

When in Islam, Do as the Muslims?

You've heard it said, "When in Rome, do as the Romans." But what do you do when you are smack-dab in the middle of a Muslim nation that disdains Americans, offers little respect to women and is determined to make sure you know it?

The ongoing news about the crisis in Egypt caused me to look back at some of my own experiences with Muslims. I have had wonderful experiences with Muslims in the U.S. and terrible experiences with Muslims in Islamic nations—and wonderful experiences with Muslims in Islamic nations.

I will never forget my weeklong visit to an Asian Islamic nation. I couldn't blend in. I stood out like, well, like an American woman in a Muslim nation. I'm clearly a modern Western woman with the red hair and freckles to prove it. While I was in this Islamic nation, I couldn't shake the feeling that Christ in me seemed to stir the principalities and powers that wondered why I was there.

To say the heavens were hard would be an understatement. To say the people were rude to me would pay them a compliment. And to say I didn't struggle to maintain a positive attitude would be an outright lie. You see, my appointed escorts took noticeable pleasure in running me ragged, giving me the silent treatment, leaving me stranded at airports and feeding me unclean food. (The squid and rice actually had a large metal staple in it.) Again, to say I wasn't working overtime to be diplomatic in the face of this treatment would be less than truthful. They openly laughed and joked with one another about how they were mistreating me. I could hardly believe it—and I wasn't really sure what to expect next in the midst of what had turned out to be a nightmare assignment.

Friends were text messaging me with suggestions that I take the next flight home. I somehow knew I had to stick it out to the end. I wasn't quite sure how I was going to do it gracefully, but I did know this: These Muslims had a dossier on me that told them who I was, what I wrote about (read: radical Islam, prophetic ministry and fervent Christian living) and they were dishing out an American hazing in the most politically correct manner possible. In other words, I probably wasn't in any imminent physical danger, but I was not being treated with common respect. Rather, I was being harassed for my faith and on behalf of my nation.

So what do you do when you are in a Muslim nation where they don't like you? The answer is not to do as the Muslims. Sure, there was a temptation to fall back on the "eye for an eye concept" and dish out the rudeness in return. But these folks knew I was an active Christian, and they were watching my every move. They were trying their level best to provoke me, to see if I would lose my composure, to break me. As an ambassador for Christ, I knew I had to let them see Christ in me. But in a jetlagged, utterly exhausted and poorly nourished state, I also knew I couldn't take another step without a specific strategy. I needed more than a pat answer from the Bible. I needed a *rhema* word from God. So I cried out to God in my hotel room, "How do I respond to these people?"

It didn't take Him long to answer. In that still small voice, He made it all so simple: "If a man compels you to go a mile, go two." At first I thought to myself, *I've already walked 15 miles with these people!* But, alas, this wisdom from above was pure, peaceable, considerate, fully of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. And peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness (James 3:17-18). I turned immediately and began reading the Beatitudes. I took great comfort reading verses like:

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for

righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt 5:9-12, KJV).

There I found grace for the next few days of my journey through Islam with the power of the Holy Spirit to be a witness. And something amazing happened. By the last two days of my visit, these Muslims who had treated me so rudely began to change their attitude toward me. We discussed Christianity, Islam, Judaism and other religions in an openminded exchange of ideologies. We laughed together, began to understand each other, and started to look at one another not as Christian and Muslim but as people. By the end of the journey, they were saying things to me like, "You are not like other Americans. You're different." And they meant that in the most positive sense.

What about you? You may never go to a Muslim country that's hostile toward your religion. But you may go to a workplace where you feel like you don't get a fair shake. You may have to deal with unsaved neighbors who work your last nerve every weekend. How will you respond? Will you turn the other cheek? Will you walk the extra mile? Will you love your enemies? Will you stand in your role as an ambassador for Christ?

Christ sent the Holy Ghost so we could be witnesses. Paul said we are living epistles. Like John the Baptist, we need to burn and shine. That doesn't always mean looking for the quick conversion. It may just mean walking in love so people can see the real Christ.

At the end of my Asian adventure, as I was riding back to the airport, God did something I didn't expect. Earlier in the week I asked Him how Jesus would respond to Muslims. In the wake of extreme terrorism, the Western world tends to do its

own fair share of persecuting those who practice Islam without considering the people who practice Islam. Jesus loves people, including Muslim people.

As I was riding in that van to the airport, God exposed His heart to me. His heart aches for everyone that is dying and going to hell every day. The intensity of Christ's love for all people pricked my heart, and it was all I could do not to weep violently. I could not contain the tears, and I began to pray for that nation and the Muslims who live there. Scripture says that "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

So whether you find yourself in the midst of a spiritual clash in an Islamic nation or in the midst of a workplace war on the job front, remember this: God hates sin, but He loves people. He's counting on you to be the salt and light that opens the door for lost souls to enter into the kingdom of God, where Jesus is waiting for them with open arms.

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