How would the Lord Jesus share the Gospel with an Arab Muslim?

I would like you to look at two examples of how the Lord Jesus communicated with people from a Middle Eastern background.

John Chapter 4 – The Woman at the Well

The prejudice and resulting wall of misunderstanding between 1st century Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day was similar to that between Muslims and people from a Christian background. There are many parallels between the faith of the woman of Samaria and the faith of our Muslim friends.

Both Samaritan religion and Islam have their roots in Judaism. While there has been a conscious alteration of certain external forms, the underlying structure of the two faiths has remained similar. The Jews prayed towards Jerusalem. The Samaritans changed the centre of worship to Mt. Gerizim. Muslims originally faced Jerusalem when they prayed, but, during the lifetime of Muhammad, they changed the direction towards Mecca.

The Samaritan woman was looking for the Messiah. (v. 25) Today Shia Muslims are looking for the Mahdi to appear and many Sunnis believe that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, will return.

Both Samaritans and Muslims see religion as a total way of life combining what westernised people call "religion" and "politics" into a unified whole. Both faiths hold many Old Testament patriarchs and prophets in common – e.g. the Samaritan woman speaks of, ***"Our Father Jacob"***. (v. 12) She even understood Jesus to be a prophet. (v. 19) From these and from other parallels between the context of John 4 and the situation in which we find ourselves, we may project from this passage what Jesus would say to a Muslim and consequently what we can say in a similar atmosphere of prejudice and mild hostility.

Before turning to a detailed study of the methods of the Lord Jesus, it is important to note that there is a great danger in concentrating on "methods". Meaningful Christian witness comes more from the genuine and contagious character of your life than from saying all the "correct" things. Yet, as disciples, we all need to learn from Our Master.

The 1st Principle – Communication Costs

"Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about noon. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water …." (v. 6-7)

"Jesus had to pass through Samaria" (v. 4) He planned it that way. He wanted to leave Judaea and return to Galilee. Why did He want to leave Judaea? Possible reasons include:

- He didn't want a premature collision with the Pharisees.
- He didn't want to give the impression of rivalry between John's disciples and His own.
- He "left" – an unusual word not used elsewhere in the New Testament *(atheken)* which means to leave something to itself – to withdraw any control – to back off.

From now on the Lord Jesus would focus His ministry in Galilee. There were two possible routes from Judaea to Galilee:

- Via the east bank of the River Jordan at Jericho at the bottom of the rift valley, then up into the hills of Gilead through some of the villages of the Decapolis and then down the Jabbok river into Galilee near where the Jordan flows out of the Sea of Galilee. Most devout Jews took this route.
- The short way through Samaria – most Jews hated to go this way because they would be contaminated by contact with the Samaritans.

The Lord Jesus chose the Samaritan route. They came to a Samaritan village – called Ashar today but called Shechem in Jesus' day. Today Ashar is a suburb of Nablus. The village is about half a mile (less than a kilometre) north of Jacob's well. Villages in many parts of the Near East are built on hilltops for protection. Jacob's well, in the valley, is one of the few places in Israel where there is no dispute. It is very deep and ~2 metres in diameter. Today it has masonry down to about 3 metres and then goes down through solid rock to about 40 metres before you get to water. Joseph's tomb is about 400 metres from the well.

"***Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, was sitting beside the well."***

The Lord Jesus was tired and deserved to rest, but He realised this woman had a need and He wanted to meet that need. So He was willing to talk to her even though He was tired. We are all very busy. If we are going to help our Muslim friends – to seek to understand them and share our faith with them – we will have to pay the price of spending time with them however tired we may be.

"There came a woman of Samaria to draw water." (v. 7)

What was this woman like?

- She didn't seem to be overly burdened by moral scruples.
- She had a quick mind and a sharp tongue.
- She had a stock of local religious sentiment – a great mixture of truth and error.

I think Jesus enjoyed talking with her! He opened the conversation as soon as she arrived. Why was she at the well at midday when it was hot? Village women usually draw water from wells soon after sunrise and shortly before sunset when it is cooler. Probably she came at this time to avoid the sneers and contemptuous glances of other women. Her lifestyle had probably provided plenty of material for the village gossips.

What were the sources of prejudice? Firstly, she was a woman. Then, as in all the Arab World today, a man did not speak to a strange woman. Secondly she was a Samaritan and He was a Jew. Thirdly, she was a despised sinner. The Lord Jesus had all these areas of prejudice to overcome. In the same way, when Muslims and believers get together to talk much prejudice must be overcome on both sides. The "problem" the Lord Jesus had was to get her to accept what He had to say despite the fact that He was a Jew.

The 2nd Principle – Learn the art of receiving and be vulnerable.

Most of us feel that, as believers, we should give out the Gospel. We have often travelled a long way to do this and we forget that we also need to receive.

"Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'." (v. 7)

It was the Lord Jesus who created water, the oceans, the rivers and the rain cycles. He could have made the water rise up out of the well. He had brought water out of flinty rock for Moses. Satan had challenged Him when He was hungry to make bread from stones. But the Lord Jesus never performed a miracle for His own benefit. He talked about everyday things. Here was a woman who had not come to ask about spiritual things and so the Lord Jesus had to establish a relationship with her. He did this by being willing to make Himself a debtor to this woman so that He might have the opportunity to give her something so much more important.

So on the surface He looked like a needy foreigner rather than the Lord Jesus the Messiah speaking to this very needy woman. If we are always giving, we set up an unnatural situation in which people are repelled. Either we create a situation in which people receive passively with little involvement or more commonly, we make people feel uncomfortable and resentful in some way (remember it is an honour/shame society) because they find themselves under

an obligation to repay us in some way. Consequently, they are not willing to go on receiving. But if we can deliberately place ourselves in positions where we are willing to receive from people, perhaps they will be willing to receive more from us.

One form of receiving involves asking questions. We are often great talkers, but the answers we give are to questions that no-one is asking! Why is it important for us to ask questions?

- As believers we have a genuine concern for people. This is not a gimmick. Asking questions helps us to form a reciprocal relationship with people quickly. If we **genuinely** listen to others they, in turn, will usually be willing to listen to us.

- People like to talk about themselves. As we ask our friends to share their lives and experiences and talk about their problems, a warm relationship is usually established. One result of asking questions can be that a person begins to have **a self-revelation of his/her own needs** without the need for you to point them out.

  For example, if you ask, "What is your experience of God?" and he/she has no experience of God, he/she will realize this. It isn't necessary to point a finger and say, "You don't know God personally". Your friend will usually run out of words about his experience and switch to an academic statement of beliefs and practices. Often he, himself, realises what he has done and his own lack of a real experience of God.

- Ask questions that are centred on a person's experience and need rather than theoretical theological abstractions. Often arguments about such things as the Trinity are a smoke screen enabling a person to hide from any personal involvement or commitment.

  We often find we are having an abstract discussion about a "Christian approach to Islam". But we should not be interested in a "Christian approach to Islam". Islam is a religious system. We should be deeply concerned about sharing **our faith and experiences with God** with our friends who happen to be Muslims. Do you see the difference? We don't speak to systems but to friends. Often people don't believe what the system says they are supposed to believe!

  Find out what your friends think and believe on a one-to-one basis. Don't assume anything. Above all, don't assume that his/her beliefs are a carbon copy of some orthodox theological manual on Islam.

The 3rd Principle – We need to establish social contact with Muslims.

If we want to speak to Muslims about God, we must make friends with them! Join social or sports clubs or spend time in the local coffee shops where you can establish genuine, personal relationships with people.

Notice how Jesus started His conversation with this Samaritan woman. He said, ***"Give me a drink***. He talked about everyday things. Here was a woman who had not come asking about spiritual things and so the Lord Jesus had to establish an "ordinary" relationship with her first. What was her response?

"The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans?' " (v. 10)

She brings up the issue of racial prejudice and gender prejudice. About 500 years before, Assyria had moved the ten Jewish tribes from the Northern Kingdom into captivity up in the Fertile Crescent. It was a clear case of ethnic cleansing. Miscellaneous foreigners were brought from Assyria to settle in Samaria.

There was a generalised Semitic belief that Gods were territorial. So the new immigrants sought to learn about the God of Israel. The Jews in Judaea totally rejected the colonists. But

the Samaritans wanted to imitate the Jews in some ways and this led to a very syncretistic religion. (2 Kings 17:24-29)

Later the Southern Kingdom of Judah experienced the Babylonian captivity. When they returned to the land they found the Samaritans still there. When the returnees started to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans wanted to help. This offer was completely rejected. (Ezra 4:1-5) The Samaritan answer to this rejection was to build their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The Maccabees destroyed this in 108 B.C. So there was a huge amount of enmity and bitter hatred from both sides. It is not surprising that this woman was very suspicious of a Jewish man sweeping away all racial and gender based prejudices! What were His motives? She probably thought they were bad.

The 4th Principle – Be patient.

Hostility that has grown over many years will not be broken down overnight. As a westerner, I need to remember that hostility has not only come from the Arab side to us. There were the Crusades that were conducted with barbaric cruelty. There was the exploitation that took place during the colonial period of the last 200 years. Then there are the recent wars of the last decade or so. All these have left a deep scar on the minds of Arab Muslim people.

The 5th Principle – We need to show we have something that others need or want.

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew <u>the gift of God</u> and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water'."

Notice the Lord Jesus didn't answer her question directly. He shifted her attention to God. ***"If you knew the gift of God …"*** Note the reversal. First, ***"Give me"*** and now the offer of **giving to her** living water. God has a gift for this dear lady and for all who are thirsty. In fact the Lord Jesus told her all that you need to know to obtain salvation!

What is it? "The water of life"

Who controls it? The Lord Jesus does!

How do you get it? Ask Him and you receive "the gift of God".

So many people view God as the one who makes demands on them. This is true of Muslims. In fact the reverse is true, God longs to bless us!

We are fellow human beings with Arab Muslims and we have many common concerns. Does your life show that you have found satisfaction, joy and peace? Do you have a sense of the presence of God in your life? Do you have a calmness in tense situations? If there is nothing in your life that people want, there is not much point in trying to communicate.

The 6th principle – Don't present difficult Biblical concepts and statements until your friend has enough experience and understanding to grasp them.

The woman replied: ***"Are you greater than our father Jacob?"*** (v. 11)

Here is a common heritage for the Samaritan, the Jew and ourselves! It also includes Arab Muslims – "***Our father Jacob"***. We all have our roots in the Old Testament where we can find much on which we **can** agree, before we turn to those areas where honesty demands that we disagree. But note this woman's innate thoughtfulness. (v. 11-12)

Now this Jew goes way up in her estimation. She calls him, 'Sir'. But she is also confused! The well is deep. She has made many trips to it over the years so how can He give her water? He has no bucket. Her thoughts go back ~1700 years to Jacob and his feat of cutting through the rock to make the well! She believes that Jacob was an ancestor – she calls him 'father'. But the Lord Jesus wants to introduce her to His Father who could become Her Father.

The Lord Jesus could have responded to the woman, ***"Yes, I am the Messiah"***. But, He didn't reveal this until much later. If He had asserted His Messiahship too soon, she would have misunderstood His meaning, for the current expectation of both Jews and Samaritans was that the Messiah would be a great earthly ruler who would defeat Rome militarily. So the Lord Jesus postponed this self-revelation until she had enough understanding not only of the title, but also of the job description that went with the title!

Such titles as 'Son of God' would fit into this category. Our Muslim friends misunderstand the Biblical meaning of this title just as many did in the days of the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

The 7th Principle – Don't get entangled in irrelevant academic discussions, but concentrate on the needs of individuals.

Notice the way the Lord Jesus answered the woman's question: ***"Are you greater than our father Jacob?"*** He didn't enter into a discussion on whether He was greater than Jacob or not. He kept the discussion focused on her personal need – "**living water"**.

It is easy to get entangled in fruitless academic arguments – e.g. on The Trinity – instead of concentrating on what it means to have God at work in our lives experimentally changing us and to know the guidance of God in our lives and His power within us.

The 8th Principle – Learn the art of a simple illustration.

"Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life'." (v. 13-14)

The Lord Jesus is clearly using a figure of speech, but she is still thinking in literal terms. She hasn't really understood. So the woman asks for this mysterious water that will take away the necessity of coming daily to the well. Perhaps she was looking for an easier life. She couldn't follow the symbolic illustration of the Lord Jesus, but she did state her dire need and she asked for the water. So now **she** is the one who is asking for a drink!

Good stories convey truth and are easy to remember long afterwards. Jesus showed His understanding of this basic principle in the way He told parables. Until the age of satellite television, the storyteller was the principle entertainer in the towns and villages throughout the Muslim World. In your notebook, collect useful illustrations, parables and proverbs.

The reply the woman gave in verse 15 indicates that her curiosity was aroused and she was experiencing a sense of need. At this point, the Lord Jesus could take her to the next step in touching the root of the problem – the question of sin.

Some examples:

Inherent sin: do you have to tell people to be naughty?

All are sinners: what will happen if the police stop a car driving at night without any lights and the man gives the excuse that his horn is not working?

Usually advice or even the law is not enough to prevent us from sinning. A man might see a pool of water on a hot day. He also sees a sign saying, "No Swimming Allowed!" There may be people there who see him taking off some of his clothes and getting ready to dive in. They may shout to him to warn him that it is very dangerous. But he jumps in anyway with deadly consequences. Honey in a jar and oil for your car in a jar look very similar but changing the label doesn't change the content.

The 9th principle – Try to communicate a sense of sin.

" 'Go and call your husband.....' The woman answered Him, 'I have no husband'. Jesus said to her, 'You are right .... for you have had five husbands and he whom you now have is not your husband'."

As soon as the woman reveals her receptiveness to the gift, the Lord Jesus points out the cause of her quenchless thirst – her sin. The poor woman immediately backs off from a sensitive issue and tries to insulate herself from exposure.

In effect, the Lord Jesus said, 'If you want the water of life, then, like a surgeon, I must put my knife on that malignant growth of sin in your life which is making eternal life impossible. It is the sentence of death in your life. I must deal with that first.'

At first this was very unwelcome and she shrank back. Maybe she had been telling herself for years that her lifestyle was okay when all the time she knew it wasn't. But it was now clear to her that this water of life could only be obtained by some definite, personal and very awkward pre-conditions. This led to a defensive reaction. The woman said, ***'I have no husband'***. She probably wanted to change the subject! She probably thought this very strange Jew couldn't possibly know the story of her life, so she states her present marital status and conceals the true situation.

But the Lord Jesus reveals that He knows her well – 5 husbands in a row so far. We aren't told how these marriages were dissolved. The Lord Jesus was and still is 'a perfect gentleman'. He didn't expand on her present dishonourable situation and increase her shame. His aim was to expose the sore, not poke and pry into the details of her life. ***"Love covers a multitude of sins".***

There is both a theological and a practical difficulty in communicating a sense of sin to Muslims.

- **The Theological Problem:** the Quran and most orthodox Muslim theologians present sin as **a weakness** that can be overcome with increased effort in keeping the Sharia. They don't see the need for a major transformation of man's nature. In the Bible, man's sin is seen as **the major problem of his life**. How can we communicate this Biblical concept of the depravity of man with no hope of salvation by self-effort? One way is the Bible's own way of presenting the utter holiness of God and His very deep hatred of sin.

In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah saw the Lord of Hosts as He really is, he was suddenly aware of how terribly corrupted by sin he had become and he cried out,

"Woe is me! for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!"

You can refer to Rom. 7:7-24 and man's inability to do what he knows is right. Verse 15 says, ***"I don't understand my own actions. I don't do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."***

A practical problem: all Arabs have a high concept of a person's honour. One way to describe this is by pointing out that God's holiness, greatness, and justice cannot tolerate sin any more than an Arab can tolerate the violation of his honour! Sin must be dealt with before any reconciliation can take place.

The 10th Principle – Use your friend's background to point him beyond it.

"The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet'." (v. 19)

She started calling Him a Jew, then she progressed to calling Him "Sir" and now she calls Him a prophet! In the end she comes to recognise Him as the Messiah.

Here is an affirmation shared by Muslims and Christians and also by a Samaritan woman! The Lord Jesus was able to lead her from a point of common affirmation to show that He was a prophet, but also much more than a prophet.

There is much in Islam concerning Jesus that we share with our Muslim friends – His miraculous birth, His miracles, His ascent into heaven and His future return at the end of the world. Our task is to show how He was not only a prophet, but **also** Priest, King, Saviour and Lord. We will come back to this later.

The 11th Principle – Avoid unnecessary argument.

"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." (v. 20)

The woman was still trying to evade the sin question, so she resorted to a tactical diversion! This is very common when issues become personal and plain! We seek to escape into obtuse questions hence her tactical diversion.

Shechem and Mount Gerizim played a key role in religious history. They were associated with Abraham (Gen. 12:6-7), with Jacob (Gen. 35:18) and with Joseph (Gen. 37:12-13). This was a city of refuge (Josh. 20:7-9). It was there that the tribes rehearsed the law (Josh. 8:33). This was where Joshua gave his last message (Josh. 24:1-31). It was also where the Northern Kingdom was set up (1 Kings 12:1, 25).

So for this woman, it was a tactic to divert discussion into an irrelevant religious controversy. This is very much like asking, "Should we face Jerusalem or Mecca when we pray?"

The Lord Jesus replies, ***"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."*** (v. 21)

The Lord Jesus didn't allow Himself to be diverted into unnecessary argument. Argument is always a poor method of communication because our goal easily shifts from finding truth to winning the argument.

Let us look at some ways to avoid arguments:

- One way is to concentrate on your own religious experience. You might say, *"You tell me about your religious experience and I will tell you about mine."* A testimony – 'telling your story' – about your own personal experience doesn't lend itself to argument.
- If everyone is talking at the same time (which sometimes happens in a group), you could suggest that people take turns and speak for a stated period of time. Always be quick to acknowledge the many points on which we agree.
- Learn how to tell your story in 3 minutes and practice often so that when you have an opportunity you can share it. Structure the time as follows:
  - ✓ one minute on how your life was before you met the Lord Jesus
  - ✓ one minute on how you met the Lord Jesus
  - ✓ one minute on how different life has been since you have known the Lord Jesus as your friend

Make sure you tell your story naturally without any jargon phrases that could lead to misunderstanding.

The 12th Principle – We must present our understanding of the truth in spite of prejudice.

"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (vs. 23-24)

The Lord Jesus ignores her tactic and confronts her with an amazing truth. She boasted about "our fathers". The Lord Jesus talks about "The Father". He lifts her thoughts far above earthly shrines. He knew that within a generation the temple in Jerusalem would be as extinct as the one on Mount Gerizim. Temples made with hands had no relevance in the new age that was about to dawn. It was a word about **the future**.

It was also a word about **faith** – "salvation is of the Jews". It was of the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Judah, the family of David and of the town of Bethlehem that the Saviour of the World was to come. None of the faults and failings of the Jewish people could alter or annul the Father's plan.

Then the Lord Jesus speaks to this woman about "the Father". It is very remarkable that this lofty concept of worship – the greatest in revealed Scripture – should be revealed to this wayward woman. It wasn't revealed to Nicodemus, but to this now eager Samaritan seeker. Looking into her heart the Lord Jesus saw a thirst and an empty heart in this bright and thoughtful woman and He saw her longing for truth and holiness. So He gave her one of the greatest revelations about God in all history!

The Lord Jesus drew her mind away from places to **a person**. Very rarely in the Old Testament is there a reference to God as Father, but this was the characteristic name that the Lord Jesus used of God. True worship of the Father has to be "in spirit". Sadly both Judaism and Islam are largely of "the letter" rather than "the spirit". They were concerned with rights and rituals, rules and regulations, forms and ceremonies, feast days and fast days as well as circumcision and Sabbaths. All this was to be set aside in favour of spiritual worship and real worship had to be in the truth.

Samaritan worship was a mixture of truth and error. It was a hybrid thing – lifeless, dead and false. So the Lord Jesus lifted her thoughts to a living, loving Father who yearns for the worship of anyone – Jew, Samaritan or Muslim – who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. What was needed was regeneration by the Spirit of God so she (and we) could worship in spirit and in truth. The full revelation of the Son of God would enable her to worship Him in truth. The woman is overwhelmed and so are we!

Honesty demands a clarification of the differences as well as the similarities we have with our Muslim friends. Ultimately there is always the huge stumbling block of the Cross. Our task is to see that we don't add any additional unnecessary stumbling blocks.

The 13th Principle – Discuss common aspirations and show how the Lord Jesus fulfils them.

The woman's ultimate aspiration was to worship God. The Lord Jesus showed her how this aspiration could be met.

The chief concern of our Muslim friends is to worship God correctly without associating anyone else with Him. Our task is to show that this can only be done as we open our hearts to the full revelation of God in the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit teaches us to worship the Triune God.

The Lord Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah in verse 26, ***"I who speak to you am He*** (the Messiah)***"***, because by now the woman had had enough time with Him to understand the term in its true sense.

The 14th Principle – People must act on their understanding.

"The woman left her water jar and went away into the city and said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Messiah'?"

Give your friends opportunities to act on the basis of what they have understood; otherwise they won't mature in their understanding. Encourage them to share with their family members. This will frighten them a great deal!

The family's honour will be lost if it is known publicly that a family member has become an "apostate" by leaving Islam. Death or expulsion is the usual result – an "honour killing".

Your friend will need your help. Start with a small Bible study on who was saved:

- Gen 7:1 – only Noah or his entire household?

- Gen 19: 12-16 – was Lot the only one saved or his wife and daughters?
- Joshua 2:17-19 – was Rahab the only one saved in Jericho? (see Josh 6:23)
  No! "Her father and mother, brothers and all who belong to her" – evidently all her relatives.
- Acts 10:2 – was Cornelius the only one in the household saved? Look at v. 24.
  Cornelius had called together all his relatives and close friends.
- Acts 16:31 – speaking of Lydia we read, ***" … after she was baptised and her household as well".***
- Acts 16:31 – Paul and Silas say to the Philippian jailer, ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household".***

So the principle is: God saved you and He plans to save your whole household/family. This usually sparks a small amount of faith. Suggest that they don't go home and announce that they don't believe in the Quran or in Muhammad any more but have become a follower of the Lord Jesus.

Ask them to think of five people in their extended family who love them dearly. It might be a little sister, an elderly grandmother, an older brother etc. make a list of the five and pray for them every day that God would save them. Then watch and see the Lord Jesus prompt one of those prayed for to ask a question such as, "You have really changed recently. What has happened to you?" Then the new believer can begin to tell his/her story.

When the Lord Jesus said, "I am that Messiah", there was an interruption. The disciples arrived back! They were shocked that the Lord Jesus would speak to a Samaritan woman. The result is that she leaves her water pot! Why? Was her heart so overflowing with the living water now beginning to flow into her life that it was an unconscious, symbolic testimony to the new life within?

Anyway she hurried back to the village. She rounded up the people and gave her simple testimony, ***"Come and see a man who told me all the things I ever did. Is not this the Messiah?"*** It was a simple and successful testimony.

The 15th Principle – Give a personal testimony – Tell your story.

"Many … believed in Him because of the woman's testimony."

The 16th Principle – People must come and meet the Lord Jesus.

"Many more believed because of His word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of <u>your</u> words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the World."

The village arrived at the well wanting to know more. They asked the Lord Jesus and the disciples to stay with them for two days. For these Jews this meant breaking many rules and regulations – visiting homes, eating their food, sleeping in their beds and teaching the Word of God. As a result, 'revival' broke out!

So unlike the Jews, the Samaritans did not ask for signs. The Lord Jesus performed no miracles, but these despised Samaritans received the Lord Jesus gladly. They gave Him a wonderful title, **The Saviour of the World**.

Salvation is from the Jews and for the Jews and for the Samaritans as well. Salvation is also for us and Jesus is also the Saviour of Arab Muslims!

Our job is to help remove prejudices and misunderstandings so that people can see Jesus as He is. This involves not only our words, but our lives; only as men see us take up our cross and follow our Master, will they understand the self-giving love that led Him to accept the Cross.

John Chapter 3 – How did the Lord Jesus speak to Nicodemus?

Nicodemus was no poorly educated village woman, but rather a learned and pious religious man. His name means “conqueror of the people”! He was a Pharisee and also a member of the Sanhedrin – i.e. ruler of the Jews.

We can see many parallels between Nicodemus and some of our more religious Muslim friends who are more radical in their beliefs and believe in strict implementation of the Sharia with all its moral injunctions. Their basic creedal statements (recited daily) are comparable, **"The Lord Our God is One Lord"** and **"There is no God but God"**. They share the same Old Testament prophets. To both of them religion is a total way of life. They both concur in their rejection of a Suffering Messiah – a concept incompatible with their expectations of God's sovereign rule. Our Muslim friends would certainly agree with Nicodemus’ view of Jesus in Jn. 3:2:

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no-one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

The Lord Jesus opens the discussion with this statement:

" … Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (v. 3)

It would seem that the Lord Jesus had the following objective in mind: **Nicodemus should see man's basic problem** (and therefore his own) **and the solution offered by God**. Here the Lord Jesus is using Principle 9 – **communicate a sense of sin**. This is one of the hardest things to do and it is so helpful to have the Lord Jesus giving us an example of how to do it! The Samaritan woman knew she was a sinner. Probably Nicodemus thought of himself as sinless!

Let us look a little more deeply at the greatest problem of men and women as viewed in the Quran and the Bible. In order to contrast the somewhat different views of man's problem as a human being. Let us compare and contrast the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve in the two sources.

In Gen. 3:2-6 Adam and Eve **knowingly disobeyed** God's command, while in sura 20:114/115 it says, *“Exalted is God, the true ruler … But say, ‘My Lord increase me in knowledge’. We had commissioned Adam before but he forgot, and we did not find resolve in him.”*
So Adam **forgot** and **did not intend to do wrong**.

As to the consequences of sin in the Bible (Gen. 3:23-24), they involved banishment from fellowship with God and the ultimate means of reconciliation was not until the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. In contrast, in the Quran (sura 2:35-37) Adam was **quickly re-instated** by God. A means of salvation was unnecessary. Our Muslim friends believe that to require one would be to limit the sovereignty of God who, *"Forgives whom He wills and does not forgive whom He wills."*

In the Bible men and women are seen as having a bias towards doing evil. Sin together with all its consequences is seen as very grave. Eph. 2:3 says, ***"We were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind"***.

In the Quran, men and women are alright provided they do God's will as taught in the Sharia. In sura 12:53, Potiphar’s wife tells the King (Pharaoh) *"Yet I do not exonerate myself, for the self is certainly compulsive with evil …."* And in Sura 19:33 there is a statement about Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus. A famous commentator on the hadith, Al-Baidawi, said of this verse, *"There is not a newborn child but Satan touches it when it is born, except Mary and her son".* So there is a suggestion that we are all inherently “touched” by Satan and so have a propensity towards evil.

The Bible is very clear. We have a bias towards evil, but the solution is seen very differently. The solution in the Quran is the revelation of God's will in His law – the Sharia. Men and women are able to do God's will if they understand it by studying and doing what is taught in

the Sharia. Many Muslims believe that for the good of a Muslim State and its people the state should enforce Sharia. They may not like it now, but they will be thankful on the Day of Judgement because their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds.

Paul, from a very similar background, saw that the Law of God demanded righteousness. But he also began to see that we don't have the power to fully obey the Law of God – i.e. to be righteous. There was a need for new life and power. The Lord Jesus gave us all the solution to mankind's problem when He said we must be ***"born again"***.

We can see the dual nature of the Biblical solution, given to us by the Lord Jesus, in Jn. 3:3, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God".*** And again in v. 5, ***"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God"***.

To one who was an expert in the interpretation of the Old Testament, "Water" and "Spirit" would convey the forgiveness of sins and new life (see Ezekiel 36:24-27).

"I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all filthiness and from all idols I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will keep My judgements and do them." [See also Jer. 31:31-34.]

In Jn. 3:14-15 the Lord Jesus points us to the means of salvation: ***"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up"***. The Quran does not ask the question, *"How can God be just and justify the sinner?"* It is the Bible that asks the question and also gives the answer: the Lord Jesus, ***"Bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed."*** (1 Pet. 2:24)

The means of providing cleansing from our sin and new life is through the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. The means of acquiring these personally is faith in the efficacy of His death: ***"Whoever believes in Him may have eternal life"***.

This emphasis on salvation by faith isn't accepted by the majority of Muslims although it is found in the Quran – sura 7:149, *"If our Lord does not have mercy on us and forgive us we will surely be among the lost."*

Sura 5:5-7, *"Today is perfected for you your religion, and fulfilled upon you is my favour and I am pleased for you … but he who is forced by hunger, not inclined wilfully to sin, truly, God is forgiving, compassionate."*

Most Muslims believe sins are forgiven on the basis of good works – sura 3:190-193, 194-195 and sura 18:87-88.

Jn. 3:16 adds another major ingredient of our message – the **love** of God. ***"For God so loved the world ...."*** The love of God **is** mentioned in the Quran, but it is exclusively for those who love Him (sura 3:29, 31-32), do good (sura 2:191-196) or who repent of their sins (sura 2:222). The message we have to share with our Muslim friends is that God's love is for those **who do not love Him** and are sinners – Rom. 5:8 and 1 Jn. 4:10.

Notice that the Lord Jesus uses the terms "Son of Man" (v. 14) and "Son of God" (v. 18) rather than "Messiah" which would miscommunicate – Principle 6. He used the title "Son of Man" because Nicodemus, as a religious expert, had a basis for understanding the term from its use in the Old Testament. See the book of Ezekiel where it is used more than 87 times! You also find it in Daniel. You find it even more in apocryphal literature such as the Book of Enoch. In the 1st century A.D. it was free from loaded political connotations. It is better for us to use

the term "Messiah" as it is now free from political connotations, whereas "Son of God" is definitely misunderstood by our Muslim friends.

Note the shift from the third person in verse 3 (***"Unless <u>one</u> is born anew ..."***) to the second person in verse 7 (***"<u>You</u> must be born anew"***). This is an application of Principle 7 where you speak directly to an individual – your friend – rather than just being content only to speak about theological abstractions. Make sure that you get beyond the level of the intellect to the level of **the will** in order to elicit a personal response.

Nicodemus might have been prepared for a stimulating intellectual discussion for he said, ***"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God"***. Our Muslim friends are often ready for a stimulating religious discussion, but the Lord Jesus wasn't interested in a philosophical discussion. He wanted Nicodemus to make a real commitment to Him that would result in new life within. Don't be content to be drawn into a sterile, impersonal discussion. Always call for a personal response to God as He has revealed Himself through the Lord Jesus. It is so important for our Muslim friends to realise that it is God, by His Spirit, who transforms men and women. We can never make "converts".

The reference that the Lord Jesus makes to the wind is an example of Principle 8. Languages reflect the way in which those who speak them look at the world. Arabic has words that are rich in meaning, but don't lend themselves to logical arguments. English and other European languages, with their wealth of prepositions and prefixes, allow shades of meaning that make elaborate rational arguments possible.

Two influential men – one who lived in Arab Muslim Spain, Ibn Rushd Averroes (1126-1198 A.D.) and Philo, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt in the 1st century – are among the world's greatest philosophers. They had a far greater influence in Europe than "at home" in the Arab World. This is because in the West the languages and people's views of the world were more receptive. [Philo was translated into Arabic from Greek. Averroes wrote in Arabic and was translated into Latin.]

What is known technically as 'peripatetic philosophy' was derived from Aristotle and incorporated into early Islamic philosophy by Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina Avienna and Ibn Rushd Averroes. Their works were translated into Latin in the 12th century and gave rise to the "scholastic philosophy" under such people as Thomas Aquinas. During this period, Al Gazzali (1058-1111 A.D.) taught in Damascus. He wrote a book entitled, **The Destruction of the Philosophers**. It is devoted to the destruction of the arguments of philosophers and advocated the more irrational model of Sufism.

From this, perhaps we can see why elaborate rational arguments are not very convincing to many Arab peoples. Illustrations not only help understanding, but they can often touch the emotions and influence the will.

In Jn. 3:14 the Lord Jesus used the religious background of Nicodemus to illustrate something concerning Himself. ***"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up".*** Here Jesus is using Principle 10.

This verse also shows an expansion of Principle 12. We must always present our understanding of truth in spite of prejudice on the part of the hearer. **The central truth is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.** This is the heart and core of the apostolic preaching of the Gospel. In 1 Cor. 15:3-4, Paul said it was of ***"first importance".*** In 1 Cor. 2:2 he says, ***"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified".***

The reason for this emphasis is seen in Jn. 12:32 where Jesus says, ***"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself"***.

This idea of someone suffering on behalf of another person is foreign to the vast majority of Muslims, although some Shia have interpreted the death of Hussein, Muhammad's grandson,

in these terms. There are also echoes of this truth in the sacrifice of an animal (a male sheep/ lamb/goat) during *Eid-al-Adha*. In sura 37:107 God says, "*We ransomed him* (Abram's son) *with a great sacrifice* (the ram)!" Although this is not a sin offering, it clearly shows the idea of substitution – i.e. the ram became the substitute for the son just as Jesus became the substitute for sinners in 1 Pet. 1:18-19, ***"You were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish."***

[Note that Muslims believe it was Ishmael who was saved by substitution. The Bible clearly says it was Isaac. To avoid getting into an unnecessary argument at this point, just use the term "Abraham's son".]

There is a sacrifice in some parts of the Arab World called '*Aqiqa*'. As practised in some Arab countries, the child's head is shaved soon after he is born. A sheep or a goat is killed and then a prayer is made like the one following:

"O God, here is the Aqiqa for my son – its blood for his blood, its flesh for his flesh, its hair for his hair and save my son from the Fire (hell)*."*

The parallels with the death of the Lord Jesus as our substitute are obvious.

The Samaritan woman certainly became a believer. Nicodemus, the pious follower of the Law, probably believed as well. Certainly he showed great courage and identified himself with Jesus when he saw Him "lifted up" on the Cross. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who was also a disciple of the Lord Jesus, claimed the body of the Lord Jesus after His death and buried Him in the tomb. (Jn. 19:38-40)

I think the application of these principles, **when saturated with prayer and much faith**, will result in some of our Muslim friends becoming believers in the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.