

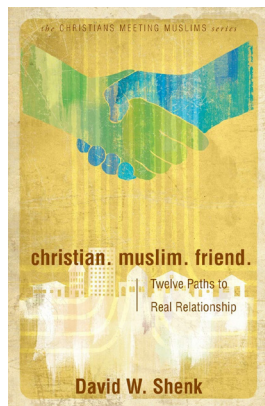
Christian. Muslim. Friend. Twelve Paths to Real Relationship

By David W. Shenk.

Herald Press, 2014. 187 pages.

Reviewed by M. James

M. James (pseudonym) and his family served more than twenty-five years in the Arabian Peninsula, where he was employed in higher education. Together with a team, they co-labored to follow-up media inquiries, minister to seekers, disciple believers, and train workers.



Dr. Shenk's books flow out of his life's experience of living among Muslims. One of his first books, *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, has become a primary source for rationally presenting similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam. Considered his fourth book of this series, *Christian. Muslim. Friend* continues to highlight the importance of relationship in communicating the beauty of the gospel. Dr. Shenk is a Westerner, has lived among Muslims most of his life, and desires for more Western Christians to live as witnesses among the people of the Muslim world. Dr. Shenk's goal is to promote authentic, faithful witness through sincere relationship by which a Muslim friend experiences the gospel. This positive message resulted in *Christianity Today* awarding the book as the best Missions/The Global Church book in 2016.

This book is filled with personal stories illustrating Dr. Shenk's advice on establishing real relationships with Muslims that honor God and

reflect truth. As such, the chapters are entitled according to his advice: *Live with Integrity, Keep a Clear Identity, Cultivate Respect, Develop Trust, Dialogue about the Different Centers, Practice Hospitality, Answer Questions, Confront Distortions, Seek Peace, Partner with a Person of Peace, and Commend Christ*. Only the chapter entitled, *Consider the Choice: The Hijrah. The Cross.*, is less on relational advice and more about historical material that underpins Islamic misconceptions of salvation via the cross. Dr. Shenk includes a summary of Islamic beliefs and duties with suggested responses to common objections concerning the death of Jesus, veracity of the Bible, and explanation of the Trinity.

However, Dr. Shenk's main point is the importance of an overt Christian identity among neighbors and colleagues. In other words, Dr. Shenk emphasizes both friendship building and conveying Jesus' loving work on the cross, even if the topic risks dispute, a rift in relationship, and issues with authorities. Dr. Shenk's desire is for his Muslim friends to know and experience the depth of love through a divine connection to Jesus, which releases the power of forgiveness. As far as issues with the authorities, Dr. Shenk's encounters were wisely addressed with a truthful, gentle response which calmed the situations without incident.

Dr. Shenk's experience in the Muslim world was largely urban. He does not address folk Islamic practices, which are more common to a rural setting. His residency was through a missional center that hosted an international school and church. This context spanned his range of experience and provided the foundation for his interactions with Islamic theologians and Muslim professionals, which was enjoyable to read about. Dr. Shenk was on an official religious visa and comfortable with being known as a prominent Christian who was ready to discuss his faith. He did not understand why a person would downplay his Christian connections in order to, for example, maintain a business visa. Dr. Shenk preferred adherence to national laws with full disclosure of operations at the missional center. This aspiration is noble and provided a platform to shine the light of the gospel in the community. However, the number of residencies available for Christian workers in Muslim countries is limited.

To spread the gospel message in the Muslim world, a Christian witness is required across society with the establishment of businesses for mission and Christian global professionals serving in the healthcare, education, utilities, and many other industry sectors. A discussion of language learning is not prominent in the book, aside from a brief comment highlighting the importance of learning the national language as a means of displaying hospitality. However, recent studies have shown the importance of developing higher levels of proficiency in order to effectively witness, disciple, and form a church (see the article by Daniels et al. in this issue of Seedbed for a full discussion). Lastly, Dr. Shenk promoted the use of Quranic verses to highlight biblical truths. Since Dr. Shenk does not read Arabic, he uses the Yusuf Ali English version in order to not skew the official interpretation, as do many Islamic evangelists with Bible verses. Personally, my Muslim friends never accepted my use of a Quranic verse, especially if it wasn't first eloquently quoted in Arabic. Instead, I personally recommend a bolder declaration of loving promises in the Bible, which give a stronger witness to the care and nearness of our God.

International marketplace ministers of the gospel are on the rise. The Christian global professional is able to establish natural connections within the national community and does not require years of support raising before becoming a resident. Unfortunately, a quicker placement tends to come with little preparation, lacking skills for engagement, and no connection to ongoing ministries.

Christian. Muslim. Friend provides fundamental information on Islam, advice for engagement, and includes end-of-chapter reflection questions to stimulate thought and group discussion. As such, the book provides a good foundation for basic training on engagement and connection. In the Arabian Peninsula, I met many Christian educators, doctors, nurses, and engineers who prayed to share the gospel with their Muslim colleagues. Unfortunately, most were unsure how to approach the subject of faith and instead maintained a workstyle comparable to any other secular, Western professional. Nationals in the Arabian Peninsula

equate the terms *Christian* and *Westerner*, and so an effective witness must boldly speak truth and overtly display Christian values of respect, faithfulness, hospitality, and love in order to shine the gospel.

This is the advice of Dr. Shenk: live a genuine, open, Christian life that attracts real friends to the gospel. Dr. Shenk may not comprehend the secular pressures on Christian professionals, but he does well in advising how to move beyond secularism to real relationship and witness. Although Dr. Shenk briefly addresses discipleship of new believers, baptism, communion, and church formation in various illustrations, the focus of *Christian. Muslim. Friend* is becoming a faithful witness among the Muslim people.

In summary, this book is strongly recommended for the Christian global professional, newly resident in a Muslim, urban context. God is increasing the number of Western Christians working in Muslim societies. In order to be better used by God, sending churches and agencies need to innovate new and relevant training for engagement, relationship, witness, and more. I endorse *Christian. Muslim. Friend* as required reading and a first study to initiate transformation from being a mere foreign worker to a prominent Christian sought out by Muslims to learn the truth about Jesus and the promises of forgiveness, salvation, and an eternal, loving relationship with God.

Bibliography

Daniels, Gene, M. James, C.J. Young, and Heather Simons. 2021. "Fruitful Practices for Language Learning: A Quantitative Study of Language Learning and Effective Ministry in the Arabian Peninsula." *Seedbed: Practitioners in Conversation* 22, no.2 (May). www.seedbedjournal.com.