowed to wander through public foyers, or see everyday sights and wonders). They have very little opportunity of being exposed to the gospel.

My time in this country is now over, and the difficulties I experienced only go to emphasise how important it is that God's people, with the right support, preparation, and an obedient heart, should continue to bring the Good News to this land. Although I have no amazing testimonies to share, I know that my service for the Lord has not been in vain. After all, as it has been said: you cannot have a harvest if you did not sow any seed.

## Ways you can get more involved:

- Pray for us using our monthly prayer updates
- Give regular or one-off gifts to the ongoing work of ReachAcross, specific projects or workers
- Invite ReachAcross to speak to your church
- Shop online through [theGivingMachine.co.uk](http://theGivingMachine.co.uk) nominating ReachAcross as your chosen cause
- Select ReachAcross as your chosen Amazon Smile charity when shopping on Amazon.co.uk
- Consider serving with us, long, short term or Gap year

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