

WOMAN TO WOMAN: SHARING JESUS WITH A MUSLIM FRIEND

by Joy Loewen

Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2010. 204 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8007-9483-5

What two words coupled together will give you about 12,300,000 results on Google in 0.24 seconds? Fear and Islam. Perhaps that is why Chosen Books recruited Loewen to write *Woman to Woman*. Loewen understands fear and she understands Muslim women. Born to missionary parents in Islamic Africa, Loewen grew up terrified of the sights, the sounds and what ifs of Mogadishu. In the book, she tells the story of how God's perfect love cast out her own fear and moved her to a place where she is now at home with Muslim women.

For anyone who has ever felt alarm just at the sight of a woman in a head scarf at the mall, Loewen openly shares her own insecurities: 'Obsessive fear spread through my body like a poison, eventually taking control of me and making me a slave to it' (37). Her honesty with the reader and with each Muslim friend she makes as she walks through first encounters, suspicion, weddings and goodbyes gives readers confidence that small acts of kindness, mingled with the Holy Spirit, can change a Muslim woman's life for eternity. Through her own weaknesses and fears, she demonstrates how anyone can move from fear to love and compassion that results in a very special friendship.

The book opens in the present day as Loewen prepares to go to a party of Muslim women who are living as immigrants in North America. Loewen muses on her central theme of 'being at home' with Muslim women. Although she is not from their cultural background and looks very different, she can share in their world through common rites of passage, such as marriage and childbirth. She writes, 'Is this how Jesus felt when He left heaven to live in our world and to identify with us? ...did He remember who He was and where He came from? Did He ever feel confused with His identity or feel like a misfit' (25)? Loewen shares that she feels 'at home' with Muslims, but that it wasn't always that way.

Through the next several chapters, we follow her life from childhood as she tells of some of the terrors she experienced growing up in the Muslim world. She describes how those fears, as well as her insecurities about whether or not God really loved *her*, crippled her ability to have Christ's compassion for Muslims – until she had a divine intervention. As an adult ministering to Muslims in Pakistan, Loewen experienced Jesus' supernatural assurance of His overwhelming love for her.

She describes how those fears, as well as her insecurities about whether or not God really loved her, crippled her ability to have Christ's compassion for Muslims – until she had a divine intervention.

This set her free from fear and opened her heart to be filled with compassion for hurting Muslims.

Loewen's journeys eventually lead her to move back to North America where she begins to minister to university students, immigrants and refugees. The next few chapters of her book are filled with stories about some of her early encounters with Muslims in North America as she learns to walk in humility, define her identity, recognize barriers and bridges to the Gospel, make mistakes and be a learner to the precious people God entrusts to her care.

Christians talk a lot about fear of Islam and Muslims in North America, but we seldom consider how afraid Muslims are of the Gospel. Chapter eight ('Afraid to Know') deals with this subject as Loewen shares stories of two women who wanted to know about Jesus, but were too afraid. It reminded me that in addition to 'feeling safe' as ministers of the Gospel, we also need to 'be safe' for those with whom we are working. They need to know that we will not betray them, expose them, or take advantage of them. When they feel safe, or 'at home', they will ask us the questions that are burning in their hearts.

The remaining ten or so chapters are comprised of a series of stories arranged topically addressing issues specific to ministering to Muslims. Through Loewen's life experiences, the reader encounters examples of how to show hospitality, share holidays, affirm the value of women, help those in abusive situations and invite Muslim friends to share an eternal home in heaven. Loewen also demonstrates how the power of prayer, revenge, community pressure and expectations can enhance or inhibit a Muslim seeker in his or her spiritual journey.

As director of a local ministry in North America that reaches out to Muslim women, I too have seen numerous volunteers move from fear to faith as they allow relationships to blossom with immigrant women. This book is going to be on a short list of suggested reading for volunteers who want to work with us. Loewen's personal vulnerability and very practical advice can encourage any Christian

that they too can do this.

One thing I would like to see added is a short study guide with questions for group discussion. I believe this book would be a great tool for ministries like ours in training American Christians on how to have a truthful, compassionate witness and 'feel at home' among Muslim immigrants.

Reviewed by Janelle Metzger

Janelle spent seven years in the Middle East, with her family, living and working among Muslims. She is now the director of a school that teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) and life skills to immigrant women and children from a wide variety of countries and cultural backgrounds.

This book is going to be on a short list of suggested reading for volunteers who want to work with us. Loewen's personal vulnerability and very practical advice can encourage any Christian that they too can do this.
