

Let's Be Honest: The Five Pillars of Effort (Islam)

SERIES	Let's Be Honest — Worldview Series (Overview)
MESSAGE	Week 2 — Islam
DATE	July 5, 2026
PASSAGE	John 14:6
SPEAKER	Phil
KEY PRINCIPLE	A report card keeps the score; a birth certificate secures your status.

I. Introduction: Report Card or Birth Certificate

A Good morning, Menlo Church, and welcome back to the second week of our series. Before we dive in, I want to remind you what we're doing throughout this series. We're spending the next several weeks looking at various religions, not to say they're all the same, because they're not.

B And not to present the most easily dismissed version of each faith to make ourselves feel more comfortable. We're doing this because most of us live in a neighborhood, work in an office, or have a friend whose faith is different than ours, and a deeper love for them comes from greater understanding.

C When we engage in conversation, we want to be people who are actually interested, intellectually honest, and spiritually curious in a way that other people would be with us. We want to listen respectfully and for that person to leave the

conversation honored.

D So for the next few weeks, we're getting honest about what different people actually believe and why, and then we're asking the harder question: what does Jesus offer that's different? Today, we are looking at Islam, the world's second-largest religion after Christianity, with 2 billion followers.

E Before we dive into the topic, I'm going to pray for us, and if you've never been here before or heard me speak, before I speak, I pray kneeling, as a reminder that God is worthy of our surrender, because everything we need for eternity, He's already paid for. *[Congregational prayer.]*

F *[Transition.]* There's a huge difference between these two documents. Maybe you don't think about this because you don't need them every day, but there is a major difference between a report card and a birth certificate. A report card keeps score and evaluates progress.

G It tells you how you performed on that exam, how you did in the quarter or semester of class, and whether you passed or failed. It's a constant evaluation and assessment that is being calculated before you ever see the final result, but you can feel the examination all the time.

H Every red mark on the page is a judgment about your effort and performance. And the deeper message you can feel beneath every grade, number, and letter is: are you enough? Did you do enough? Will you be enough?

I A birth certificate is something completely different; it doesn't keep score. It reveals a status that is secured and inalterable. It's a document that says you belong to a family and gives you a name. It declares, in human terms, your most base identity. You didn't achieve it, you received it.

J You didn't earn the name on that certificate; you didn't perform your way into that last name, you were born into it, you were given it. Here's what's important about this distinction: a report card tells you how you did, a birth certificate tells you who you are.

K This is the distinction I want to use as our frame for today's conversation.

Because Islam and Christianity approach the same question, what is my standing with God, in very different ways. One system is built on your work in life, the other is built on Jesus' work before you were born.

L I grew up understanding something about report cards. My childhood wasn't what most people assume; it wasn't stable, it wasn't safe, and on top of that, I was battling a learning disability, severe dyslexia, a reading disability, and a debilitating stutter. Report cards were regular reminders of how far I was falling behind.

M I dreaded receiving them because I knew, even as a kid, it wasn't going to be good enough for my dad. So on days I thought the report card might arrive, I'd wait by the mailbox. I'd try to intercept before he saw it.

N Not because I thought I could hide it forever, but because I was trying to buy time before the inevitable judgment came. I was trying as hard as I could, and I knew that my best effort was never going to be enough.

II. The Five Pillars: A Clear Path, An Uncertain Ending

A That feeling, that desperation to perform and the constant fear that it's not going to be good enough, is something that millions of Muslims live with every day. Not because Islam is cruel, but because it's part of how the system is structured.

B Islam means submission. The word is about yielding, about bending your knee to the will of God. And in Islam, you find something that's actually kind of refreshing about its clarity. You have a clear path. It tells you exactly what God wants from you; there's no guessing.

C *[Transition.]* The path is built on five pillars; they're non-negotiable. If you're a Muslim, these are the foundations of your religious and spiritual life. The first pillar is the Shahada, the testimony. This is the declaration, "There is no god but Allah, and

Muhammad is his prophet."

D This is the statement that makes you a Muslim; if you say it with your whole heart, you're in — kind of like how we offer the chance for people to offer sincere prayers of salvation. The second pillar is Salah, prayer.

E These prayers happen five times throughout the day. If you're a practicing Muslim, you're pausing to orient yourself toward God, and submit your will to His. That rhythm shapes your entire life, no matter where you are or what you're doing at the time.

F The third pillar is Zakat, almsgiving. It's not charity with your leftovers. It's a mandatory portion of your wealth set aside for the poor. It's built into the religious practices for Muslims; if you have, you give.

G The fourth pillar is Sawm, the fast practiced during Ramadan. For thirty days each year, from sunrise to sunset, you don't eat, drink, or enjoy certain other comforts. This practice, like when Christians do it, is to remind Muslims of their dependence on God.

H You're reminded of what it's like to be hungry, which is supposed to build compassion for those who don't have the same choice. Finally, the fifth pillar is Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. At least once in your life, if you're able, you go and join millions of others who have done the same thing.

I These are not suggestions within Islam; they are obligations. They're the way you show God that you are serious in your pursuit of Him. They're your report card. The score that is being kept on your account. Honestly, I respect the clarity the system offers; you know what's expected.

J The roadmap is clear, but there is a real tension in this report card for every person who follows Islam. You can do all of this and still not know if it's enough. On the Day of Judgment, God is going to put your deeds on a scale. Good works on one side, your bad works on the other.

K At that moment, if the good outweighs the bad, you'll go to paradise. If the bad outweighs the good, you'll face judgment. But here's the part that every Muslim has to grapple with in their journey of faith within Islam: they don't know how the scales will tip until that day.

L The Quran, their most holy book, is clear that ultimately, salvation is Allah's — the Arabic name for God — choice. You can be devoted, pray five times a day, fast, give, go on your pilgrimage, and at the end of a life that was dedicated to this pursuit, you still don't know, not fully.

III. A Universal Weight: The Panel Story

A If you're a Christian, I want to caution you before you judge your Muslim neighbor or coworker too quickly. Because here's what's more true than we want to admit: the scales system I described? A lot of us live under that same system without ever calling it that, and we feel the same pressure to perform.

B We're keeping score and wondering if we're enough. We're just doing it within a Christian framework rather than an Islamic one. This is a universal human problem, and the Bible speaks directly to it. In the book of Psalms, the writer puts it this way:

"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" — Psalm 130:3

C *[Transition.]* The answer the author is assuming is that no one, no one could stand. That feeling and pressure are something we should be honest about, because it can create a level playing field in conversation.

D This feeling of not measuring up, that you might have a way to reconcile because of the grace of Jesus on your behalf — many Muslims you interact with are quietly wondering how their obedience will measure up against their disobedience in the final judgment.

E The Psalmist understood this weight, that if God kept a record that exclusively determined our standing in eternity, no one would measure up. Early in my ministry, I was invited to be part of a local interfaith event on world religions. On a panel with others, I represented Christianity.

F The event was still close enough to 9/11 that the cultural wounds still felt very fresh, and I could tell the Muslim on the panel was trying to be very careful in navigating this tension. He was thoughtful, educated, and clearly a person of profound personal faith.

G After an hour of respectful discussion about what we each believed and how it affected our lives, the panel ended, and this gentleman and I struck up a conversation in the hallway. He thanked me for the conversation, and I could see the weight he was carrying.

H I asked him how he was doing in the midst of so much confusion and judgment right now. He shared that he was scared most of the time; scared on airplanes, at the store, scared that strangers were afraid of him, while he was deeply afraid at the same time.

I His fear didn't surprise me too much, unfortunately, but his kindness did. With all the weight he was carrying, he was still willing to be caring and respectful in a setting like the one we just shared. He listened and hoped for understanding. We could find something in common.

J But here's where Islam and Christianity start to look a lot different. This isn't because we treat the Bible seriously and Muslims don't. They take Scripture very seriously; they just understand it differently.

IV. Progressive Revelation: Reading the Same Book Differently

A *[Transition.]* In Islam, there is something called progressive revelation. The idea that God has revealed Himself in stages, with each stage refining and correcting what comes before it. So the Torah we talked about last week? That's God's Word, so are the Gospels of the New Testament, but they are incomplete.

B In Islamic teaching, they contain errors and have been corrupted by people who didn't understand or preserve them properly (obviously, I disagree with this understanding, but that's one of the reasons I'm not a Muslim).

C So the Quran, the main Islamic scripture, comes as the final, complete, and pure revelation within their religion. It's not simply adding to what came before; it's correcting and superseding it. God is doing something progressively more accurate as He reveals Himself.

D Christians read Scripture very differently. We read backward and forward with Jesus as the center of the narrative, no matter where we are in Scripture. We believe that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Let me show you how this changes things.

E *[Transition.]* Take the idea of God's oneness, the version of monotheism (one God), that's central to Islamic teaching. Muslims point to a passage like Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." And they would agree that God is one, and this foundation is simple and pure.

F Christians, looking at the entire Bible as describing a consistent God, would read John 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and note that while there is one God, He exists in three persons, or the biblical idea of the Trinity.

G Muslims would read that same passage and likely identify it as something that has been corrupted when Christianity started borrowing from competing worldviews and traditions. They might argue that the Quran corrects this by being more straightforward and clear.

H Or take Abraham. Muslims see Abraham as the father of their faith, too. But the Quran teaches that God asked Abraham to sacrifice Ishmael, not Isaac, the son who becomes the father of the Arab people. So Muslims see themselves as the true spiritual descendants of Abraham.

I Christians read Genesis and see Abraham willing to sacrifice his son as a foreshadowing of God the Father actually sacrificing His own Son, Jesus. Same father, same story, but a completely different interpretation. Not because Muslims are refusing to see something.

J They're reading their sacred scriptures through the lens of progressive revelation. In their view, God has now clarified who He is and what He wants. To them, the earlier version is incomplete. This is all wrapped up in what each person brings as assumptions to the study of faith.

V. The Exclusive Claim and an Invitation Home

A *[Transition.]* So with all of that as a backdrop, the core difference comes down to how we understand Jesus.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." — John 14:6

B There's nothing ambiguous about that. Jesus is claiming to be the only path to God. As you've heard me say before, Christianity claims to be the most inclusive, exclusive faith in the world. It's the only way, and it's available to everyone, every day.

It's a scandal to people who believe all religions are the same and a challenge to a works-based faith, like Islam.

C Islam is about submitting to the will of God through the five pillars in hopes that your lifetime scales will tip to the side of God's favor. Muslims revere Jesus; they just reject His divinity and resurrection, the very things that would change the report card paradigm.

D Jesus says, "I am the way," not the manual, not the checklist. A personal relationship with God Himself is the means of salvation. Someone who has already lived the life we can't, already satisfied the judgment we can never measure up to.

E Jesus is saying, your record doesn't matter as a final report card because His was perfect, and it's the only one that can qualify you for a restored relationship with your creator. Jesus actually takes the failing report card, or at best the incomplete report card, and trades it for His.

F Here's something I was thinking about while writing this message that I learned from my sister-in-law years ago; it's such a perfect picture of this contrast. She married into our family when I was young, and something happened when she gave birth to my niece, her first child.

G As she was filling out the birth certificate paperwork with my brother and putting down their names, she wrote it exactly as she had always written down and known it, and my brother mentioned, "Oh yeah, you know the B in our last name is capital, right?" She didn't!

H It was this moment that didn't just impact my niece, and while my sister-in-law's name didn't change, she just realized what it had been the entire time. That's what a birth certificate does; no matter how we spell it, it determines our family of origin, the name we carry, who we are.

I Christianity does something similar. You don't become a Christian when you perform well; you become a child of God when you acknowledge your inability to perform well enough for a holy God and that in His love for you, Jesus offers His

righteousness in your place.

J You live surrendered in a different way when the stakes aren't whether or not you are welcome in the family, but when your standing is secure and your place in the family is guaranteed. Submission leaves you wondering where you stand, but surrendering to Jesus can give you certainty for eternity.

K It doesn't mean we just do whatever we want as Christians; that's how a family works. It means that when we know we are loved, that we belong, our motivation for obedience changes. You're not trying to earn a place you've already been given; you live from an identity of acceptance.

L I really do respect people who have found Islam to be a system that offers clarity for their life and faith community, in a confusing and confused world. This kind of clarity about the path toward God can be such a gift if it's the path you've chosen.

M Muslims are thoughtful, devoted people who strive to honor God with their whole lives. The issue isn't their intellect or their sincerity; it's ultimately about what they're trusting for their eternal standing before God. Islam teaches the concept of this report card that feels so heavy.

N I also want to flag something, and I say this as someone committed to truth: as a Christian, I wouldn't want someone judging me or my faith by the worst, most extreme, most hateful version of it they could find, because in 2026, you can find a lot.

O The vast majority of the 1.8 billion Muslims in the world condemn terrorism and violence. According to Pew Research, less than 5% of Muslims globally have favorable views toward groups like al Qaeda. I'm not saying that's good; I'm simply saying we should keep it in mind.

P When we take the actions of a fraction and say that's Islam, we're doing the same thing we'd hate if someone judged Christianity by the Westboro Baptist Church or abortion clinic bombers. That's not intellectual honesty. That's caricature. And the answer to it is still the Gospel.

Q *[Transition.]* Christianity teaches that our personal report card will never measure up. Knowing that and loving you, God sent His Son to live, die, and be resurrected to make a way for you to know Him forever. By grace, through faith, in Christ, we can know — forever, right now — where we stand.

R *[Transition.]* Those are really different visions of faith, and that's okay, it's better that we understand that. Just like we talked about last week, Islam is not just one thing; if you know one Muslim, you know one Muslim. The spectrum includes Sunni Muslims (80–90%) and Shia Muslims.

S The spectrum of Muslims represents very different schools of thought in theology and practice. Even within those groups, there are different schools of Islamic law: the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools. They disagree on some things.

T They emphasize different aspects of Islamic teaching, and there are entire nations that are Islamic-ruled nations that bring their interpretation of Islamic law into the public square in a way that can shift with each new leader.

U This matters because when you try to have a conversation with someone of the Muslim faith in your life this summer, a simple but honest question like, "How do you practice your faith?" can open up a powerful conversation of story and relationship.

V We live in a world where people tend to take the version of Islam they see in the news and assume that's all there is. But the Islam of a terrorist is not the Islam of the man on that panel with me. The vast majority of Muslims are just trying to live faithfully, raise their families, and love their neighbors.

W If you're Muslim and you're listening to this — I see the weight you carry. I think about that man on the panel, and I think about the millions of people like him who are doing everything right, who are devoted, who are trying so hard, and who still wake up uncertain.

X And I'm not here to tell you that your effort doesn't matter or that your faith isn't real. It is. Your devotion is beautiful. But I am here to tell you that there's another way to live. A way that doesn't leave you wondering. Where the report card you need has

already been graded.

Y Where certainty isn't arrogance, it's just a name you've been given. If you've never heard that before, or if you've heard it but dismissed it as too good to be true, I'm asking you to sit with it. Jesus isn't asking you to abandon who you are. He's asking you to come home to who you've always been meant to be.

Z If you were to stand before God right now, how confident are you that you'd be in heaven? What would you answer on a scale of 1–10? If you're Muslim, you could never answer 10. A Christian who understands the gospel would never answer anything less than 10. That's the difference. That's the good news. And it's radically different from every system that asks you to earn your way in. Can I pray for you? *[Closing prayer.]*

Resources for Further Study

LET'S BE HONEST: ISLAM — WEEK 2

Foundational Resources for the Entire Series

[The Kingdom of the Cults: The Definitive Work on the Subject of Cults and New Religions](#) — Walter Martin (Bethany House, rev. ed., 2003)

The classic, comprehensive reference for understanding world religions and alternative belief systems from a Christian perspective. Martin provides historical context, theological analysis, and respectful but clear critiques of various faith traditions. His approach models intellectual honesty combined with Christian conviction.

[So What's the Difference? A Look at 20 Worldviews, Faiths, and Religions and How They Compare to Christianity](#) — Fritz Ridenour (Regal Books, 2001)

An accessible, conversational guide that compares various worldviews and religions directly to Christianity, presenting each with respect and clarity. The entire "Let's Be Honest" series is built on the framework Ridenour models.

Books Specific to Islam

[Islam: The Straight Path](#) — John L. Esposito
(Oxford University Press, 4th ed., 2010)

One of the most widely used introductions to Islam in academic settings. Clear, accessible explanations of Islamic theology, history, and practice — particularly helpful for understanding the Five Pillars and Islamic law.

[Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources](#) — Martin Lings (Inner Traditions, 1983)

A sympathetic but historically grounded biography of Muhammad. Essential for understanding how Muslims view the Prophet and the origins of Islam.

The World's Religions — Huston Smith (HarperOne, rev. ed., 1991)

A classic overview by a scholar who approaches each religion with genuine respect. The Islam chapter is particularly balanced and helpful for gaining empathy for the Muslim worldview.

Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World

— John O. Voll (Syracuse University Press, 1994)

Excellent for understanding the diversity within Islam across cultures and time periods — counters the monolithic view of Islam and shows the spectrum from Sunni to Shia traditions and Islamic law schools.

The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism — Tariq Ramadan (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Written by a Muslim scholar of Swiss-Egyptian descent, exploring Islamic theology in conversation with pluralism — helpful for understanding how thoughtful Muslims engage with religious diversity.

Articles and Resources

Pew Research Center — "Little Support for Terrorism Among Muslim Americans"

The source for the statistic cited in the sermon: only 5% of Muslim Americans hold favorable views of al Qaeda, while 78% believe suicide bombing and violence against civilians can never be justified. Essential for countering stereotypes.

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Educational Materials

Accessible, accurate information about Islam and Muslim communities in America, written by Muslims for non-Muslim audiences and designed for interfaith education.

Pew Research Center — Religious Landscape Studies

Demographic and sociological data on Muslim populations worldwide and in America — helpful for understanding diversity and geographic distribution, and correcting caricatured views.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy — "Islamic Epistemology"

For those who want to dig deeper into how Muslims approach knowledge and Scripture. Explains progressive revelation and the relationship between the Quran and previous scriptures.

Understanding the Sermon's Key Concepts

Progressive Revelation

Perhaps the most important theological divide between Christianity and Islam. Muslims genuinely believe God refined His revelation through Muhammad — this isn't a belief they arrived at carelessly, it's central to their faith. The sermon's examples of Deuteronomy 6:4 vs. John 1, and Abraham's sacrifice, illustrate this divide.

The Five Pillars

Non-negotiable in Islam — not suggestions. Treating them as serious, robust spiritual practices (rather than empty rituals) honors Muslim faith. The sermon frames them as Muslims' "report card": the way they demonstrate devotion and keep score of their standing with God.

The Scales Metaphor in Islam

Not a misunderstanding of Islam. Even devout Muslims acknowledge they don't know for certain whether they'll go to paradise — not a flaw in their view, but an expression of God's absolute sovereignty and justice. The uncertainty is built into the system.

The Report Card vs. Birth Certificate Metaphor

The sermon's locked key principle: a report card tells you how you performed; a birth certificate tells you who you are. One system measures output; the other declares identity. This frames the entire theological contrast between Islam's works-based approach and Christianity's grace-based approach.

Conversations with Muslims in Your Life

The Respectful Approach

Modeled through the panel story: ask genuine questions, listen before you speak, lead with curiosity, not accusations. If you know one Muslim, you know one Muslim — the spectrum of belief and practice is enormous.

Key Question to Ask

"How do you practice your faith?" This simple question opens a conversation about Sunni or Shia identity, which school of Islamic law they follow, how culturally or theologically connected they are, and what Islam actually means in their daily life.

What Not to Do

Avoid suggesting Islam is just "works righteousness" as if that's obviously inferior. Avoid portraying Muslims as inherently violent or suspect. Avoid acting as if you know Islam better than Muslims do. Avoid confusing cultural Islam with theological Islam.

Theological Resources for Christians

On Hermeneutics and Scripture Reading

Christians and Muslims read the same biblical passages differently — not because one side is careless, but because they operate from different theological frameworks. Christians read Scripture as a unified narrative pointing to Jesus; Muslims read it through progressive revelation, where God's final revelation corrects and supersedes earlier ones.

On Salvation and Assurance

A Christian who understands the gospel can answer "10" when asked how confident they are about heaven, because their assurance rests on Christ's perfect record, not their own performance. A Muslim, by contrast, can never answer "10" because salvation depends on Allah's choice and the balance of deeds.

On Grace vs. Works

Christianity doesn't teach that effort doesn't matter. It teaches that your standing before God isn't determined by your effort — you do good because you're loved, not to earn love. This removes the exhaustion of perpetual performance evaluation.

Data and Statistics

Pew Research Center — Muslim American Views on Extremism

Less than 5% of Muslim Americans hold favorable views of al Qaeda. 78% say suicide bombing can never be justified. These statistics counter the narrative that extremism represents mainstream Islamic thought — the same standard we'd want applied if Christianity were judged by the Westboro Baptist Church or abortion clinic bombers.

For Your Congregation

Post-9/11 Context

Many congregation members may have complicated feelings about Islam shaped by media coverage of terrorism. Muslims themselves live with the fear of being stereotyped and associated with extremism — this is the weight the man on the panel carried.

Missionary Impulse vs. Respect

You can simultaneously believe Jesus is the only way and treat Muslims with genuine respect and curiosity. These are not in tension. The sermon models this throughout.

Interfaith Relationships

Equip your congregation to listen well, ask good questions, and represent Christianity accurately without apologizing for its exclusivity.

The Diversity Within Islam

Sunni and Shia traditions, different schools of Islamic law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali), cultural versus theological practice — the Muslims in your community are not responsible for every expression of Islam globally, any more than you're responsible for every expression of Christianity.

What This Sermon Is Not

Not:

- An apology for Christianity's exclusivity
- A suggestion that all religions are equally valid

- An endorsement of Islam
- A political commentary on the Middle East or Muslim-majority nations
- An attack on Muslims or their faith

It Is:

- A clear articulation of what Islam teaches and why it's compelling
- A respectful acknowledgment of real theological differences
- An invitation to Muslims who might be listening to consider Jesus
- A call to Christians to love their neighbors well enough to understand them
- An appeal to intellectual honesty in how we talk about other faiths

Five-Day Devotional: The Report Card and the Birth Certificate

Week 2 of the "Let's Be Honest" Series

Day 1 — The Weight of the Scales

Passage: Psalm 130:3

"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"

Reflection: The Psalmist understood something that millions of Muslims live with every day: if God kept a perfect record of our deeds, weighed against everything we did right, who could possibly measure up?

This is the weight that Islam carries. On the Day of Judgment, the scales will be brought out. Your good deeds on one side. Your bad deeds on the other. And if the good outweighs the bad, maybe you go to paradise. Maybe. You won't know until that day comes.

That's exhausting — living under a report card your whole life, trying to keep the score high enough, hoping you've done enough, never quite certain. But this isn't a uniquely Islamic problem. This is a human problem, felt by anyone who tries to earn their way to God.

Prayer: "God, I realize I've been carrying weight I wasn't meant to carry. I've been trying to balance scales I can't see, performing obedience, hoping it's enough. I'm tired. Help me believe that in Jesus, you've already done what no amount of works could ever do."

Reflection Question: What report card are you keeping in your own life? Where are you trying to earn something that might already be given?

Day 2 — Born, Not Earned

Passage: 1 John 3:1

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are."

Reflection: Phil's sister-in-law didn't have to do anything to give her daughter a family name. The baby was born into it. That's what a birth certificate does: it declares your identity, not your performance.

When you become a Christian, something similar happens. You don't become a child of God because you perform well. You become one the moment you acknowledge you can't perform well enough, that you need Jesus, and that in His love, He offers His righteousness in your place.

John is saying this clearly: you are already a child of God. Not someday if you do enough. Now. This is who you are.

Prayer: "Thank you that I don't have to earn my way into your family. Thank you that I'm not a servant on trial, hoping to perform well enough to stay. I'm a child. I belong. Help me feel that in my bones today, not just in my head."

Reflection Question: What would shift in how you live if you genuinely knew you were God's beloved child, not just His employee?

Day 3 — Reading the Same Book Differently

Passage: John 1:1-5

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Reflection: Muslims and Christians read the same Scripture differently — not because one side hasn't read carefully, but because they operate from different theological frameworks. Muslims believe in progressive revelation: God revealed Himself in stages, and each stage corrected what came before.

So when Muslims read John 1 and Christians talk about the Trinity, Muslims say that's a corruption borrowed from Greek philosophy, and that the Quran corrects it by being clear: God is one. Christians read the same passage and say: God is one, but God is also somehow three — Father, Son, and Spirit. A mystery, but one Scripture pulls us toward throughout its entire narrative.

Same passage. Different conclusions. Understanding this difference means you can respect people who read Scripture differently than you do, without thinking they're closed-minded.

Prayer: "Help me understand people who read Scripture differently than I do, not as enemies, but as people operating from different theological assumptions. Give me humility about my own interpretations, and conviction about Jesus, not arrogance."

Reflection Question: Is there someone in your life whose faith is different from yours? What might you learn by asking them how they read a particular Scripture passage?

Day 4 — The Exclusive Claim

Passage: John 14:6

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Reflection: This is the hardest verse for many people. It's not inclusive or pluralistic. Jesus is saying He's the only way. In a culture that has told us all religions are equally valid paths to God, this feels arrogant, exclusive, unloving.

But Jesus isn't claiming to be a better checklist, a more rigorous set of rules, a harder path to follow. He's claiming to be a person. A way. A relationship. Someone who has already done what you can't do.

Islam offers certainty about what to do. Christianity offers certainty about who to trust. Those are not the same thing. This is offensive to people who believe they can earn their way to God — but to those who realize they can't balance the scales, it's the best news possible.

Prayer: "Jesus, I believe you are the way. I believe you are the truth. I believe you are the life. Not because it sounds nice, but because it's true. Help me hold this conviction with humility and love for those who believe differently."

Reflection Question: If Jesus truly is the only way to the Father, how does that change the way you think about your own salvation and your relationship with God?

Day 5 — Known and Loved

Passage: Romans 3:23-26

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

Reflection: You are God's child. Right now. Not after you've performed enough. Not after you've balanced your scales. This is the good news of the gospel: God has already claimed you as a beloved child. Your status is secure. Your identity is established. You belong.

The difference between the report card and the birth certificate is the difference between constantly proving yourself and finally resting in being known. On the report card, you're always being evaluated. On the birth certificate, you're just known. You're just loved.

Phil's sister-in-law didn't have to do anything to give her daughter a family name — she was born with it. In the same way, you don't have to do anything to be God's child. You receive it, by grace, through faith in Jesus.

Prayer: "I'm exhausted from trying to earn approval. From wondering if I'm enough. From carrying weight I was never meant to carry. Today, I'm saying yes. I'm a child of God. I belong — not by performance, but by grace. Help me live from that truth."

Reflection Question: What would it look like if you lived this entire week knowing you were God's beloved child, secure in that identity, resting in that love?

Closing Reflection

This week, you've been exploring the difference between systems that demand performance and a God who offers relationship. You've encountered a faith that leaves people uncertain and the gospel that offers certainty. You've read Scripture passages that separate Christians and Muslims and passages that unite all believers in the love of a Father.

As you close out this devotional, ask yourself: are you still trying to balance scales that can't be balanced? Or have you surrendered to Jesus and begun to trust that your standing isn't dependent on your works, but on His?

If you've never made that surrender, this is your invitation. Sit down at the table. Say yes. Let God call you by your true name: beloved.

If you have made that surrender, maybe today is the day to stop living like you haven't. Stop performing. Stop earning. Start resting in the love that's already yours.

God isn't grading you on a report card. He's already written your name in His book.