

Foreword by Rev Dr Paul Blackham

# ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

How 20 Muslims Became Disciples of Jesus



**Aweis A. Ali**



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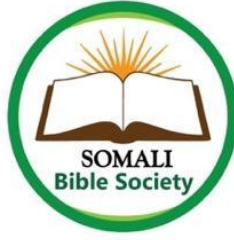
Aweis A. Ali



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## TESTIMONIES

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<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK 1/2.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>FOREWORD.....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>HOW TO READ THIS BOOK .....</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>xvi</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>MUHAMMAD FROM SIERRA LEONE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EID FROM SOMALIA .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ELIAZER FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>BATULI FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>FATUMA FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>ABDALLAH FROM COMOROS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>NEEMA/FATUMA FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>IBRAHIM FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ERTAN FROM UZBEKISTAN .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>OMAR FROM SOMALIA .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>ADEN FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>AYUB FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>ZAHRA FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>FARAJ FROM TANZANIA .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>SHAIBU FROM TANZANIA .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>MUSA FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>MARIAM FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>75</b>

---



<b>KHADIJA FROM ALBANIA .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>AHMED FROM KENYA .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>QUULE FROM SOMALIA .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK, 2/2 .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>OTHER BOOKS BY DR. AWEIS A. ALI .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>GLOSSARY .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>ADDENDUM .....</b>	<b>105</b>

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## **DEDICATION**

I want to express my gratitude to Quule Ali Egal whose wisdom has been a blessing and helped me thrive under the guidance of the Lord. This book is dedicated to him.

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## WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK 1/2

In *Encounters with Christ*, Dr. Ali has gathered sacred treasures in the testimonies of precious Muslim people who came to faith in Jesus Christ. Each of these witnesses (*mártyras*) offers stories that are at once inspiring and convincing. Many of them include the testimony of miraculous encounters with the risen Lord Jesus. One of this book's inspiring themes is Jesus' utter winsomeness. In this, we are reminded that God is at work by the power of the Spirit to reconcile the world to Himself. Another theme that runs throughout is the faithfulness of God's people to bear witness by their words and the quality of their lives. God's love made evident in God's people draws others to encounter Jesus personally. I am inspired by the sacrificial lives of these saints and by the ministry of Dr. Ali to bring us their stories.

***Rev. Jeren Rowell, EdD***  
***President of Nazarene Theological Seminary***  
***Kansas City, Missouri***

By reading these heartfelt accounts, we can witness the incredible ways God is working within the Muslim community, providing comfort and guidance to His faithful even in their darkest moments. It is crucial to remember that God calls us to use His Word and show compassion to those who may seem unreachable, with the goal of bringing them closer to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. This book is a powerful reminder that we should strive to do more of this and courageously follow the Holy Spirit's guidance.

***Siegfried Koch***  
***Educator and Entrepreneur***

This book compiles inspiring testimonies about religious conversions from Islam to Christianity. The stories cover various means of conversion, including the genuine kindness of a Christian friend, intellectual curiosity, and dramatic dreams. It is a valuable contribution to the increasing literature on this topic.

***The Rev. Dr. Duane Alexander Miller***  
***Professor of Theology & Anglican Priest***



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I am grateful to Dr. Ali for producing this book that offers a glimpse into the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The book showcases the bravery of men and women who have embraced Jesus and become witnesses of a new life characterized by faith, love, and hope. When we encounter Jesus, our lives are transformed into that of God's children, and we become brothers and sisters with all human beings. This type of relationship is akin to experiencing heaven on earth! I hope their testimonies motivate and uplift all readers of this book.

***Mons. Giorgio Bertin, O.F.M.  
Bishop of Djibouti and Apostolic Administrator of Mogadishu, Somalia***

Rev. Dr. Ali provides a welcome addition to the published testimonies of Christians from a Muslim background. He shares the stories of men and women mainly from East Africa. These testimonies reflect the themes common to many Muslim conversions: reading the Bible and encountering Jesus, often through dreams. They also illustrate the cost many Muslims face if they follow Christ. This book reminds us that God is calling Muslims to himself. It encourages us to keep praying for and sharing God's word with them. It also highlights the importance of a Christian community that gives belonging and support in the face of persecution. These believers are an example for all Christians to follow, as they share the good news about Jesus despite the cost. May God bless them with abundant fruit!

***Dr. Evelyn Hibbert  
Regional Vice President, Global Region  
Evangelical Missiological Society***

Living a life devoted to Christ often requires significant sacrifices, and persecution has been a harsh reality for many believers since the early days of the New Testament. Dr. Aweis Ali shares inspiring stories of individuals who have shown unwavering dedication and bravery in the face of trials, all for the sake of their faith.

***Dr. Mátyás Bódi  
Researcher***

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This gallery of living saints gives us rich insights into what it means for men and women in majority Muslim contexts to encounter Jesus, undergo persecution, and follow him daily in joyful and courageous obedience, no matter what the cost. It is a valuable record of exceptional faithfulness in the midst of hardship and suffering as well as a guide for how to best introduce Muslim brothers and sisters to Jesus—through friendship.

***Dr. Michèle Sigg***  
***Executive Director, Dictionary of African Christian Biography and Editor,***  
***Journal of African Christian Biography.***  
***Center for Global Christianity and Mission***  
***Boston University***

This book provides valuable insights into the field of ethnography. While studying Islam outside its geographical context, we tend to focus on conversions from Catholicism or other Christian traditions. However, religious conversions occur even within the Muslim world. Through personal accounts, this work sheds light on a lesser-known aspect of the relationship between Islam and Christianity.

***Dr. Arely Medina***  
***Universidad de Guadalajara. CUCEA.***  
***Departamento de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas***  
***Jalisco, México***

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## FOREWORD

Rev. Dr. Aweis Ali has provided an excellent resource in this book. He has shown us that when Christians bear loving witness in word and deed to the LORD Jesus, Muslim people are open to finding Him. If we live the life of loving holiness that Jesus calls us into, then our gospel witness can be fruitful to our Muslim friends and neighbors. This book inspires us to see how the Living God can make any of us fruitful if we serve Him.

In his conclusion, Dr. Ali provides a powerful line, “no ministry opportunity should be wasted even if we only have a few minutes to testify.” When we see our lives in the light of eternity, all our values are turned upside down. Nothing matters so much as knowing this LORD Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the LORD. Jesus is not just a prophet. Jesus is the LORD God of Israel; the beginning and the end; the Alpha and Omega; the First and the Last. Jesus is the Crucified God, the Divine Lamb, in a profound mystery slain before the world began. Jesus is the Cosmic High Priest; the Divine Emperor; the Craftsman of Creation; the Chief Musician; the Eternal Angel of the LORD; the Cosmic Word who holds all things together.

Jesus is all the fullness of God in bodily form, not a diluted form of God but the highest and deepest of the infinite and eternal God at full strength. Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given by His Father, in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus is the center and soul of the Christian Faith. Because of who He is and all that He has done, He wins hearts and minds every day, all over the world. When the Immortal God was lifted up on the Cross to die, which seems impossible and even illogical, yet by that glorious work, He promised to draw all people from all nations and backgrounds to Himself (John 12:32).

The Eternal Father always begets His Beloved Son in the unity of the Spirit from everlasting to everlasting. When we join with Jesus, we are drawn into that eternal life of God sharing in the divine nature. This is what Islam rejects. Allah is defined as the god who does not beget nor is begotten and that it is the most serious error to suggest that Jesus is divine or that there is a Trinity.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it is no small matter when a person becomes a disciple of the LORD Jesus Christ. It is not a superficial change of religious perspective, but a profound revolution of heart and mind, life, and identity.

Jesus Himself said that to become one of His disciples means getting ready to lose all that we have, even our family, even our life. To be a disciple of Jesus means picking up a cross and following Him... even through death into resurrection. It means that we cannot any longer grasp onto the old life we had and must trust Him, one day at a time,

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<sup>1</sup> “Say, ‘He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Absolute. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is nothing comparable to Him.’” Quran 112:1-4. The Clear Qur’an.

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as we walk into the new life. Each day we put off the old humanity and put on the new humanity: yes, to become a disciple of Jesus is nothing less than a change of humanity, a new identity.

These testimonies show us what it means to follow Jesus. Some of these brothers and sisters have faced the costly challenges of following the Way of Jesus even losing their homes and families. This is why we know that those who become disciples of the Risen, Living LORD Jesus do not make this change through merely earthly resources or through their own power. Over and over again you will read how this glorious LORD Jesus is alive and sends dreams and visions to those who reach out for Him.

If we want to follow the LORD Jesus then we will always face opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we do not face any such opposition, we should be worried. Jesus promised that we will have trouble in this world, but that we should not fear because He has overcome the world. To follow Him means that we will be treated in the same way that He was treated. The religious authorities of His day were often against Jesus. They wanted to control Him, question Him, oppose Him, manage Him but they did not want to worship Him or trust Him. It is the same today. The religious powers of this passing age may want to say apparently pleasant things about Jesus of Nazareth as if they respected Him. However, when they realize who He really is and how the ancient prophets spoke about Him, they cannot handle Him.

This collection of testimonies takes us right down into the reality of this journey. Jesus is the great evangelist and He graciously invites us to join Him in this great work. The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is very relevant. The child who had become so lost, far away from home, was greeted down the road as he traveled because his father was looking out for him. In just this way, when we begin to turn around and search for this Living God, we will find that He comes looking for us! He is the Good Shepherd, the Divine Shepherd, and He will go to find a lost sheep even if we could not imagine how we could ever be found.

Each of these testimonies illustrates these truths in different ways. For some, the move from Islam is sudden and quick but for others, there is a more gradual journey. Yet, for all, it is clear that the LORD Jesus is the King of all kings and the LORD over all earthly and heavenly lords so that He can overrule all circumstances and even work impossible miracles in order to draw us to Himself. On the one hand, there is this Living God who has conquered death and will come to find us if we turn to Him... but on the other hand in this present darkness, we are faced with severe opposition and persecution. The world pushes us away, but the LORD God pulls us in!

This collection of testimonies gives us confidence in evangelism. The LORD Jesus who was alive and at work in the Scriptures is **still** alive and at work today. He sends us out to be His ambassadors; no matter what opposition and trouble we face, He will stand with us. When we are on the front line of helping people move from death to life, we see the miraculous power of the Living God more than anywhere else. Nothing so glorifies

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the Father, Son, and Spirit as the rescue of precious human beings who are made in the image of God.

In this book, you will meet wonderful saints who have often endured great suffering in order to follow Jesus. They were counted worthy to suffer for the Name, Acts 5:41, Hebrews 11:35-38).

This book of wonderful testimonies is a privilege to read because it inspires us to play our part in such stories, in the lives of the Muslim people we live and work with. The work of the gospel is the greatest work of this mortal life, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever wins souls is wise.” Proverbs 11:30. This book renews us and equips us for this great work.

Finally, pray for these brothers and sisters and keep on praying for those who face similar challenges. The Apostle Paul sometimes was so overwhelmed by the persecution and trouble that he felt as if he could no longer live, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.... This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.... On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.” 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

Brothers and sisters in the Muslim world are turning BACK to the LORD Jesus AWAY from Islam. Dr. Ali has shown in his many writings how Somalia and all East Africa had rich Christian heritage before the arrival of Islam. This latest book not only calls us to evangelism, but it also calls us to prayer.

We need great wisdom, love, and courage as we respond fruitfully and faithfully to all that we read in this book. We pray for the blessing of the Living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as you read this book.

***Rev. Dr. Paul Blackham***  
***Theologian and Church Planter***

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## PREFACE

*“It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.” Daniel 4:2.*

This book is the result of years of prayers and consultations. As a Christian who comes from a Muslim background and has survived persecution, I have shared my testimony with fellow believers from various countries; they were deeply impacted by my story, seeing it as a modern-day version of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>2</sup> For them, the idea that someone could be killed or harmed for their faith in the 21st century seemed unreal. However, Christian converts from a Muslim background may struggle with doubts about the authenticity of their faith if they do not face persecution as described in 2 Timothy 3:12.

With the knowledge I gained, I gathered the testimonies of twenty Muslim background believers from various countries to amplify the blessings of the Lord. The impact of having twenty testimonies from fellow brothers and sisters who used to be Muslims would be even greater than my own testimony. I collected these accounts starting in 2020 and submitted them to the press for publication by 2023. It was not an easy task, as I faced numerous challenges during the three-year period. It felt like I was in a spiritual war, with Satan trying to conceal the message you are reading now, but He failed.

Believers were interviewed in different ways, either face-to-face at secure locations, through social media, or by submitting a preprepared rough draft of their stories via email. The pre-submitted testimonies were refined with the help of the believers who sent them. Testimonies were collected in various local languages, such as Somali and Kiswahili, and later translated into English.

My initial plan was to collect the testimonies of only Somali believers. I then realized that the book would be richer if believers were from different countries and ethnicities. This is when I expanded my vision and contacted many Christians from a Muslim background. Some of the believers provided testimonies on the condition that I use a pseudonym for them. I honored this agreement. Others shared their testimonies with me but only for personal use; they did not want them published for security reasons. I respected this agreement and appreciated their honesty and trust in me. That is how and why the book you are reading came into being.

I firmly believe God uses our testimonies to lead others to the light. When we witness to others, we testify to them who Christ is and what He means to us. One of the reasons I wrote this book is to be used as an evangelistic tool. In fact, much of the Bible is the testimony of believers, who shared their testimonies so people could be saved. Let me conclude here with the evangelistic testimony of Apostle Paul:

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<sup>2</sup> My testimony is detailed in my biography: Naol Befkadu Kebede, *Courage, Conviction & Character: The Biography of Dr. Aweis A. Ali*. Blaze Goldburst, Cuttack, India, 2023.

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“So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (2 Timothy 1:8-9).

***Dr. Aweis A. Ali***

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## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Only the first names of the believers are mentioned in the book. All but one of the believers permitted the author to use their full names in the book. However, the author decided to use only the first names of the believers for security reasons. A few names in the book have been changed for the safety of the believers. The believers are sometimes quoted verbatim. However, some of these quotes have been translated from native languages. Translations are accurate to the best of our ability.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people were instrumental in bringing this book to fruition. Their unwavering support and hard work were invaluable. Although some preferred to remain anonymous, I would like to express my gratitude to Rev. Nicholas Baraza for his tireless efforts in arranging interviews and reaching out to many believers for additional questions or clarifications. Rev. Baraza's ability to transcribe audio into text is awe-inspiring. Additionally, Rev. LeCrecia M. Ali devoted several months to refining the initial manuscript and ensuring its publication readiness. Fiona Bear meticulously proofread the manuscript and offered crucial suggestions for improvements and corrections. Moreover, Siegfried Koch's recommendations were particularly invaluable; his expertise in Islam and proficiency in multiple languages significantly enhanced the book's quality. I am grateful to every one of you, always.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17.*

The testimonies of twenty Christians from a Muslim background are detailed in this book. Every individual testimony includes an introduction and family background, encounter with Christ, persecution, and following Jesus daily. The testimonies vividly illustrate that the Holy Spirit is at work even in Muslim communities where he convicts Muslims of their sins and facilitates their decision to follow Jesus. The testimonies also bear witness that God still communicates with seekers and believers through visions and dreams and that the Holy Spirit speaks through the persecuted disciples of Christ. According to the synoptic gospels, the Holy Spirit speaks for those who are mistreated because of their walk with the Lord;<sup>3</sup> “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.” Luke 12:11-12. No persecuted believer in this book is ever anxious or tongue-tied when threatened or cross-examined by those in authority over them.

As you read the remarkable stories in this book, you will be reminded again and again that the miracles and mission work in the Acts of the Apostles are still alive and well. The disciples of Christ chronicled in this book faced immense persecution yet their faith in Jesus was never shaken. In fact, it is safe to say that the persecution they experienced strengthened their faith and deepened their walk with the Lord. This must have surprised the persecutors who expected that shootings, beatings, detentions, starvations, and mental and psychological attacks would dampen the faith of these Christians who dared to walk away from Islam. Tertullian was indeed correct when he penned “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”<sup>4</sup> The blood of the Christians in this book that was unjustly shed became a lifeline for their spiritual growth.

Many Christians are unaware of the persecution Muslim background Christians face in the Muslim world.<sup>5</sup> This book will dispel that lack of knowledge. There are also Christians who consider persecution against the church as a final death blow; while we experience an ever-increasing anti-Christian global sentiment, the Christians in this book make it very clear that the gates of hell are not able to destroy the church. Similarly, the Christians also prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that any Christian who

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 12:11-12, Mark 13:11, Matthew 10:19.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, (Editors), Tertullian’s Apology, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3, 1997, Oregon, Books for the Ages, 182 (OR 1-2).

<sup>5</sup> See the author’s PhD thesis about the persecution many Muslim background believers face: Aweis A. Ali, Persecution of Christians, and Its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia. (Nairobi, Kenya: KENPRO Publications, 2021).

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lives a holy life will be persecuted, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

You will notice in this book that the believers start sharing their faith right after they are saved. They do not wait until they graduate from a course of study; they do not look for a church or a mission to send them to evangelize. The Holy Spirit instills in them an urgent burden to testify; they understand that the salvation they tasted is too good to be hoarded; they share it with family and friends even when their very lives are on the line. You will be amazed by what you learn from the brothers and the sisters whose testimonies are recorded in this book.

The relationship between Islam and the church is complex, with both the Qur’an and Hadith referring to Christians as the “People of the Book” and highlighting their piety and kindness: “You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allāh; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, “We are Christians.” That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.” Qur’an 5: 82. Saheeh International.

Although Islam can show hostility towards Jews and those who practice non-Abrahamic religions, Christians are not exempt from adverse treatment. Nonetheless, followers of Christ can use their privileged position within Islam to positively influence Muslims as examples of compassion and grace. Although there may be some exceptions, Muslims are generally more inclined to follow Christ when they witness the kindness and humility of Christ-like believers, rather than through logical arguments. However, this does not diminish the significance of apologetics in Christian ministry.

***Dr. Aweis A. Ali***

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## 1. MUHAMMAD FROM SIERRA LEONE

*"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* Philippians 4:13.

### Introduction & Family Background

Muhammad was born in 1994 at 9 Cox Street in the Kissy neighborhood of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone is a small country on the West Coast of Africa. At that time, the Cox Street community was a small, intimate community. When Muhammad was born, there were two mosques, one primary school, and one church. Presently, the district has a population of about fifteen thousand people. The main economic activities are small-scale trading, skilled and unskilled labor, and some civil servants.

Muhammad is the third born in his family. His family was small for his community, comprising only his father, mother, brother, and two sisters. His parents were devoted Muslims who faithfully observed all religious traditions required. Because their faith was so important to his parents, they ensured that all their children were well-grounded in the tenants and practices of Islam. Muhammad remembers many times when his mother sent them to the mosque on Fridays to perform *Jummah* prayers. His family was so devoted to the Islamic faith that eventually, he had a mosque built in their compound. As a show of good faith, he and his family had to be the first people at the mosque every prayer time.

Muhammad's mother played a significant role in shaping their spiritual life as Muslims. She taught them the importance of submitting to Allah by demonstrating their devotion in prayers, fasting, and Sharia law. She trained her children to always remain faithful Muslims.

This strict adherence to Islamic values became part of their overall lifestyle. Muhammad believed washing hands before eating and maintaining strict hygienic practices were essential to his Islamic faith. He and his family always said "*bismillah*" before eating anything and "*alhamdulillah*" when finished. He and his siblings attended Quranic classes every evening at a local *madrassa*. When a family member failed to live up to the religious expectations enforced in the home, Muhammad's father severely chastised the unfortunate family member. Not wanting to disappoint his disciplinarian father, He excelled in his Islamic knowledge, belief, and practice.

At the age of six, He started school. In junior secondary school, he realized that his faith was vital to him. Every day after school, he would get together with other Muslim friends his age to attend the Qur'anic classes. These classes teach young Muslim children to memorize the Qur'an while covering Islamic history and doctrines. During this time, He became selective in the type of people he would associate with and chose to be close to only fellow Muslims.

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Muhammad attended Baptist Boys High School, which is a Christian-sponsored school. One of the requirements was the attendance of devotions every day, regardless of the student's religious affiliation. Attending daily devotions became a considerable burden for him. He would keep quiet and even close his ears during the singing and preaching. During break time, he and other Muslim friends would engage in religious debates. The topic that dominated most of their discussions was the "Sonship of Jesus Christ."

After school, during Qur'anic class, Muhammad became an assistant to the teacher and was given the title "*Karmokor*" because he was considered one of the brightest students. The leaders of the Qur'anic school encouraged him to study further to become a teacher to other children. Further studies allowed him to learn the Arabic language and the Qur'an thoroughly. He became well-versed in both. He felt proud that he was becoming an important person who could train others in the faith.

Muhammad found out that this opportunity to teach produced a passion for teaching. After he completed his high school education at the Baptist Boys High School, he decided to pursue education as a career. He knew that once he had the required skills and opportunities, he would teach many and use that influence to bring others to the Muslim faith.

### **Encounter with Christ**

Meanwhile, his mother was looking for a clear direction in her life. She wondered, "What is the right way to heaven?" One evening as they were home, listening to the radio, they heard a preacher sharing God's word. They raised their eyebrows at each other as they listened to things they had never heard about God and Jesus. That sermon was so challenging to Muhammad and his mother that they were worried and perplexed by the end of the broadcast. The message captured their minds and challenged them. His mother's heart was troubled, and she longed for peace and to trust that God would show her the path she should follow.

That night as they slept, Muhammad's mother had a dream. In her dream, she saw a man wearing a glorious outfit that radiated light into every corner of the room where she slept. This man stretched his hand toward her and said, "I am Isa (Jesus), Son of God, the Way you desire to know. You are safe with me. Let your heart be at peace." She woke up with so much joy. She could not describe her happiness, but her joy was evident to those around her. She confessed that she encountered Jesus Christ and that He gave her the invitation to be safe in His hands. Muhammad remembers his mother telling him, "Muhammad, I feel happier, more joyful, and safer than ever before." He believed every word his mother spoke to him because of the seriousness and sincerity of her tone.

The following Sunday, Muhammad and his mother went to a nearby church for the worship service, and that very day they gave their lives to Christ! It was a refreshing moment, but at the same time, they knew they had made a serious decision to leave their former faith. They were now embarking on a new adventure, the end of which they did not know, but they anticipated hardships because of their strict Muslim faith

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community. They did not know how their other family members would react to their decision, but they had decided that this was the Way they wanted to follow.

### **Persecution**

Due to their rigorous Muslim family background, they expected to be treated differently. They anticipated persecution from the Muslim community. To their surprise, they did not experience any persecution. Their community was very much tolerant of others. They enjoyed relative calmness from family members and other Muslims in the community. Their family members did express shock that the people who had been so dedicated to the Muslim religion could turn away from the faith and join another faith.

In the beginning, they received frequent visitors from the mosque, who came to convince them to recant their new faith and go back to Islam. They had difficulty convincing others that it was a done deal. The encounter with Christ set their path, and Muhammad and his mother kept their commitment to Christ. The community knew them as the ones who had adopted a new faith. They knew they were on the right path that they had been seeking.

While they did not experience outward persecution, Muhammad struggled with the influence of his Muslim friends, who were constantly questioning him to convince him to return to Islam. They were his closest friends, and could not accept his new faith. He started to feel rejected by the people to whom he had been close. Some of his old friends abandoned him in their struggle with his new faith.<sup>6</sup> It was a lonely place, but the benefit was that he had to seek out new Christian friends, and these new friends would help him grow spiritually.

Muhammad struggled with relinquishing the Islamic way of life. That lifestyle shaped his entire existence. He worked to separate what was acceptable in the Christian faith and what was Islamic tradition. Because Islam was his comfort zone, the temptation to return was often present.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

A crisis point eventually came one Sunday when Muhammad felt loved and guilty at the same time after listening to his pastor preach a powerful sermon on "Sin and the Gift of God." The message touched Muhammad's heart so much that he wept exceedingly before God. He knew he had converted to be a follower of Christ, but he had not fully surrendered his life and committed to Christ alone. He was living a double life where he mixed Christianity and some previous beliefs dear to him.

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<sup>6</sup> Most Muslim scholars hold that a person should cut ties with a Muslim who left Islam (murtad) because an apostate should feel hurt and lament over his apostasy and protect himself from his incitement towards apostasy. The only relationship allowed with a murtad is based on encouraging him to return to Islam. If one loses hope in reverting, one may not continue relations with him, nor should he be shown kindness.

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That day he surrendered his life entirely to Christ, giving God complete control. He committed to living a life that would honor God alone and not live a double life where he mixed the standards of God and that of his former life. That day Muhammad decided to walk in God's light and power for the rest of his life. It was another life-transforming experience that he had in the presence of God.

After surrendering his whole life to God, Muhammad prayed that God would use him for His Kingdom. As he continued walking the journey with Christ, he asked to understand the call of the Lord in his life and how he could be of use in the Kingdom of God. The local church encouraged him and others to be involved in evangelistic outreaches, and they were allowed to preach in schools and different towns and villages. Muhammad felt that God had allowed him to win others to Christ for the honor and glory of God. The young man who had been shy and introverted became someone who could boldly preach the word of God.

The transformation of Muhammad's life was a shock to many in the Muslim community in his village. Despite their previous dedication to Islam, God utterly transformed his life. The whole family began to change through the transformation of Muhammad and his mother; their testimonies were powerful. Today all the family members are born-again Christians actively involved in building the Kingdom of God. They also participate in evangelistic outreaches in their local church and the community. They still live in their majority Muslim community, but they trust God that many will come to know the light and be transformed by the power of God.

Muhammad's favorite Scripture is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." This verse gives him strength, knowing there is nothing impossible with God. God makes everything possible for him and enables him to do many things he never thought or imagined he would do. Muhammad has experienced a more significant power through whom he can do all things. His salvation entirely depends on that greater power.

Muhammad rests wholly on the fact that there is nothing impossible with God. God saved him and his mother; He delivered them from their sinful nature. Therefore, God can forgive every person and welcome them into His Kingdom. Muhammad's prayer is that more Muslims realize that Jesus is the only way to God. Currently, he is pursuing a degree in education.

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## 2. EID FROM SOMALIA

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Matthew 25:31-32.*

### Introduction & Family Background



Eid was born in 1979 in a small Somali village in eastern Ethiopia. His father is a Sheikh. Sheikhs are Muslim religious leaders, highly respected in their communities. Eid's mother passed away in 2017. Before her death, she was a devoted housewife who cared for the family by raising the children and keeping the homestead well. His family is small-scale herders who keep herds of cattle, sheep, and camels. There was a time when they stayed briefly in the city, but most of the time, they spent their lives in nomadic travel. He enjoyed an excellent loving relationship with his family. As the family's eldest son, his brothers, and sisters loved him and accorded him the respect required by their culture. The eldest son is considered the father's representative in the family. Eid was respected amongst his family and in his community.

He grew up in a Muslim community where he was a devoted practicing Muslim. Eid and his community despised people from a different faith than theirs. He believed that anybody who did not worship or ascribe their allegiance to Allah was his sworn enemy and the ultimate goal was to kill them. His belief system stated that on the day a devoted Muslim killed a Christian, he would be counted righteous and be admitted to paradise as a person who did the noblest thing on earth. Immediate access to paradise by killing a Christian is still a strong belief among many of the people in Somalia who practice Islam.

In his practice of Islam, Eid read and understood the whole Qur'an. He learned all the doctrines of Islam and adhered to them religiously to the extent of being radical to defend what he learned. He believed that only those who strictly practiced the tenets of Islam were Muslim. Anyone who failed to practice it to its full extent would face the wrath of the other Muslims in the community.

Eid was privileged to be able to attend school and went on to college, where he obtained a degree in Community Development.

### Encounter with Christ

God turned Eid's life around when he met a Christian in 1998. The Christian he met gave him a New Testament Bible to read. He had never encountered someone who shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. The unique thing about this person was that



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he was one of the most educated and respected men in the town where they lived. The community knew him to be a Christian, but he was well versed in the Qur'an because he had converted to Christianity from Islam. Eid admired his life and the way he was principled. They had time to talk about his life and what motivated him to convert from Islam to Christianity, and through that conversation, Eid decided that he wanted to be like this respected gentleman.

Another thing that motivated Eid to convert is how Islam treats women versus Christianity. He saw that in Christianity, men and women are treated equally, whereas Islam treats women as lesser people.<sup>7</sup> Eid knew that after his father had married another woman, Eid's mother felt unhappy. Despite her desire to have her husband's respect, his father treated her poorly.

Eid also appreciated how Christians sing together. The outstanding Christian music from the Ethiopian churches called him to follow Jesus, and he wanted to be a part of the group that praised God together.

Many questions must be answered when a Muslim seeks to convert to Christianity. A good teacher will be able to answer those lingering questions. When questions are unanswered, the seeker may doubt the existence of God and even decide to return to Islam. These concerns include how Christians worship, many questions about the Bible, and the Christian faith.

After Eid's conversion, he longed for a deeper understanding of his new faith. He was privileged to sit under the teachings and training of great Christian leaders who helped him grow in the Christian faith. During those sessions of discipleship, he was able to understand the word of God more deeply. He received training in church leadership. He is now actively involved in church leadership today.

## **Persecution**

Eid felt a peace beyond his imagination when he came to know Jesus Christ. He felt the peace and love of God all around him. At the same time, he faced great persecution after choosing to follow Jesus.<sup>8</sup> He expected to receive opposition from those around him. A common tactic in the Muslim community is to frustrate new believers in hundreds of little ways so that they give up their faith and return to Islam. However, more severe persecution is always a possibility. Many Somali Christians lose their lives because they decide to follow Jesus.

The persecution that Eid faced ranged from family pressure to government persecution. In Somalia, being a Christian is a criminal offense. His only crime was falling in love with Jesus and following Him. He knew the consequences of becoming a Christian. He was

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<sup>7</sup> "Narrated Abu Said Al-Khudri: The Prophet said, "Isn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?" The woman said, "Yes." He said, "This is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind.", Sahih Bukhari, 3:48:826.

<sup>8</sup> According to an authentic hadith, Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever changes his religion, kill him." Sahih al-Bukhari, 3017.

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willing to pay the cost of being a follower of Jesus Christ. He made a deliberate decision to ask Christ into his life and be a child of God at that time despite knowing the consequences that would come. Eid was jailed at least 15 times for his faith. Sharing his faith violated the state law, and the police detained him for breaking the law of the land. He was once accused of leading over 300 underground house churches! He desired that claim to be accurate, but alas, it was a false allegation. He led three underground churches, where dedicated believers worshiped together. However, all this did not break his spirit because he knew he was doing the right thing to show others the light. Jesus had saved him from the pit of darkness and showed him the light, and Eid wanted all people to know and follow Jesus.

Because of his faith, he also lost a wife and a child. Eid was married and had a child when he believed in Jesus Christ. His wife's family took her by force and declared her divorced from him.<sup>9</sup> Her family arranged for her to marry another man without her consent. This tactic is frequently used amongst Eid's people when someone converts to Christianity. Eid fell into a depression when he lost his family, but he never lost hope in God. He knew that in due time God would restore to him all that he had lost for the sake of Jesus Christ.

After several years, Eid married again, and God blessed them with several children. Yet again, after seven years, his wife and children were taken away by the wife's family because of his commitment to following Jesus Christ. His deep love for his family made the loss devastating. However, this time God had another plan. After some time apart, he reunited with his family, and they lived together happily. Eid thanked his in-laws, who promised they could now stay together and raise their children.

Eid's life is not without ongoing persecution. The threat of death is constant. His culture believes Christians curse Allah and deserve punishment. The appropriate penalty for the apostate is death, which will give the killer good standing with Allah. So as a Christian, Eid receives numerous death threats. He made the difficult decision to leave his homeland so that he could continue to preach. Better to be a living preacher than a dead martyr. Because of his faith, he could not return to his homeland, Somalia.

However, Eid rejoices when he remembers that Jesus told his disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33. This verse gives Eid the strength to persevere because he knows that persecution is a part of the trouble about which Jesus spoke. He knows he will overcome his trials; many will follow Jesus Christ because of his testimony.

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<sup>9</sup> The main Islamic schools of thought (including Shafi'i, Hanafi and Maliki) agree in principle that the marriage collapses if one spouse apostates from Islam, at-Tanbih, 165. *Al-Tanbih fi al-Fiqh al-Shafi'i*, (The Notification) is one of the most essential books in Shafi'i jurisprudence. It played a significant role in the development of the Shafi'i school of thought, madhab.

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Eid understands now “the cost of following Jesus.” He has experienced firsthand that following Jesus requires total commitment. No matter what happens, following Christ will mean being ready to face the consequences. However, he does not regret his decision to follow Christ because he knows God is with him wherever he is.

Eid’s stand for Christ has led some people to Christ, including some of his siblings. One brother accepted Jesus Christ, even though he had already married two wives and had several children. When his family and friends looked at Eid’s life and saw how Jesus had changed it, they were encouraged to follow Jesus because God is merciful and all-forgiving to those who seek Him, forgiving their sins. They can live lives free from the bondage of sin.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Eid has felt God speaking to him on many occasions. Through the Scriptures, he hears the voice of God talking to him personally. He knows he must make sure he is listening to the right voice. There are so many voices out there, and the follower of Jesus can only understand the voice of God when he spends quality time with Him.

Eid has come to cherish his time in God’s Word. He enjoys reading the book of Luke, but his favorite verses are Matthew 25:31-40. He is always blessed when hearing these verses. He knows that a time will come when the Lord Jesus Christ will come to judge each person. The action and decisions they make here on earth will determine where they will go and spend eternity. The ones who have accepted the forgiveness of sin will go and enjoy eternal life in heaven, and those who did not receive Him will have a destiny in the ravaging fire.

Eid believes that Jesus is coming soon, and we must give an account of how we spent our lives here on earth. But he is encouraged that it is a fruitful journey that, despite the many challenges, God still shows His love to all, irrespective of what they have done in the past.

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### 3. ELIAZER FROM KENYA

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* Revelation 3:20.

#### Introduction & Family Background



Eliazer was born and brought up in one of the many coastal villages surrounding Malindi, Kenya. The inhabitants of this area are known to be predominantly Muslim. He was born into a Muslim family and grew up under the strict teaching of Islam. He is the second-born son of many brothers and sisters in a large family. His father had two other wives besides his mother.

Growing up, his mother played a crucial role in shaping his belief system. Typical of many families where a husband has multiple wives, Eliazer’s father was rarely with the family, but his mother was always close to him and his siblings. His father was a businessman and a good provider, while his mother cared for their day-to-day needs.

As a young man, Eliazer longed to become a religious scholar specializing in Islamic religious education. He chose to attend *madrassa* rather than the local public school system. His lessons at the *madrassa* grounded him deeply in the teachings of Islam and gave him a passion for continuing to study and learn more about his faith. He also had the opportunity to meet great scholars who further equipped him in his studies. His father, in particular, supported his desire to become an Islamic scholar.

Eliazer began to engage in public debates about Islam and Christianity as his zeal for the Islamic faith grew. To better debate his opponents, he studied the Qur’an and the Bible. He sought contradictions in the Bible to win the debates against Christians. He became very influential and traveled throughout the coastal region, engaging in public debates.

Due to his dependability and zeal for Islam, Eliazer had the opportunity to go on the Hajj to Mecca. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim who can, male or female, should make at least once in their lifetime. During the Hajj, he met other devoted Muslims and made friends with them, which only increased his devotion to Islam.

Eliazer later had the opportunity to advance his studies in Yemen, which was a great honor and something he had longed for. However, he began having health issues in Yemen and eventually requested to return home. He flew home and started what would become an extended medical journey. He saw many doctors and visited many hospitals, but they could not diagnose his illness. The family became frustrated because of Eliazer’s health challenges. His medical needs consumed all the family finances with no positive results. He struggled with his illness for almost two years and came to the point where he had lost all hope of healing. He was just 24 years old when he gave up hope of being well again.

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Eliazer became more open to people's suggestions in such a desperate situation. He had tried modern medicine, and it had failed. He began to try alternatives such as traditional medicine and even those practicing magic, but these were also unsuccessful. His condition remained unchanged.

### **Encounter with Christ**

One day as his father was taking Eliazer for medical treatment on a bus, a man they did not know started talking to them. This man showed concern for his medical condition. His father explained everything they had gone through with the hope of healing and shared that nothing was working. His father confided in this stranger that someone recommended a particular medicine man who they believed would help them. As they continued to talk, the man, who they later learned was a pastor, realized Eliazer and his father had reached a point where they would welcome any help. The pastor looked at Eliazer and had compassion for him.

As they got off the bus at the same stop, the pastor asked if he could pray with them even though they were Muslim. They struggled with the idea of allowing a Christian to pray for them. However, in the end, they decided they had nothing to lose, and they accepted. The pastor prayed for them, and one thing he said in his prayer stood out to Eliazer and remained with him long after the pastor finished the prayer. The pastor said, "May God reveal Himself so that he (Eliazer) can be a living testimony that indeed Jesus heals as He healed and raised the dead." That statement resounded in his mind. Would God heal him so that he could be a testimony?

Before they headed in their separate directions, they exchanged contact information with the pastor. As they returned home, Eliazer kept remembering the pastor's words and thought, if Jesus healed people and raised them from the dead, why not him? After some days, he called the pastor to ask him to continue praying for him. Eliazer, as one of the respected Imams in their community, never wanted anyone else, especially the Muslim community, to know that he was asking a pastor for prayers. But after the encounter with the pastor, he felt some improvement in his health. Even though he never knew what was affecting him, he started hoping things could change.

After a few days of communicating, the pastor invited Eliazer to his house. Eliazer intended to go there, have the pastor pray for him, and then return to his everyday life. The pastor talked to him about God's love, God's good plan for him, and his need for a relationship with God. None of this was very striking, but in the end, the pastor gave him a challenge from the book of Revelation. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Revelation 3:20). These words struck his heart and kept Eliazer thinking about what kind of God wanted to enter his heart and dwell there. After a long talk, the pastor concluded by praying for Eliazer to be healed in Jesus' name.

That night, Eliazer could not sleep. The pastor's words kept ringing in his head about a God who would enter his heart to dwell there. To Eliazer, Allah was not a relational God to be concerned with his welfare. For several days, he struggled with deep thoughts

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about this God that he had never known despite being a great Muslim religious leader. He longed to know a God who cared for him without dealing with the complexities of the Christian faith, notably the Trinity.

During his mental battle, Eliazer continued to develop his friendship with the pastor. He introduced the pastor to his friends and met the pastor's friends. However, his siblings were unhappy about this new friend, mainly because he brought Christian literature. Even his father, who had initially favored the friendship, started to resent it because the pastor had not fully restored Eliazer's health. It created tension in the family, so Eliazer and the pastor devised new communication methods. Eliazer was still sick at this point, and for peace at home, he asked the pastor to pray to His God for healing. That way, they could continue their friendship outside of the house.

One day during his afternoon nap, Eliazer had a dream that, to this day, he cannot fully explain. He appeared to be in a dry place where no people were, and being the only person there was so terrifying. He saw that he was walking, trying to get to the place where people were, but he was not moving. So he knelt and said in his heart, "I have tried with all my strength, but nothing is happening." At that time, he heard a voice saying, "If only you would allow me to help you," but he did not understand who said those words. Terrified at hearing a voice in an empty desert, he woke up confused, with many questions about what he had dreamt.

Even after waking up, the dream lingered. Whenever Eliazer was alone, he vividly remembered that voice saying, "If only you would allow me to help you." Eliazer remembered the verse in Revelation that his pastor friend had shared about Jesus standing at the door and knocking and thought his dream might be connected to that. Finally, he decided to see his pastor friend, sensing that he might understand the vision. They met and had a long talk concluding that maybe God was telling Eliazer that he had tried everything with his strength and wisdom, but all had failed him. Now it was time to allow God to have a place in his life so that God could help him. The pastor took him through the steps of salvation, prayed for him, and departed.

That evening Eliazer's heart was restless, and he had no peace. Fear, anxiety, and uncertainty troubled his heart and left him exhausted. During the night, he woke up with a troubled soul. He said to himself, "If this God, about whom my pastor friend has been telling me, will sort me out, then let me allow Him in." Desperate for peace, he took out the Gideon's Bible hidden in his room, found a page with a prayer of confession, and read the words aloud. He knew he had accepted Jesus Christ into his life but continued to struggle with anxiety and fear. Finally, he went to sleep, hoping that he would be relieved of his fears and worries.

That night he slept deeply and soundly and felt a peace in his heart that he had never experienced. He slept like a well-fed baby! In the morning, he called the pastor to tell him that he had repeated the prayer of confession in Gideon's Bible, which gave him peace that he could not understand. However, he knew that he had wanted peace for his whole life and that it only came through Jesus Christ.

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## Persecution

Fearing his family's reaction, Eliazer continued going to the mosque as before, but gradually he began relaxing his previously strict rituals. In time, it became evident to his family that things were not as they had been. Just as in his earlier life, he greatly desired to know God and had a great zeal to know God and his ways. With the pastor's help, he accessed more Christian literature that deepened his Christian faith.

At home, everybody sensed the change in how Eliazer lived. There was a total difference, and they suspected it resulted from the contact he kept with the pastor. Eliazer's father was not happy at all. He felt that he was losing his son to another religion which, according to him, was not true. Knowing that their home was not conducive to being a Christian, he decided to move away from the homestead and go to Mombasa, where he could live and experience this newfound faith.

Eliazer left home with only the clothes on his back and some cash for his transport and food for a few days. Things were not easy once he arrived in Mombasa, but he was determined to continue this new life he had found in Christ. His health was still not fully restored, so he was on and off his sickbed, but his faith remained unshaken.

Eliazer contacted his family at home to see if he could get any help. His father was angry with him for leaving home without telling them where he was going or why. During a conversation with his brothers, Eliazer revealed that he had converted to Christianity. The family decided to keep it a secret because they felt they would be embarrassed and despised by the community.

Eliazer's father was so mad with him that he continued to remind him of his investment in Eliazer for his Islamic religious education. His father could not stand that his son had abandoned all this. But Eliazer persisted. He was determined to hold on to his new faith and not leave God. He joined a local church there in Mombasa and became even more dedicated to following the Lord. The new pastor in Mombasa became instrumental in helping him grow in his salvation, and Eliazer began to feel peace in his heart.

Eliazer continued to grow in his faith and love for Jesus for two years. He had spent so much on doctors, hospitals, traditional medicine, and even known magic practitioners, but none could diagnose his illness. Some elders told him that marine spirits that wanted to kill him as a sacrifice were afflicting him. He never fully understood this but continued to trust God to deliver him, and God, through prayer and fellowship, delivered Eliazer. He regained his health and looked better than before he left home.

Eliazer got a job in Mombasa, and life was going well, besides communication with his family, which had been nonexistent because they did not want anything to do with him; his Christian faith angered them so much. Then one day, he received a call from his father, asking him if it was correct that he had rebelled against their religion. When he confirmed that he was a Christian, his father told him from that day on, Eliazer was no longer considered one of his children. If anything happened to him, he should know they have no relationship because he and the rest of the family are disappointed with his

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decisions and actions. Hearing these harsh words from his father broke his heart, but he knew he had made the right decision to follow Christ.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Eliazer does not regret his decision to follow Christ and has had more peace in his heart. Although it has not been a smooth journey, he is determined to hold on to God until the end. He often remembers the words that God spoke to him years back. "If only you would allow me to help you." Indeed, God has helped him as he is now fully recovered without human intervention. Only God was able to heal him.

Eliazer has the vision to return to his community and share the love of Christ with them. He knows this will not be easy, but with the Holy Spirit's help, he can share the light in that community. However, for the time being, he is hiding because of his family's animosity toward him. He intends to get married and settle down to raise a God-fearing Christian family. He is engaged to a fine Christian lady, and they plan to be married soon.

He is fully involved in ministry in his local church as an evangelist who strongly emphasizes reaching the Muslim community. He has not changed his name.<sup>10</sup> He still uses the name associated with the Muslim faith, so he is welcomed whenever he gets a chance to venture into the Muslim community. While there, he takes every opportunity to preach the gospel from an intellectual point of view because he understands the Bible and the Qur'an. With the Islamic debates experience, he knows how to engage Muslims in private conversations that do not put him at unnecessary risk.

He has also had opportunities to meet other MBBs and fellowship with them to encourage one another in their faith journey. Organizers invited him to attend a conference on evangelism to Muslims in West Africa, which opened his eyes to the whole issue of reaching out to the Muslim community. The conference created in him the burning desire to see more Muslim brothers and sisters know the truth and follow the light that God has provided for them.

Eliazer still holds Revelation 3:20 as the motivating verse in his life. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me." This verse opened his heart and allowed God in his life. It gave him the concept of a God who wanted to establish a relationship with him and show love and compassion in his life. And that is the same God with whom he desires all people to have a relationship.

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<sup>10</sup> In some Christian traditions (including Catholics and Orthodox), it is customary or mandatory for new converts to adopt a new name that symbolizes their rebirth as a new person in Christ.



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## 4. BATULI FROM KENYA

*"I once was lost, but now I'm found." Amazing Grace by John Newton.*

### Introduction & Family Background



Batuli is the second-born child in a family of seven children. Her staunch Muslim family lived in Nairobi, where she was born. Batuli's mother was not her father's only wife. She has a sister, Fatuma, who is the last-born child in the family. They were a typical Kenyan family, despite their numerous challenges, mainly due to polygamy. They grew up loving one another and were a close-knit family.

Batuli went through the Kenyan education system, where she reached grade eight. She could not continue with her education to secondary school because there was no money for school fees. Batuli was heartbroken because she was a brilliant girl who loved learning. While her friends continued to high school, she remained home, figuring out what her life would be like. Fatuma, also a bright young woman, experienced the same heartbreak several years later when she could not continue with secondary education because the family could not pay the school fees.

When they could not continue their education, Batuli and Fatuma asked themselves what they were doing with their lives. They spent most of their time in the mosque praying that one-day things would change. Their devoted Muslim family taught them from childhood about their faith. They adhered to Islam without question.

Batuli attended all the prayers at the mosque. She would move around the neighborhood seeking casual jobs, hoping to secure one and save enough money to return to school. The positions she could get did not pay well enough for her education and care for some of the family's needs. She felt obligated to help her big family with their financial needs.

One day she reconnected with a woman who had given her some casual work. On that day, the lady, Patience, talked to Batuli about her life, and they had a friendly chat. Patience knew that Batuli was sharp but felt something was missing from Batuli's life. She shared with Patience the story and that of her family and her desires and aspirations in life. This story touched Patience so much that she promised to support Batuli so she could go back to school. However, it had been four years since she had to drop out of school, and she was concerned about returning to school.

### Encounter with Christ

After a lengthy discussion, they agreed that Batuli would enroll in a local technical college where she could take a course to learn skills that would help her in the future. Patience secured her a place in the college, which began a long friendship. Batuli and

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Patience spent much time together, and Batuli confided in this lady about her life. Surprisingly, her new friend always said, "Let's pray." Batuli did not have a problem with her prayers because she respected anyone who prayed.

They got very close after several days of working together and planning for the future. She began to feel a bit uncomfortable as it became a routine that Patience would always share the word of God with her whenever they were together. She was Muslim and never regarded Christianity as acceptable to God. She would listen, but she did not take anything seriously. Patience consistently shared about the goodness and love of God and how He sent Jesus to save us from the hands of the enemy. None of that made much sense to Batuli.

Patience continued supporting Batuli with her college fees, and they would visit her family occasionally. Patience became a family friend. Eventually, she invited Batuli to church, and she attended to see how different it was from the mosque. However, the church visits began to be more frequent. Her parents did not have a problem with her church attendance because they thought that she was going so that she could continue receiving support for her education.

However, over time Batuli began to admire her friend's lifestyle. Patience was incredible, and Batuli wanted to know what gave her so much joy and a heart to help even a stranger. Batuli began to have so many questions about the admirable attitude of this generous, kind woman.

One day while alone in Patience's house, Batuli began to consider all the beautiful things her friend had shared about God and Jesus' love. She shared her desire to understand the love her friend had shown her. Patience told her the story of salvation and how the love of God alone can give joy. Other things do not provide satisfaction; only God's Son, Jesus Christ, gives joy. Batuli desired at that point to follow Jesus so that she could experience the joy always evident in Patience's life. She became a disciple of Jesus and was excited for the next phase of her life in Christ Jesus.

Back at home that evening, she was happy as she enjoyed gospel music. Before, she would listen, and nobody took notice. However, this particular day was unusual because she would sing along with some of the songs. Her mother was concerned, and she asked her what caused the change. Batuli then shared with her mother that she was now a Christian. Her mother was shocked as it was the last thing she thought could happen to her children.

### **Persecution**

Batuli's mother became angry and reminded her about her heritage and religious upbringing. Batuli and her mother quarreled throughout the night, and someone informed her father. Her father came home furious, and their home became a battleground. She regretted having shared her conversion with her mother. She ran away for safety. Patience hosted her for some time until she had finished her training. She was able to secure a job in town, and she started to take care of her life.

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Batuli struggled to accept the changes that had happened in her life. Everything had changed, from her manner of dressing to her friends. She knew if she maintained her friendships with her Muslim friends, it would be too easy for her to return to that life again, so she separated herself from them. She also deliberately forced herself to refrain from participating in Islamic celebrations and rituals, such as Ramadan, and Islamic prayers. One advantage she saw was that those practices prepared her for her Christian life. Fasting was not a struggle for her in the least, and she could fast with the proper mindset and not as a legalistic requirement of the religion.

It was challenging for this young Christian because her father told her she was no longer welcome in the family. Her mother was compassionate toward Batuli, but she could do very little to ensure she would be accepted into the family. Several months after she accepted Jesus, Batuli met a young man in the church, and eventually, they married.

Batuli found that the journey of salvation was not that easy. It came with its challenges, but she clung to the hope that God would be with her. Those times when the family was far away and did not want anything to do with her because of the decision she made to follow Christ, God gave her people who were more than just friends; they became her new family.

Three years passed without contact from home. Batuli's family chased her away from home, and nobody seemed to want to know her whereabouts or how she was doing. But at the birth of her firstborn child, her mother excitedly and secretly visited them without informing Batuli's father. In that beautiful reunion, her mother embraced her and asked for Batuli's forgiveness. After that, she and her mother began having regular talks on the phone, but she was still not allowed to go home, which was the price she had to pay for making such a bold decision to follow Jesus.

Yet every day, her relationship with God was getting stronger as she sensed God was calling her into the ministry of intercession. She became more prayerful, which developed into a closer walk with God. She felt an intense burden to pray specifically for her immediate family members, who were still Muslim. Her prayer was that they would realize the saving power of Jesus. God opened another opportunity for her to speak to her sisters to lead them to Christ. If God had saved her, she could be an instrument to bring her family to God.

Batuli's marriage continued to flourish as they depended more on God, and God blessed them with four daughters, including a set of twins. They continued to live a life of service and honoring God. God had brought her this far because of her decision years before when she had lost hope. Her goal in life was to help others find hope in Jesus Christ. Her favorite song that blesses her heart each time she hears it is "*Amazing Grace*" because it captures what her life was like: she was lost, but now she is found.

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## Following Jesus Daily

For some time, Batuli lived with bitterness because the family abandoned her after she decided to be a Christian. None of the family members were concerned for her or her family, which created resentment in her heart. One day she decided she needed to work on that aspect of her life and forgive everybody who ill-treated her. Most bitterness was towards her father, who ensured none of the family members connected with her. After praying and fasting for her family, she heard a clear voice that she believed was God saying, "My daughter, forgive them as I have forgiven you." She began to take deliberate steps to go to her family home to talk to her father and the rest of the family and let them know that she had forgiven them.

When she arrived, Batuli's father was very sick. She made her way to his bedside with tears in her eyes. She told her parents that she had forgiven them for what they had done because of her decision. She confirmed that she did not regret her decision to be a child of God. Her parents were remorseful and said they respected her decision to be a Christian and forsake the Muslim faith. She was welcomed back as part of the family.

After that beautiful reunion, both her parents passed away, but she was able to gather with her siblings to mourn and comfort one another. It was a great blessing that her parents passed away after she had made peace with them. She was sad because they died before they followed Christ even though she testified to them while they were still alive.

She made it her mission to boldly proclaim her faith and share the gospel with her siblings so they could see the light and follow Him. She is motivated by God's love for her and the world. He gave His only Son to die for all sins, and all could have everlasting life through Him. This hope motivates her to continue to live a life pleasing to God.

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## 5. FATUMA FROM KENYA

*“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”* Ecclesiastes 3:11a.

### Introduction & Family Background



Fatuma, Batuli’s sister, also struggled when she could not continue her education. While Batuli sought a job and eventually found Christ, Fatuma remained a staunch Muslim. She had much idle time and often joined other girls her age to attend *madrassa*. She also helped with household chores. She stayed home to sleep or watched movies during her free time.

As time passed, she began joining another group of girls who roamed around the neighborhood and loitered throughout the area. They were all young women who had nothing constructive to do with their time. They felt hopeless about their future.

Her elder sister, Batuli, tried to talk to Fatuma about the company she was keeping and how that group of girls could be a bad influence. As a typical teenager, she would not take advice from her sister. And besides, she could not listen to Batuli because she had embraced another religion unacceptable to the family. Nothing Batuli said made sense to Fatuma.

Eventually, Fatuma met a Muslim man from Uganda with whom she fell in love, and they decided to get married. They settled into married life. Fatuma enjoyed marriage, and things went well until she conceived her firstborn child. Her husband changed drastically and became abusive. Despite the abuse she faced, she could not do anything about it because the only alternative was to return home where there was no hope. There was no one to turn to for help, so she had to endure her abusive marriage.

Despite the abuse, which included physical cruelty, she delivered her first born baby safely, a girl. She was excited, and even her husband was happy to be a father. Her husband became more loving and caring, making the marriage happy again. She was surprised by the change but enjoyed it while it lasted.

But not long after her baby was born, Fatuma’s husband stopped coming home and neglected his family. She felt abandoned and alone as she tried to care for herself and her young daughter. Eventually, she discovered that her husband was looking for a second wife. In Islam, a man can marry up to four wives and keep an unlimited number of concubines (bond women).<sup>11</sup> Fatuma, being from a polygamous family, clearly understood the implications and challenges of having such a marriage. Long before, she had vowed never to agree to a polygamous marriage. She opposed her husband’s plans for a second marriage, and he was not pleased with her.

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<sup>11</sup> “If you fear that you will not do justice to the orphans, then, marry the women you like, in twos, in threes and in fours. But, if you fear that you will not maintain equity, then (keep to) one woman, or bond women you own. It will be closer to abstaining from injustice.” Qur’an 4:3 — Mufti Taqi Usmani translation.

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Amid her challenging marriage, Fatuma discovered she was again expecting a child. Her husband continued to be abusive and was still adamant that she must accept having a co-wife. Despite her objections, her husband married a second wife. Fatuma was heartbroken. Her marriage was bad enough without adding another wife to the mix.

The abuse continued until one day, Fatuma could not take it any longer, and she left. She wanted a new life. However, her husband fought for custody of the children and won, so she had to go without her two children. She moved to Mombasa, where she wanted to start life afresh. From time to time, while she was in Mombasa, she would visit her children but seeing how the stepmother mistreated the kids broke her heart. The new wife could not have children and took her frustration out on Fatuma's children. Being without her children broke her heart, and she longed for the day when she could get custody of her children and be happy again.

### **Encounter with Christ**

Fatuma remained faithful in her religious life, praying to Allah to help her through all this. She found a job in Mombasa and started planning to get her children through the legal system. In her legal pursuits, she met a young man willing to help her get custody of her children. As they were working through this process, this young man started sharing with her about the love of God. Fatuma's agenda was to get the children, and that was it. However, this man kept giving her Scriptures to read and other Christian materials that introduced her to Jesus.

At the same time, her sister, Batuli, was also sharing how God could intervene in that situation miraculously if only she would have a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Both people started talking to her about God almost at the same time. At first, what they were talking about did not make sense, but after much thought and remembering that God could indeed do miracles, she began thinking that maybe this was God speaking to her.

Soon after, she needed to go to Uganda for the custody hearing. She would have to make regular trips to attend court dates, which was financially and emotionally draining. She felt so alone and needed someone to support her. Her legal advisor told her repeatedly to trust God for things to work out.

One day she decided to visit her legal advisor's church, and the preacher spoke about faith. She did not understand any of those aspects of faith about which the preacher spoke. At the end of the service, the congregation began an intense prayer session, and she just sat there wondering what to do. She finally said a short prayer. "God, bring my children back to me if you are there. If you do, then I will follow you." After that simple prayer, she left the prayer meeting. Her heart was still troubled from missing her children so much. Batuli encouraged her, but she still spent most of her time weeping for her children.

While planning to travel to Uganda to see her children, she received a call from her ex-husband telling her she should not bother coming. As a family, they had decided to

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give her back the children, and she could go to the airport that evening to receive them. Fatuma felt like she was in a dream: she could not believe it! That very day she went to the airport, and true to his word, the children arrived safely by themselves. It was overwhelming to be reunited with her children for good without going through more grueling court battles. God had answered her prayers. She called all her friends to share the good news.

As she went to sleep that evening, she remembered that she had made a promise to God some time back. She knew she would not have peace until she fulfilled the promise. She called her legal advisor, who was happy to share the story of salvation with her. He led her to Christ that evening, and she started a new life as a Christian. It was the beginning of another exciting journey because she had seen the hand of God in the legal process and deliverance of the Lord.

### **Persecution**

Fatuma's decision to follow Christ did not receive much opposition from her family because her sister, Batuli, had already walked that journey. Fatuma had Batuli's support in her spiritual growth. She did struggle with other family members who saw the two sisters as strange people because they had gone totally against the traditions and religion of their birth family. Her parents and brothers did not support the two sisters' decision to follow Christ, and while they did not harass her, she did not speak or meet with any of her immediate family members for several years. Later, the family called her and Batuli to visit their ailing father, and they were able to talk to him; he stated that he respected their decision to follow Jesus Christ.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Meanwhile, Fatuma continued her friendship with the young man who had been her legal advisor. For several years, he was instrumental in disciplining her in the faith. Over time, they fell in love and got married. They are now happily married, serving in their local church, and sharing their story of how God uses ordinary people to bring glory to Himself. God blessed them with two more children, and they praise God for how he has remained faithful in their lives. Fatuma saw the deliverance of God from a place where she had lost all hope to a place where she now is the one helping other young ladies to find hope in Jesus.

Fatuma dedicated her life to sharing what God had done for her. God delivered and rescued her from her painful life and gave her a new life. She can smile about life again. Without Christ, she was without hope, but now she wants to share her hope in Jesus.

Fatuma and Batuli continue to be the intercessors for the family. They use some virtues they previously practiced in Islam to ground themselves in the word of God. They take prayer seriously and regularly take time to fast, specifically for the deliverance and salvation of their Muslim friends and family.

The sisters decided they would not change their names, but they continued using their Muslim (Arabic) names, indicating that God can change anyone and use them for His

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Kingdom. They desire their lives to be like a book read by all people so that others may come to know Christ and his saving power.

Fatuma's favorite verse is Ecclesiastes 3:11a "He has made everything beautiful in its time." It reminds her that when people seem rejected, God continually renews them. She has seen how God took the brokenness of her life and made it beautiful.



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## 6. ABDALLAH FROM COMOROS

*“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....”* Philippians 3:10.

### Introduction & Family Background



Abdallah was born in a small island country called Comoros. About 98% of the population of Comoros Island is Sunni Muslim. He is the firstborn son of three boys and two girls. He was born into a relatively well-to-do family; his father was a government official, and his mother was a businesswoman. Abdallah and his siblings enjoyed their childhood, growing up alongside the other children in the community.

Abdallah’s family was strict Muslim, just like all those around them. Following Islamic teachings was mandatory for them, but they never gave a thought to an alternative faith. His strict parents ensured their children memorized the Qur’an and could recite it without struggle.

There was often competition across Comoros where children competed in their recitation of the Qur’an. The organizers highly rewarded the winner, which was a matter of pride for any parent whose child became the winner.

Abdallah grew up entirely dedicated to Islam. He followed the religious guidelines without reservation. With strict parents and a community thoroughly dominated by Islam, he did not know he had an alternative.

When Abdallah finished high school, he convinced his father that he should go to university outside of the country. He would gain more experience beyond the tiny island country of Comoros. His parents agreed and made all the necessary arrangements for him to travel for education. His grades were not high enough for direct enrollment in an undergraduate degree program, but he got an interview for placement at a college in Malawi. He was determined to get more education.

His Muslim background informed Abdallah’s philosophy of life. However, his new friends in Malawi were from a Christian background, and he became interested in knowing what they believed so that he could challenge them. He was already knowledgeable about Islam and the Qur’an, so he started reading the Bible to understand and use that knowledge to engage in religious discourse with the Christians. Most of the young people he met were Christian, but they did not understand the Bible well. Understanding the Bible gave him an advantage over them. He was excited to challenge them using their own Bible.

Abdallah began to read the Bible to look for contradictions with which he could attack Christians. He bought three different versions of the Bible to read them and make

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comparisons. He ended up reading the whole Bible several times. He was always on the lookout for a weak Christian to challenge and inform that the right religion is Islam.

Abdallah knew converting a Christian to Islam was easier than a Muslim to Christianity. In the short time he was in Malawi, he convinced three people to convert from Christianity to Islam. His goal was to have as many people as possible follow Islam, especially at his college.

Like many Muslims, Abdallah believed that Christians believed in three gods because they talked about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He used the Trinity to invite many to Islam, where they believe in one non-trinitarian God, Allah. His argument was based on his belief that Jesus does not forgive sins and that the Bible was not a reliable source of truth. He attacked many Christians using these views because they could never give him concrete responses. Their biblical illiteracy gave Abdallah more confidence in presenting Islam as the true religion.

### **Encounter with Christ**

As Abdallah continued his education in Malawi, he met a pastor teaching at his college. He and the pastor became acquainted and developed a friendship. Abdallah struggled academically, and the pastor was assisting him with his studies.

Their friendship grew, and after a time, the pastor began sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. They had lots of discussions on different subjects in the Bible. Abdallah would bring up the areas he considered inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The pastor's knowledge of the Bible amazed Abdallah greatly. The pastor became another source of inspiration that increased his desire to know more about Jesus Christ. Abdallah spent more time reading the Bible and would even read the Bible and the Qur'an and simultaneously try to find a way forward. Reading the two books together raised more questions.

Abdallah reached a point where he asked God to show him the true way to follow. The question that continued to trouble him was whether Jesus was indeed God. He read the New Testament and other historical books that affirmed that the gospel is reliable and trustworthy. Finally, Abdallah went to the pastor and asked him how he could follow Jesus. He prayed a prayer of confession and decided to live for God alone all the days of his life.

He committed to following Jesus with the same zeal he used to defend Islam. Abdallah often preached the gospel because he realized the truth is found in God through Jesus Christ alone. He felt happy that he decided to follow Jesus not out of coercion or pressure but after diligently looking for the answers and making personal discoveries.

The pastor connected him to a local church where other believers helped Abdallah to grow in his faith and become a strong Christian. It was not an easy transition for him because he grew up so differently, and now he had to unlearn all that and adopt a new lifestyle and religious community. It took a while to start feeling comfortable in church, including singing, partaking in the Holy Communion, and baptism.

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None of his family members knew about Abdallah's decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ. He knew the consequence of changing his faith. He felt he had betrayed the family and the community that raised him. His biggest dilemma was sharing the news with the family, and for the sake of peace, he decided to keep it to himself for a while.

During a break from his classes, he decided to go home to be with his family for a holiday. It was all well at home, but he struggled in his heart because he did not want to continue with the Islamic religious practices like going to the mosque and participating in prayers. He knew he was indeed a changed person.

### **Persecution**

One day, the house helper was cleaning his room when Abdallah was visiting family and friends. As she collected his dirty clothes for washing, she discovered a Bible and other Christian books on his table. She was shocked to see that Abdallah was reading these books. She called his mother to see what was in the room.

When Abdallah's father heard, it created quite a commotion in the home because his father was furious that his son was reading these materials. He was especially suspicious because none of the books found in Abdallah's room were Islamic materials. The mother called Abdallah by phone, and he confirmed that he was now a follower of Christ. That statement alone brought much trouble on Abdallah, and for the sake of peace and his safety, he was advised that he should renounce his Christian faith or, at the very least, go away to a place where nobody could find him.

Abdallah's beautiful life became a nightmare. He sought places of refuge, but he lived in terror because he knew if anybody discovered his location, his life would be in danger.<sup>12</sup> His father refused to continue paying for his education and told Abdallah that he was no longer a part of the family. He became homeless, sleeping wherever the night found him. The struggle for food and fresh water was also now his reality. During this time, his father tried to get him to recant by jailing him. But he stood firm in his faith even when he knew his life was in danger.

He kept in touch with the pastor in Malawi, and he, along with other believers, was able to secure Abdallah a ticket to travel to Malawi for safety reasons. However, while in Malawi, he could not continue his college education because he did not have the funds. His local church supported him with shelter and food while he was there. He found some peace as he continued to fellowship with other believers and grow in his life as a believer.

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<sup>12</sup> One hadith that sanctions killing Muslims who abandon Islam is: "Narrated Abdullah: Allah's Messenger said, "The blood of a Muslim who confesses that none has the right to be worshiped but Allah and that I am His Messenger, cannot be shed except in three cases: in Qisas (equality in punishment) for murder, a married person who commits illegal sexual intercourse and the one who reverts from Islam (Apostate) and leaves the Muslims." (Emphasis mine). Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 9, Number 17.

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He kept a low profile and did not share his whereabouts with his family. Abdallah trusted only one brother who had always been close to him, and they would talk because his brother promised not to disclose Abdallah's whereabouts. They kept in contact, and his brother sent him money from time to time to help him. Eventually, his brother had the opportunity to go to the Netherlands and settle there.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Abdallah never wanted to be involved in full-time ministry as a preacher. He wanted to be a Christian who followed Christ and kept a secular job. One day he had a strong urge to surrender all his life to serve God without reservation. He resisted it for a while until one day, reading the Bible, he came across the story of Jonah, who ran away from the call of God. The urge to surrender his desires to Christ and serve Him became more pronounced, especially as he thought of his family and others back home who lived without knowing Christ.

He finally prayed and asked God to use him the way He wanted. He knew for sure he was being called into ministry. He enrolled at a Bible college to prepare for ministry. He planned to return to Comoros after graduating from Bible college to preach the gospel.

But God was not done preparing him yet! Abdallah had the opportunity to travel to Nairobi for a university education, where he graduated with a business administration degree and a postgraduate diploma in education. These trade courses would help him secure formal employment in Comoros and allow him to reach the people God called him to.

Thankfully through the church's mission, he has had the privilege of meeting different people who have helped him grow in his faith. Abdallah also shared how God stood with him when things were tough and nobody wanted anything to do with him. He experienced the love of God through many people.

After much preparation, God eventually granted Abdallah the desire of his heart. He has experienced God's transforming power as he witnessed Muslims turn to Jesus Christ. Abdallah's passion is to see as many Muslims as possible turn to the truth and know the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He also prays that Christians will desire to learn and understand the Bible to offer solid answers to refute the misconception and misinformation many Muslims use to attack the Christian faith. Many people follow the Christian faith, but they are shallow in understanding God's word.

Abdallah's favorite verse is Paul's "I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...." Philippians 3:10. This verse bolsters him in his walk with Christ and encourages him to follow the Messiah in all these things.

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## 7. NEEMA/FATUMA FROM KENYA

*“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”* Isaiah 1:18.

### Introduction & Family Background



Neema was born and brought up in Nairobi, Kenya. Her parents were well-respected people in their community. She was the second-born daughter in a family of five, having an older and a younger sister. Her family was Christian.

Growing up, Neema felt unloved, which is not an uncommon experience for a middle child. She thought she was the one to blame for all the wrongdoings. As these incidents continued, she began to believe she was the black sheep in the family and became rebellious. Her parents and sisters tried to reassure her of their love, but Neema continued to feel unloved and separated from the family.

When she went to university, Neema hung out with a group of girls who would go out and waste life like spoiled university girls. She misused her freedom to do whatever she felt like doing. She thought she was unloved and deserted by her family, so it did not matter what she did with her life.

But soon, Neema realized that her life was empty and wanted something to make her feel fulfilled. The life she was living could not fill the emptiness. To fill the void in her life, she tried drugs. The drugs would only mask her emptiness briefly before the feelings of nothingness would return. She also tried other things that seemed to satisfy her, but the more she did those things, the more the feeling of emptiness grew. She felt that God had abandoned her at the moment she needed him the most. Eventually, she called her elder sister, who by this time was a pastor, and told her, “I am done with this God of yours.” She wanted nothing to do with Jesus.

Neema converted to Islam, learning all the religious teachings and following Islam’s practices and traditions. Eventually, she changed her name to Fatuma.<sup>13</sup> She went so far as to change all her documents to bear her new Muslim name. This step broke the heart of her family. They tried to talk to her, but she utterly refused to listen. She cut off all communications with the family members so they would leave her alone.

In the process of identifying herself as Fatuma, she developed deep friendships with as many Muslims as possible to learn as much as possible about this new lifestyle as a

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<sup>13</sup> Fatuma, also spelled as Fatima or Fatimah means “the radiant one.” Fatima is a popular name among Muslims because Prophet Muhammad’s daughter was named Fatima (born c. 605, died in 632/633). She was born in Mecca and died in Medina, both in Modern-day Saudi Arabia. Fatima is an object of profound veneration among Muslims.

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Muslim. She was wholly dedicated to observing the prayer times and always fasted in the Ramadan month to find satisfaction and fill that void in her life.

Eventually, Fatuma got involved in a relationship with a man of Somali origin, and they were married in an Islamic ceremony. They started their life together despite much resistance from the family, but the other family members eventually accepted the marriage and they moved on with life. After about a year of marriage, God blessed them with twin boys. At that same time, her husband had the opportunity to go to the USA for further studies. The whole family was able to relocate to the USA.

### **Encounter with Christ**

Life was smooth initially as they settled in the USA because her husband's scholarship covered the family's basic needs. Later, Fatuma also joined a community college to study. The whole time they were in the USA, her husband was on a student visa, which meant they were not allowed formal employment. They could only have work-study jobs to help cover their study needs.

Back at home, Fatuma's family was always praying to God to open her eyes and to return to Jesus Christ. The void in Fatuma's heart had still not been filled, even after six years of practicing Islam. She longed for a lasting solution. Her husband was a staunch Muslim and tried everything possible to help his wife go deeper into Islam. He was ready to do whatever was necessary to ensure she did not return to Christianity.

Their sons enrolled in a school run by a church in their community. The church began to share the love of Christ with the twin boys. It was a haven for them because their parents knew the children would be safe in that school and they would not be treated poorly as foreigners in the community.

When Fatuma was picking up her children from school, two ladies invited her to attend aerobics classes at the church. She always offered excuses for why she could not participate, but the two ladies never gave up. They found time to visit her and soon created a good friendship. Eventually, she agreed to attend aerobics classes at the church facility when she had time.

Things became very difficult for Fatuma and her family after she and her husband finished their studies. Because they were no longer in school, their visa status had changed, and they needed jobs to stay in the country. It took a toll on them as a family. They struggled to find the right people to help them, but nothing came out of those plans. Fatuma's two aerobics friends were concerned about their welfare and encouraged them to trust God for a miracle.

Her aerobics friends invited Fatuma to the ladies' fellowship, and at first, she was hesitant to join the group. She felt she needed permission from her husband. They were desperate, so they were willing for her to be a part of the fellowship if God answered their prayers. She eventually joined the ladies' group hoping that once they prayed for her and things worked in their favor, she would thank them and return to the mosque.

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Through the fellowship, the ladies dedicated several days to praying for Fatuma and her husband so that their desires to remain in the country legally would be met and the right doors would open for them. The ladies were so concerned with their welfare that they took on some responsibilities, like taking care of the children, while Fatuma and her husband were busy looking for help.

During those prayer sessions, the intensity of the void in Fatuma's heart became unbearable, and she opened up to her friends from the fellowship. She shared her story and how it was evident that the void she had been feeling needed to be occupied with more than what she had. She had been looking for satisfaction in places where she did not get it. The ladies asked her to give Jesus a try. That same day she surrendered her life to Christ. She decided she had nothing to lose. She believed He could remove the feeling of emptiness in her heart.

Immediately, Fatuma felt a sense of calmness that she has never experienced. As she was heading home, the verse ringing in her mind was what the leader of the Bible fellowship shared that day. "Be still and know I am God." She prayed that if God answered their prayers, she would never leave Him again. Fatuma was testing God's power and faithfulness.

That day as Fatuma was preparing to break the news to her husband about the new changes in her life, her husband came in with good news. The US government gave them Green Cards, allowing them to live and work permanently in the United States. She then told her husband that she pleaded with God to fight for them on this same day. It was a very emotional time with mixed feelings as they remembered the Christian people who loved and supported them in those desperate moments.

Fatuma's husband was unhappy that his wife confessed that she accepted Jesus in her life, and there was a moment of silence in which he did not know how to respond. But Fatuma explained to him that they had tried to get the correct paperwork to secure meaningful employment for the longest time, but it had not come until the day that she prayed to God. He had answered their prayers.

A few months later, the family experienced the work of God in their lives. They were both able to secure jobs and live a relatively comfortable life. Fatuma was at peace in her heart. Her prayer was that her husband would realize that God had favored them, not because they were good, but as an expression of His love.

Fatuma's husband could not sleep as they went to bed one night. He was wide awake with anxiety, which he could not understand. Something was bothering him, and he had to wake his wife up to see if she could help. As they talked, Fatuma asked if she could pray with him, and she prayed this simple prayer: "May the God of peace surround you." After the prayer, they went back to sleep, and her husband slept very well.

The following Sunday, they drove to the church where their children went to school. There, after the sermon, her husband gave his life to Christ. He had experienced the

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love of God through the people who surrounded them when they were in great need, and indeed Jesus had given them many reasons to follow him.

### **Family Reaction**

When Fatuma shared the news of the transformation with the family back in Kenya, there was great jubilation about what God had done for them. Her family may have given up on her, but God continued to draw her and her husband to Himself. The family was overjoyed that she had seen the way and turned back to God.

As for her husband, he did not share with his family back home because he knew they would be against his decision. He decided that he had enough to worry about without incurring their criticism. They did not feel any persecution from friends. The Christian community embraced them. The church stood by them and encouraged them to grow and experience the full potential of what God wanted for them.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

In the four years since they decided to follow Christ, they have had no regrets about that life-changing decision. They have experienced God's work in their lives. God is using them to support His work in Kenya.

Faith, Fatuma's elder sister, has a ministry in Nairobi that supports widows and orphans. Through that ministry, they have been able to empower widows and help orphans go to school while encouraging those who have lost hope in life. Fatuma and her husband have supported this ministry, and they have mobilized friends to come alongside to assist it.

Through those moments in life when they were desperate and felt that things would never work out for them, they wanted to give up; that was when they experienced the power of God working through their lives. God showed up for them. Fatuma found hope in Jesus Christ through the fellowship of those Christian ladies who welcomed her. The children experienced the love of Christ through the teachers at the school. Her husband saw the deliverance and the transformation that Fatuma experienced, and it made sense to him in a way that prompted him to seek that transformational power for himself. God used their circumstances and the people around them, who loved them and showed concern for them so that they wanted to follow Christ.

Their desire as a family is to see that every follower of Jesus Christ can experience the love of God and that ordinary people can be used to display the love of God to the people around them. They are advancing the Kingdom of God here on earth through their gifts, treasures, and time.

Fatuma's favorite verse is Isaiah 1:18. "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." It does not matter what one has done or experienced; God is still forgiving and can give people a second chance to be reunited with Him.



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## 8. IBRAHIM FROM KENYA

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* John 3:16-17.

### Introduction & Family Background



Ibrahim was born in 1984 in Nakuru, Kenya. He grew up in a typical Kenyan family, where his father worked for a local industry within the town, and his mother was a small-scale businesswoman. He is the second born in a family of four children and the only son. Eventually, his father married a second wife who lived in a different town called Molo.

Ibrahim grew up in a very devoted Muslim family, where they faithfully observed the tenets of Islam. Ibrahim attended all the prayers in the nearby mosque. He did not like going to the mosque for *fajr* (sunrise prayer) because he hated waking up too early in the morning. But being in a home where his father was strict, Ibrahim could not miss *fajr* prayers at the mosque unless his father was out of town visiting the other family.

Ibrahim attended public school and mingled with all kinds of friends. The school had a minority Muslim population, so he did not have the choice to have only Muslim friends. But Ibrahim could get along with others, even though he felt superior due to his faith.

At an early age, Ibrahim noticed the difference between himself and Christians. Islam is a lifestyle. It must inform how you speak and relate to others; even your dress and physical appearance should reflect the Islamic faith and value. His parents taught him to believe that the more you prostrate in prayer, the closer you become to Allah. A prayer callus on the forehead confirms this devotion.<sup>14</sup> You can identify those who pray consistently by this holy mark, and the community admires them for their dedication, particularly among those Kenyans of Somali descent. A Muslim tradition (hadith) teaches that the prayer callus will serve as a powerful light on the dark Day of Resurrection to guide those Muslims who have it.<sup>15</sup>

However, some Muslims of questionable prayer life and motive rub rough objects on their forehead to acquire the coveted prayer bump.<sup>16</sup>

His parents made sure that Ibrahim and his sisters memorized the entire Qur'an, roughly the size of the New Testament, and all the teachings they received from the

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<sup>14</sup> The prayer callus is colloquially called *zabiba* or *zebiba*, which means raisin in Arabic. A Muslim tradition (hadith) teaches that the prayer callus will serve as a powerful floodlight on the Day of Resurrection to guide those Muslims who have it in the dark.

<sup>15</sup> Magdi Abdelhadi (23 June 2008). "Signs of division on Egypt's brow". *BBC News*. Accessed 28 May 2023.

<sup>16</sup> This practice is called *riya* (showing-off) in Arabic and is prohibited in Islam.

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*madrassa* teachers. They were required to recite a portion of the Qur'an every day, and if they failed to recite it correctly in Arabic, they would receive a severe beating. This practice of corporal punishment pushed him to memorize the whole Qur'an.

By the time Ibrahim attended high school, his Muslim beliefs were so ingrained in him that he viewed non-Muslims as lesser people who had no place in Allah's paradise. He believed Islam was the only true religion and that those outside this religion would be lost and without salvation. Ibrahim debated to discredit the gospel and the idea of Jesus Christ as the son of God. But he did believe that Jesus was one of the many prophets Allah sent to mankind.

As a dedicated Muslim, he believed nothing could change his mind about his faith. Some private Kenyan schools have a mandatory Christian chapel, but it was a waste of time for him. He and a few of his Muslim classmates protested the compulsory chapel. But the school administration reminded them that before they joined the school, they signed a document agreeing that they would abide by the school regulations and the chapel was part of the school rules. Their protest did not bear fruit, and they had no choice but to attend chapel. However, they were physically there but mentally absent. Sometimes they would sit in the back, causing commotion and disturbing the chapel speakers because they did not want to be involved in Christian matters.

### **Encounter with Christ**

Besides the mandatory chapel, morning prayers were compulsory for students at Ibrahim's school. Failure to attend was against the ethics and regulation of the Christian school. The teacher in charge of that program was a faithful Christian who was friendly but strict, especially regarding the attendance of prayers. Ibrahim would attend to fulfill school requirements, but in his heart, he wondered what they were doing. He could occasionally sing along because the rhythm and melody were catchy.

One day, as he attended one of those prayer sessions, a young man came to preach. Ibrahim could not remember the book the preacher used, but what touched his heart was a statement about Jesus coming soon to judge the world. Jesus will separate those who belong to him from those who choose to reject him. The preacher asked that each person, whoever they are, choose to be with Jesus Christ.

These statements caused Ibrahim to begin to question his own life. "If the Messiah came today, where would I be? With Him or away from him? Because Jesus will be the judge." These questions occupied Ibrahim's mind for quite a while.

One day, a local church showcased a dramatic performance in their neighborhood, and many people came out to see it, including Ibrahim. It was called "Heaven's Gate and Hell's Flame." It portrayed life after death and how people either go to heaven and celebrate with the angels or go to hell and suffer eternal punishment. This play touched Ibrahim's heart, and when the preacher stood up to invite those who would like to follow Jesus, he was among the first people to rush forward while weeping knowing very well that he was deciding his eternal destiny.

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That evening he had a sense of happiness that filled his heart with the knowledge that if the judgment day came now, he would be with Jesus in paradise. He knew he had made the right decision for him, although it would not go over well with his father. He chose to keep it a secret until he completed his high school education.

### **Persecution**

After a few months, Ibrahim finished his high school education and pondered what to do next. As he conversed with his mother one day, he broke the news that he had given his life to Jesus a few months ago. His mother was not amused and started shouting at him and cursing him for going against the family's religion. She was disappointed with him because he, the only son, had betrayed the family values and risked his life.<sup>17</sup>

His mother continued to yell at him and even called the imam to come home so that they could try to drive some sense into his head. But even the imam could not convince him because he had decided, and nothing could change his stance. It was as if he had drawn the battle line. News of his conversion quickly reached all the Muslims in the area, who shunned him because he had rebelled against the faith. When his father heard about Ibrahim's conversion, the same insults and yelling began again, this time from his father.

As Ibrahim claimed his new identity in Christ, he lost everything, his earthly possession and the people who had once surrounded him. It was a painful experience seeing his family quarreling and threatening him with all kinds of punishment. He was denied food in the house, and his father even withheld his pocket money as a punishment for going against the family's faith and traditions.

His three sisters rejected him also and would continuously call him an outcast. The insults broke his heart, but over time Ibrahim got used to the abuses and people looking at him like the black sheep of the family. He lost his close friends, and he no longer had the opportunity to hang out with his childhood friends.

Eventually, he could not stay home any longer. A Christian friend invited Ibrahim to come to live with him. This friend was instrumental in his growth as a Christian and helped him to get involved in church activities.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Even though his family had cut ties with him, activities at church kept Ibrahim so busy that he did not have time to worry about his family. It was, of course, not a good feeling

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<sup>17</sup> One hadith that instructs Muslims to kill converts from Islam says: "Narrated Abu Burda, "Abu Musa said..... Behold there was a fettered man beside Abu Musa. Muadh asked, "Who is this (man)?" Abu Musa said, "He was a Jew and became a Muslim and then reverted back to Judaism." Then Abu Musa requested Muadh to sit down but Muadh said, "I will not sit down till he has been killed. This is the judgment of Allah and his messenger," and repeated it thrice. Then Abu Musa ordered that the man be killed, and he was killed. Abu Musa added, "Then we discussed the night prayers ....." Sahih Bukhari, Volume 4, Number 656.

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remembering that he was left alone and none of his family members were concerned about his welfare and whereabouts. However, Ibrahim was fine as long as he stayed close to Jesus daily and felt secure in Him.

As time went by, he knew that he had made the right choice to follow Jesus Christ, although the journey was not easy. Twice he felt like he could not continue with his decision to follow Christ, but his Christian friends have stood with him to encourage and offer support when necessary. He desired to go to university and, eventually, get a good job to support himself and his family even though they cut off communication with him.

He moved to Malaba, where he started a small business and attended a local church. His shop has been like an evangelism center because he said he would use his trade to reach other people. He has enjoyed doing marketplace evangelism, where he reaches out to his clients and connects them to local churches.

After moving to Malaba, he enrolled in an online Bible school to learn more about God and ministry. He felt God calling him into full-time ministry, but he is unsure about which area. He knows he wants to spend all his life reaching the lost. He has been instrumental in establishing churches within his area.

He also longs to reach his family, who are still Muslim. In the past few years, Ibrahim has tried to contact his family. His mother welcomed him, but his father was still hard-hearted towards Ibrahim. His father has said that he will not have anything to do with him unless Ibrahim recants his faith. Occasionally, Ibrahim sends some money to his father to keep the connections, but he has not been able to convince his father to have a heart-to-heart chat with him. He is ready to do anything to have his family know the light and stand firm with him in his faith in Christ.

Ibrahim relates to the life of Paul in the Bible. Paul rejected the gospel, but God found him in that state and rescued him as a vessel to reach out to those still in the dark. Ibrahim thanks God for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross as a sign of His love for the world. His favorite verse is John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." This verse helps him understand that God is a God of love and cares for all humanity, so He sent His son Jesus Christ to die for all humanity regardless of their actions.

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## 9. ERTAN FROM UZBEKISTAN

*“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* John 10:9-11.

### Introduction & Family Background



Ertan was born in Uzbekistan in 1986 in the town of Bukhoro. This town has a majority Muslim population, estimated at 85%. Christianity is a minority faith. Ertan is the son of a Kazakh father and an Uzbek mother. His mother was a devoted Muslim, but his father was not there for the family. He does not even know if his father is dead or alive. He is his mother's only child; she told him that his father had been a famous businessperson in town but that he had left on a business trip and never returned. Although they had tried to track him down, no leads had ever been found for his father and they eventually gave up. He is presumed dead.

Being raised by a single mother made life hard for him. His mother instilled in him from toddlerhood the importance of attending Qur'anic classes and following the tenets of Islam. He was a bright student and would engage in philosophical discussions to better understand his faith. But life continued to be difficult. His mother did odd jobs to provide for the needs of their small family. It was a struggle to get funds, and there were many times they went without having a meal. Life was difficult during those days. At age five, Ertan had to leave home during the day to fend for himself. He became a street kid, spending all his days just looking for something to eat, only returning home to his mother at night.

As a street child, he made several friends, and they hung out together at a small church nearby. This church had a program to feed the street children and share the word of God with them. The church ran the feeding program twice a week, on Sunday and another day in the middle of the week. Ertan was assured that two days out of the week he would have a warm meal and enjoy the company of other children. He enjoyed the food; occasionally, the church would give him and the other street children some clothes. It became their routine twice a week; they went to the church to get the food and then go about their daily life.

He became confused because the church people were kind and gave him food, but he knew when it came to faith, his mother had instilled in him that he was a Muslim and that was the faith that he should live to defend and follow. He would learn something on Sunday in the church, and then he would learn something contrary to that in the Qur'anic classes.

At the age of fourteen, he was thinking critically, particularly about religion. His thoughts were full of questions about religion and faith, affecting his thoughts and mind

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constantly. He had a friend who saw that there was potential in this young man and helped enroll him in school. To Ertan, it was an opportunity to advance his education so that he could be a successful businessman in the future. He desired to be a prosperous person in the future to help his mother out of the suffering she had endured for so long.

### **Encounter with Christ**

At the age of sixteen, he continued going to church on Sundays for the food provided. However, one particular day felt different from all the other times he had been there. The teacher that day taught the lesson in a way that Ertan had never heard. He was seeking to know the right way to go in life. He longed to know the true way because he was so confused. The classes ended, and the teacher asked if there was anybody who would like to give their life to Jesus Christ and he knew that was meant for him.

He could not raise his hand because he was with his other friends. He knew the consequences, and he was not ready to face them. However, later that night, he was in the tiny house where he lived with other boys and could not sleep. His mind was spinning around and around, and his body tossed from one side to another. He stood up to walk around and see if the movement would make him tired. It turned out to be a long night for him. His friends with whom he shared the house became concerned about what was happening to him that night. Their sleeping place was just a pile of clothes they made into a sleeping area. He struggled to get sleep, but also in his heart, he knew that he was ready to give his life to Jesus Christ. He had known earlier in the day that he should give his life to Jesus but feared his Muslim friends' reaction.

Ertan finally woke up from a restless sleep in the middle of the night, asked God to forgive him of all his sins, and asked Jesus Christ to come into his life. It was a simple prayer, but that was all that was needed. After the prayer, he took a few deep breaths before he drifted into a deep sleep. That night he slept so well and serenely as he had never enjoyed sleep for the longest time he could remember. When morning came, he woke up with so much peace in his heart and the feeling of being loved like he had met the father for whom he had desired for so long.

That marked the beginning of his journey as a child of God. The church that had provided him with physical food now gave him spiritual nourishment in the form of a Bible that he had read several times. The church pastor was pleased to hear that Ertan had surrendered his life to Christ. They helped him know what it meant to follow Jesus Christ, and he felt joy in his decision to become a disciple of Christ.

### **Persecution**

Ertan's decision to follow Jesus disappointed his friends and his mother, too. His friends chased him away from the hovel they called home. He had nowhere to sleep so he returned to the streets for shelter. Then his Muslim friends located him, and after beating him up, they burned his belongings. Humiliated and frustrated, He found a hiding place in which to shelter so that they could not find him again.

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Ertan sought out his mother, thinking maybe he could hide for a few days at her place, but she became so mad at him and it became too unbearable to stay. With nowhere to go for help, he became desperate because the people he considered family or friends turned on him because of his faith.

More than five attempts were made on his life because he decided to follow Christ.<sup>18</sup> As he was still struggling, living on the streets, some people would bring him food, only to discover that it had been poisoned. As he lay there sure that he would die, too weak to get up, he prayed to God to deliver him or take him to paradise, whichever was God's will. And yet miraculously, he rose and walked strong. The people who poisoned him were astonished that the poison did not work on him. Others tried to kill him by beating him and leaving him for dead. Two other times they attempted to kill him by burning down the small house where he slept. Miraculously, the burnings happened when he was not there. God spared his life so that he could serve him without fear of intimidation.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

When Ertan gave his life to Jesus Christ, he knew he was called to ministry. A few days after becoming a disciple of Christ, he got the courage to go out in the streets and preach the gospel. He would wake up early in the morning and go to the market in their town to testify. This is one of the reasons why he was so persecuted. They wanted to silence him from sharing about Jesus. His courage came from the fact that God called him to be His witness.

Ertan had a drive that pushed him the extra mile even though the town was predominantly Muslim. He exhibited courage that he even wondered from where it all came. He dared to tell everybody that God loves them and desires them to follow Him. His primary strategy was to share the gospel in the streets. The evangelical church he was attending supported his mission. This support helped his ministry to be successful.

In time, Ertan was allowed to go to Russia for studies. There he enrolled in business classes and he did well. His studies took him away from his hometown for two years, but he gladly returned when his studies were completed.

He returned to the local church he had attended before and was disheartened to discover that only a handful of believers occasionally came to the worship service. This was partly because the church's pastor had died in a road accident. Without a leader, the little congregation was scattered. Ertan decided to lead this church. People were still trying to kill him but he was ready to accept martyrdom. He reached out to the community for the next year and sought the lost to evangelize. He spent all his time on the road sharing the gospel, and some people gradually returned to the church. At the end of that year, he handed the leadership over to another leader.

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<sup>18</sup> Prophet Muhammad taught the killing of Muslims who leave Islam: "Zaid bin Aslam reported that the Apostle declared that the man who leaves the fold of Islam should be executed. Muwatta of Imam Malik, Number 1410.

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Ertan desired to be a successful businessman who could support the work of God but not as a local church pastor. He ventured into the business world, and he became very successful. He had first opened a grocery store. Then he acquired a big restaurant which eventually became one of the leading food chains in the town. He also ventured into the transport sector which also was very successful. In all this success, he continued to support the church's ministry, giving to the less privileged in the community. He also gave generously to the work of God and helped fund church mission trips. But he wanted to concentrate on the business. And that is where things began to fall apart for him because he knew God had called him to full-time ministry, not to the business world.

God spoke to him one evening while he was home alone. He heard the Lord telling him that he was called to seek the lost, which is the mission he must go and fulfill. He struggled with that idea because he knew that while he should be reaching out to share the word of God, he also did not want to leave the businesses he had struggled to build. By twenty-eight years old, he had managed to build a business portfolio that surprised the people who knew him.

The struggle to accept and do what God had asked him to do took some time. But the still, small voice reminded him that his life had been spared many times so that he could serve God. As he kept holding on to the business, things started falling apart in his business. He had the most significant loss he had ever experienced in one month, and he knew the business would not recover from that. His transport business closed quickly, and he knew he had to stop struggling with God's call to ministry.

At that point, he sold off all the remaining businesses at a throw-away price so he could obey the call to ministry. He took his money and enrolled in mission school where he would eventually graduate and begin full-time ministry. People in the town thought he had gone mad or there was a problem, but he assured those who cared that he was following the instruction of God. God said he needed him to concentrate on God's business, not his business. One of the lessons he learned from all these experiences was that God blessed him to fulfill his heart's desire. Another lesson was that God guided him to prosper in his business enterprise.

Currently, Ertan is serving as a missionary in his home country, and he desires to reach the Muslim world by sharing with them that indeed there is a God of love. He says this God made a huge sacrifice for us to be set free from the rules and regulations of man-made religions. He set us apart as the chosen children of God. Ertan and his ministry team are actively involved in reaching the poor by feeding and clothing them and sharing the good news with them. He remembers where he came from as a Muslim street boy who did not know his father and now he can experience love from his heavenly Father.

Ertan's desire is to lead as many people as he can to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Jesus Christ is the only one who gives life in abundance. The verse that keeps him going in his salvation journey is John 10:9-11, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief



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comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Ertan is happy to serve a master like this who shows love by laying down his life for the whole world.

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## 10. OMAR FROM SOMALIA

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”* Jeremiah 1:5.

### Introduction & Family Background



Omar was born in Somalia in 1972. He grew up in a small village until he was eight years old and his mother passed away when he was a child. He attended a Qur’anic school, the foundational school for every child in the country. His teachers taught him Islamic principles and historical studies so that he could understand his faith deeply.

Omar enjoyed the Qur’anic school. His teacher was kind to him, and all the students enjoyed being with their teacher. When Omar was nine years old, his Qur’an teacher went on a journey, and a substitute teacher took over the class. Unlike their kind teacher, this new instructor was cruel and harsh toward the children. The beatings became too much for Omar, even though he was one of the best students in the class.

After his mother’s death, his father married another woman. She was to take up the role of Omar’s mother. However, not uncommon in the culture, his stepmother was unkind to him. Omar faced a challenging situation; he was beaten at school by a cruel teacher, and then his stepmother mistreated him at home. Life became more unbearable because his father was rarely home. His father went looking for Omar’s lost brother, whom they believed to have run away to Kenya. His brother had fought with his stepmother and disappeared.

The beatings became so severe that Omar’s skin would peel from the canes and abuse he was receiving from the new teacher. When he came home, he received no mercy from his stepmother. She would even deny him food at home. At only nine and a half years old, he felt the only way his life could improve was to run away from home. He had to escape the neglect at home and the beatings at school. He lacked someone to protect him and provide for the basic needs he desired as a child. It seemed to Omar that no one in the whole world, not at school or home, loved and cared about him.

One morning he decided to go through with his plan to run away. He jumped into a truck full of goods heading to Mogadishu, the Somali capital. The distance from his hometown of Baraawe to Mogadishu is approximately 200 kilometers. He knew he had an uncle in Mogadishu and thought that would be a more peaceful place to live. The road from Baraawe to Mogadishu was a rough dirt road, and it took about 18 hours to complete the journey. Omar hid amongst the goods for that long trip. The owner of the truck never noticed that there was a person in the truck.

On arrival in Mogadishu, he realized that the city was full of people. There were half a million people busy crisscrossing the city at the time. He did not know where to go. He had thought Mogadishu would be like the little town he had come from.

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In his dazed state, the men guarding the truck saw him and were surprised to see such a young boy hiding there. They questioned him about where he came from, how he got there, and what he was doing. Terrified, he explained what had happened to him and why he decided to come to the city. After hearing his story, they let him go. He did not know where to go and where to look for his uncle, whom he knew lived in the big city of Mogadishu.

Omar ended up on the streets like many other children who ran away to urban areas worldwide. This new life forced him to sleep on the roadsides and fend for himself for food, which was never enough to sustain him. Life was tough on the streets. He combed dumpsites to see if he could get any food. Sometimes he begged people for some money or anything to eat. He was still so young that he knew he could not start looking for a job.

### **Encounter with Christ**

After five years of living on the street, daily searching for food and sleeping on dirt paths, he met Sister Juliana, an Italian Roman Catholic nun. She showed immense compassion to Omar, giving him food and meeting his physical needs. At this time, she did not share the good news of Jesus Christ with him because it was illegal to preach or share the gospel in Somalia. But the compassion she showed him and other street children left an impression on him.

All the time he was living on the street, sleeping hungry, and facing cruelty, Omar never got sick or injured. Looking back, he can see that the hand of God was on his life, protecting him even before Omar knew Him.

Several years later, Omar got a job working for a Christian non-governmental organization (NGO), where he met two extraordinary ladies, Annie Hellström from Swedish Church Relief and Julie from World Concern. The Swede and the American, respectively, have for years witnessed to Omar. Also, two Somali believers (who later died for their faith) testified to him.<sup>19</sup> At that time, he did not see the need to commit to and follow Jesus Christ, but what they said made sense and planted the seed of faith in his heart.

In 1993, Omar met a US Marine who shared his faith in Jesus Christ and encouraged him to commit his life to Christ before it was too late. The three expatriate women and the two Somali believers planted the seed of faith that the Marine now harvested; he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and never looked back.

### **Persecution**

1994 -1996 were terrible years for the church in Somalia. During this time, twelve Somali Christians from one house church in Mogadishu were systematically martyred

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<sup>19</sup> Ahmed Ayntow Gobe and Mohamed Sheikdon Jama (martyred in 1994 and 1996, respectively).

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for their faith by Somali Islamists.<sup>20</sup> Even the suspicion of being a follower of Jesus was a death sentence. Several believers made official statements saying they abandoned Islam and were ready to die for the sake of Jesus Christ. Omar had to leave Mogadishu in 1996.

The journey of following Jesus Christ comes with its own unique set of challenges. His decision to follow Christ came with several life-threatening incidents. Many Christians, who converted from Islam, were martyred. At the same time, the extremists refused to acknowledge that there were Christians in Somalia.

Omar also experienced many instances where his life was in danger because of his faith. In 2002, four gunmen came to the house where he was staying in Bula Merer, about 130 kilometers from Mogadishu. Their main objective was to find and assassinate him. When they did not find him, they questioned the landlady. They searched his house, and when they found some Christian literature, it enraged them and prompted them to intensify their search. Yet as they continued to search for him, they could not find him.

After being unable to locate him for some time, they returned with anti-tank grenades, hurling them into the house. A massive explosion rocked the neighborhood. Omar's younger brother, who had been visiting him, lost a leg and later died due to his injuries. The small village clinic could not properly treat his wounds. The landlady also suffered severe injuries. After this incident, Omar returned to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for safety.

While in Addis Ababa, he visited some Somali Muslims who were refugees. Omar enjoyed sharing the good news with them, but eventually, they no longer welcomed him there. On that fateful day, he was forcefully ejected from the mosque where he shared his faith. An angry mob who accused him of trying to convert Muslim worshipers attacked him. Omar thought the hostile people in the mosque would not recognize that he was a Christian. This incident made Omar think of a Somali proverb. "A sane dik-dik will not worship in a mosque frequented by hunters."<sup>21</sup>

Two months later, Omar was approached near his house in Addis Ababa by two Somali Muslim men he had never met. One of the men told him in Somali that he would die very soon if he did not stop sharing his Christian faith with Somalis. He was shocked and perplexed at how they threatened him in Addis Ababa, not just in Somalia. His security concern forced him to report the incident to the police. However, the police could not find them, but Omar was thankful that he never saw them again.

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<sup>20</sup> Naol Befkadu Kebede, *Courage, Conviction & Character: The Biography of Dr. Aweis A. Ali*. Blaze Goldburst, Cuttack, India, 46-54; 66-69, 2023. The names of the martyred believers are: Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan, Ahmed Ayntow Gobe, Saleban Mohamed Saleban, Isma'el Yusuf Mukhtar, Mohamed Aba Nur, Ali Kusow Mataan, Mohamed Abdullahi Yusuf, Nurani Madey Madka, Khalif Dayah Guled, Bashir Mo'alim Mohamud, Prof. Haji Mohamed Hussein and Mohamed Sheikdon Jama. "Martyr's Corner," Somalis for Jesus, <https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2008/11/martyrs-corner.html> (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>21</sup> In Somali, "*Sagaaro miirkeeda qabta masaajid boonaad ma gasho.*"

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## **Following Jesus Daily**

Omar joined a holiness denomination in 1998 while a refugee in Addis Ababa. This church accepted him the way he was, and he felt at home, making him love the church even more. The church significantly invested in him with time, resources, and trust. During this time, he greatly admired and respected Dr. Howie and Bev Shute, whom he described as the greatest missionaries ever sent to serve the Lord among Somalis.

In 2001, Omar returned to Somalia in response to God's call on him to reach the people in southern Somalia. He served as an evangelist. During that time, things were not easy. He confirms that while serving in southern Somalia, there were three attempts to kill him. The challenges of doing God's work became overwhelming, and he returned to Addis Ababa in January 2003.

God has used Omar to plant underground Somali house churches, fellowships, and Bible study groups. These churches have continued to produce more churches and are parents and grandparents to new churches. Omar is thankful that the Lord has chosen him as a vehicle for sharing the good news with the Somali Muslims despite the suffering, abuse, and neglect he experienced as a child. God uses every life dedicated to Him for His glory, and Omar's life is an excellent example.

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## 11. ADEN FROM KENYA

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17.*

### Introduction & Family Background



Aden was born in the coastal town of Mombasa, Kenya, in 1986. His parents were renowned businesspeople in Mombasa, but in the early 1990s, they immigrated to Tanga, Tanzania. At that time, their business enterprise was doing much better in Tanzania than in Mombasa. Aden is the firstborn son of his family and has five other siblings, two brothers, and three sisters. The early days of his childhood were special to him and his family because they would travel and see other parts of the country. He attended a good school in his town, and the community respected his parents.

Aden’s father was a strictly religious person who embraced Islam with his whole heart. The family was required to attend daily prayers, and they took religious observance more seriously than any other aspect of life. Aden and his siblings were required to participate in all Qur’anic classes without fail, and if they happened to miss, they had to give a good reason for why they did not attend, and extreme illness was the only valid excuse for missing classes. His parents were so strict that at the end of the day, they had to repeat to their parents everything they learned in those classes. The lessons enabled them to have an in-depth understanding of Islam. Aden memorized the Holy Qur’an.

When they moved to Tanga, Aden’s father continued with his discipline of supporting the mosques in the town and emphasizing to his family the importance of being devoted to the teaching of Prophet Muhammad and Muslim traditions. Aden was comfortable with the practices and was willing to do anything to follow in his father’s footsteps.

Aden’s father introduced him to the family business from a young age, and occasionally, he would be allowed to oversee the store. One particular Friday, Aden was at the shop, and the call to prayer announced *Jumma* communal prayers. At the same time, an important client, who purchased large quantities of merchandise from them, was being served. Aden decided to finish with the client, and then he would rush to the mosque for prayers. He did not realize how quickly time had passed, and the prayer time ended before he could make it to the mosque. His father came to the shop and found that Aden had yet to go for the prayer. His father was so angry with him, and he gave Aden a beating for doing business during prayer time. Business should never come before *Jumma* prayers. It was an unwritten rule in the family that religious matters superseded all other issues.

Aden’s family invested heavily in equipping and building mosques in Kenya and Tanzania. His parents believed that their generosity would bring them blessings. They had the privilege of going on the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of Islam’s five

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pillars. All Muslims should visit Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it and are physically able. Aden desired to study in-depth and become a leader in the *madrassa*. He also wanted to teach others the ways of Allah and bring them to know Allah's ways. His dream was to be a well-respected scholar of Islam.

His grades were good enough that after high school graduation, Aden studied at the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences in Dar es Salaam; he pursued a Bachelor of Pharmacy. He had never stayed away from his family, so it was an exciting new chapter. This was the first time his father allowed him to be away from the family for an extended period. His father took him to the university and carefully selected with whom Aden would share accommodations.

### **Encounter with Christ**

As he settled into life at the university, he got along well with his classmates. The first year started well without significant challenges; he was comfortable with the roommate because his father had been particular that he should only share accommodations with fellow Muslims. They encouraged each other to practice their faith.

When the second semester started, his roommate did not report back to the university, so Aden was assigned a new roommate. He made it clear to the administration that he preferred someone of the same faith. So, he was paired with another young Muslim man from Dodoma, the capital of Tanzania.

Aden immediately noticed that this new roommate was not keen on following prayer times. The roommate read many Christian books whenever he was free. One day, Aden asked why he did not adhere to the Muslim faith and its practices. His roommate just gave him a simple answer; materials about the Christian faith are fascinating. He would listen to Christian radio stations most of the time. They started discussing the similarities and differences between Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible and Isa ibn Mariam in the Qur'an.<sup>22</sup>

As time progressed, what Aden discovered about the teachings of Islam opened his eyes, and he had the challenge of sorting out the truth and what direction he would follow regarding his faith. He only knew Islam from an Islamic perspective and so had not had the experience to seek answers to the many questions that were crossing his mind. His most profound unanswered question was, "How can I be saved?"

Aden believed Allah was holy and people could not come to him when they were sinful. His only challenge with this teaching was that there was no definite direction for salvation from sinful nature. Islam taught him to believe that no one was born a sinner but that people became sinners at a certain point in life.<sup>23</sup> He wondered in his reflections, when does one get saved from the sinful nature to be with God? He read a lot of Islamic apologists who wrote books in opposition to Christianity. One of the imams

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<sup>22</sup> Literally, Jesus, son of Mary.

<sup>23</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, Arabic-English, Vol.8, Number 597 and Sahib Muslim, Eng. Trans. Vol 4, Number. 6423). See also Qur'an 4:111; 6:164.

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taught them that the grave is the only place to discover whether they would be in paradise or hell.

Aden and his roommate continued to discuss the right way to salvation from a sinful nature. They wanted deliverance from the raging fires of hell, but Islam was not giving a definite response to this issue. Eventually, his roommate gave him a lot of Christian literature to find answers. He told Aden that he knew Islam could not offer those answers, but the Holy Bible could. The Bible says that the way to God is through Jesus Christ. He is the one who came to die so that human beings can be made sinless, and it is only those who will believe and confess their sins that will be saved.<sup>24</sup>

It started to make sense to Aden that Islam could not give direction on how to be saved from a sinful nature, but Jesus Christ came so that all people could access God. He was convicted, and his friend, a new believer, led him in the prayer of confession. It was a new dawn for him; he had decided to become a child of God. It was like discovering hidden truth; he was so excited that his sins were forgiven by accepting Jesus Christ. Jesus washed away his sins and assured him of eternal life.

That same day Aden and his roommate decided that, for security reasons, they would continue being Muslim outwardly, but inwardly they knew they were Christian. They understood that if it became known that they had moved away from the Islamic faith, it would mean that they would face severe persecution from both the larger society and their families. They continued to read the publications given to them by Scripture Union, an organization that distributes Christian literature.<sup>25</sup> Through this, they were able to be more firmly grounded in the word of God and better understand their new Christian faith.

Aden enjoyed listening to Radio Uzima (which means life in Kiswahili). This station broadcast a program that interviewed a Christian who had converted from Islam about his experience, and he encouraged the listeners to keep their Christian faith. This preacher influenced Aden's journey through his newfound faith. By the time he finished his first year at the university, he had made great strides in his faith. His understanding of the Bible deepened.

He attended church to be part of the body of Christ. On Fridays, he would still go to the mosque to see if he could find someone with whom he could share his newfound truth. He continued going to church secretly so that other Muslim friends would not notice he became a follower of Christ. The roommates had a close relationship and could do most things together and keep each other accountable to avoid getting in trouble.

## **Persecution**

During the university break, Aden went back to his family in Tanga. It was a joy to reunite with the family again after a long time at university. While they had stayed in touch during the year he was gone, there was great joy in being together physically. One thing that worried Aden was he had changed his Islamic religion and he knew this

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<sup>24</sup> John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, Romans 10:13, Ephesians 2:8-10.

<sup>25</sup> Scripture Union is an autonomous evangelistic organization in many countries under the umbrella of Scripture Union International.



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could cost him his life.<sup>26</sup> He also knew very well that this spelled doom for him if his father found out. In his heart, he knew that he would not turn away from Christ.

Aden would hide in his room and continue reading his Christian books. Until one day, he forgot to close his door. One of his sisters was looking for him and came to see what he was doing. She found Aden asleep but was shocked that a Bible and some tattered and used Christian magazines were on the table. She was so startled that she ran out to call her mother so that she could also see what was happening. Aden's mother woke him to question what he was doing with those books in his room. That is when he confessed what had happened to him while away from home. Aden told his family that he had become a follower of Jesus Christ. Aden's confession of faith in Jesus Christ did not go well with his family; they were furious with him because of his conversion.

His father was enraged with Aden. He severely beat Aden and locked him in a dark storage room for several days, where he went without food. His father told him that the condition for his release was to recant his faith and return to his Islamic faith. Aden's sister had compassion for him because he was hungry, having not eaten in several days. Despite her fear of getting caught by her brothers, Aden's sister secretly brought him meals to keep him alive. His family burned his Bible and Christian literature and confiscated his electronic devices. His father knew Aden's internet access had influenced his decision to follow Christ.

Whenever his father would pass by the storage room, he would ask Aden if he still had the same stand. Aden remained quiet, but this seemed only to invite more beatings and being locked up longer. Aden did not want to engage in discussions because this would have angered his father more. The imams visited their home to threaten him with severe consequences if he continued maintaining his Christian faith. The threats were so stern that even people he had never seen came to intimidate him because of his walk with Christ.

The imprisonment and threats went on for nine days until finally, Aden was so weak that he could not hold it together anymore. He thought he was ready to pay the ultimate price of following Jesus Christ. Through prayer, God strengthened him to withstand all the trials. He also learned that his roommate had been shot dead because of his Christian faith. His uncle, who had discovered that his roommate had abandoned the Islamic faith, had martyred him. Out of anger, he shot the young man twice in the head. Eventually, the police arrested the uncle on murder charges.

Hearing about his roommate's death made Aden fearful for his own life, but he was determined not to betray Jesus Christ. However, for peace and his freedom, Aden told his father that he had learned his lesson and would no longer be Christian. He was released and severely warned not to cause any more problems. Although he was free to

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<sup>26</sup> Islam instructs its followers to kill any Muslim who abandons Islam: "Some *Zanadiqa* (atheists) were brought to Ali and he burnt them. The news of this event reached Ibn Abbas who said, "If I had been in his place, I would not have burnt them, as Allah's Messenger forbade it, saying, 'Do not punish anybody with Allah's punishment (fire).' I would have killed them according to the statement of Allah's Messenger, 'Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him.'" Sahih al-Bukhari 6922. Book 88, Number 5.

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move about amongst his family, this did not stop other Muslims from continuing to harass and persecute him.

Aden's academic journey was also affected as his father decided to transfer him to another college near their home. He wondered how he could secretly continue following Jesus and not get killed, but he was determined to find a way. He went to the mosque as usual and discovered that there were secret believers at the mosque where he attended prayers. They formed a small band of secret believers to meet and strengthen one another. With internet access, they could access many Christian materials and listen to sermons on YouTube to be encouraged. By attending the mosque, they could keep their group secret and not raise suspicion about their actions. They could also use it to connect as a community of believers. They knew they would raise suspicion and put their lives in danger if they decided to meet at another location.

Each of these secret believers had gone through some severe persecution; therefore, they knew they had to tread carefully to avoid future confrontations with the hostile Muslim community. They created a small but strong community of believers in Jesus Christ who has continued to serve God and reach other Muslims with the truth of the gospel.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Currently, Aden is a businessman, running one of his father's businesses and serving as a leader of the secret fellowship of believers. He desires to share the gospel with Muslims, especially his immediate family. He covets prayers that he may continue trusting God and that many people will know the truth, and the truth will set them free. He is convinced that Jesus Christ is the only source of truth.

He has contemplated running away from home to live a free life where he could practice his faith without hindrance, but he believes that God has placed him in that community to be light so that many will come to know Jesus Christ personally through him. With their secret believers' group, they are careful not to expose their ministry and put their lives in danger, but they are actively involved in sharing the good news with Muslims.

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## 12. AYUB FROM KENYA

*“Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed.” Acts 13:36.*

### Introduction & Family Background



Ayub was born and raised in a small village along the Kenyan coastline. He was born into a humble family. His father was a primary school teacher, while his mother was a small-scale businesswoman in their village. He is the eldest son in his family, with five siblings. His family was strict Muslim, and all required prayer times were mandatory. They attended and participated in all religious activities required

of every Muslim.

Ayub attended all *madrassa* and public-school classes from a young age because their school district had both types of education in one school system. They studied the Qur’an and learned Arabic from well-known and respected imams in their town. His classes gave him a chance to memorize the Qur’an. He grew up like any other child in the community and was a bright student from lower primary to high school. In matters of religion, he was well-grounded and a studious young Muslim. His father, a respected community member, served as an imam and a teacher in the local school. His father wanted Ayub to be an accomplished religious teacher and well-versed in Islamic studies, so he and his siblings needed to know the Qur’an deeply.

Ayub grew up believing that no other religion is acceptable to Allah apart from Islam. Other faiths were not true ones. He thought Christians were blasphemous because of the doctrine of the Trinity. Muslims view this doctrine as idolatrous because they consider it condones three gods. Muslims are strict monotheists and shun any practice that may appear to infringe on Allah’s oneness.<sup>27</sup>

Although his community was relatively tolerant towards the Christians in their village, they did not respect them. Whenever the Christians would hold open-air meetings to share the gospel, a group of young Muslim men would disrupt the meetings to frustrate their efforts while still technically allowing them to enjoy their freedom of worship and assembly in a discreet manner.

Ayub became a part of a group of young people who would harass Christians whenever they held open-air meetings. They used any method they could to disperse the people who were holding such meetings. Once, they took hot chili peppers and ground them into powder form. When the Christian people were all gathered, singing in the local market, they sprayed the hot pepper powder into the crowd. The result gave them the effect that they wanted. The entire market area became contaminated. The instigators ran away, thinking they were not easily identifiable. However, this group of troublemakers was known to the community.

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<sup>27</sup> Qur’an 4:171; 5:73, and 5:116.

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There were many instances where Ayub's group frustrated Christians by destroying their public address system and even causing chaos so that the Christians did not have the opportunity to preach and propagate their faith. The trouble makers did not want to kill any Christian because they feared the local police, but annoying Christians and creating mayhem were fair game to them.

Ayub and his group became like an Islamic extremist group in the village. An imam, who gave them ideas on how to frustrate the Christians, fueled the zealotry. Their main objective was to prevent churches in the area from converting Muslims. Like in all Muslim communities, the imams in Ayub's community played a crucial role in shaping the worldview and mindset of young people. The young people believed the imams without question.

One fascinating thing is that none of the people they aggravated and harassed fought back or took revenge for the many bad things that Ayub's group did to them. Although they knew who had actively engaged in all this religiously motivated nuisance, they never sought vengeance. The harassment became so extreme that someone informed the local authorities that a small group of young people had attacked people's property due to their faith. If the Christians had tried to take revenge at that time, the entire community could have become embroiled in a religious war.

On several occasions, the police arrested Ayub and some of his friends for property damage, but the Muslim community always bailed them out. They were well-known young men in the community; therefore, their families and other Muslims would come together to bail them out, or the police would require them to replace the damaged property. They felt they were fighting for the greater good of propagating Islamic principles and protecting their faith. These radical young people believed they were defending their religious faith and Muslim village from perceived Christian enemies.

### **Encounter with Christ**

After high school, Ayub headed to Garissa University to pursue a degree in education. He enjoyed his time in school and was on his way to fulfilling his father's dream of becoming a teacher. His parents funded his university education. Not many people in their village were fortunate enough to attend university. He was one of the lucky few. He did not know that this would be a turning point in his life, both spiritually and physically.

At the university, Ayub made many friends among his classmates. They enjoyed having lively discussions on a variety of different topics. These discussions ranged from global and local politics, economics, sports, and religion. But religious debates could create a great deal of tension at their university because Northeast Kenya, the location of Garissa University, borders Somalia and is predominantly Muslim. Even though Muslims predominantly inhabit the area, the university admits people from other regions. The student body was an admixture of Christians, Muslims, and those who did not identify with any religious group.

One night Ayub was in his room when a bright light shone. Dazed and confused, he thought he heard a voice saying, "I love you; that is why I died for you." Then the light

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disappeared. He had no idea what to think of the voice and the incident. The next day he went to the university imam to discuss his experience. The imam told him he should not be worried; it was probably just a dream. But that explanation did not convince Ayub, so he left the mosque. On his way back to his room, he saw a small tract called "*The Four Spiritual Laws*."<sup>28</sup> This small piece of literature helps seekers to explain the spiritual journey from being a sinner to becoming a saved person. He picked it up and returned to his room as he read the tract.

For the first time, the love of God captured his mind. As he read that small tract, the voice he heard the night before kept repeating. Something was happening to him that he could not explain. Ayub began crying and wailing as he thought about how he had frustrated the people sharing the gospel and showing the love of God to his people. Those images haunted him, and he was repentant of his actions. Ayub pleaded for God's forgiveness for his many vices. He knew well that he had wronged the people and sinned against God. He begged God to forgive him and asked Jesus Christ to enter his life and make him a child of God.

After the prayers, he felt serene, like God had removed a considerable burden from him. Ayub knew God's love was what he had missed all his life, and he accepted Jesus and decided to follow him as his Savior. At this new chapter in his life, he still had to face the issue of how to communicate his newfound faith to his family. This kind of news would not be taken lightly by his family and the rest of the community. His conversion could have cost him his life.

## **Persecution**

April 05, 2015, was a turning point in Ayub's life. It was exactly three months since he had asked Jesus Christ to enter his life. That fateful day began like any typical day at the university, until around 8:00 PM when a gang of Islamic terrorists attacked his institution. It was the worst terrorist attack in Kenyan history, where Muslim gunmen shot anybody they saw. This horrific attack left many students and staff dead or injured. Reports state that more than one hundred and seventy people lost their lives in that Muslim attack.<sup>29</sup>

Ayub and his Christian roommate climbed into the closet in their room and locked the door when they heard gunshots all over the campus. Inside that cupboard, they did not know how to get out or if they would face death. The attack terrified them and shook them to the core as they waited for rescue. In his heart, he knew that his life was ending. They were already aware when he called his family to tell them about the attack. They were worried because the media throughout Kenya had been reporting the news of the horrific attack at Garissa University.

In the closet, Ayub and his roommate silently prayed to God to spare their lives. Ayub remembered a few months before when he had heard God's voice telling him of his

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<sup>28</sup> The Four Spiritual Laws tract is available here for free:  
<http://www.4laws.com/laws/englishkgp/default.html>, accessed 10 February 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Kenya Attack: 147 dead in Garissa University Assault, BBC, 03 April 2015.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32169080>, accessed 10 February 2023.

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love. This memory gave him the confidence to hold onto the hope that if God loved him and wanted him to live, He would preserve Ayub's life. He continued praying to God for his protection. His phone was now off, so they could not get any updates on the attackers from their hiding place. The gunshots continued throughout the night. They could not sneak out or do anything to save themselves.

Out of the blue, two gunmen came into their room, looking for anybody to kill. They looked in all the places and opened the closet. When they saw Ayub and his roommate, the gunmen asked them to come out. Ayub was terrified that he would experience a violent death that night. However, Ayub was confident that even if death came, he was assured of eternal life because he had asked God to forgive his sins and accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. At that moment, one of the gunmen saw them shaking. Ayub held a Bible, but the terrorists merely asked for their names. After they responded, the gunmen escorted them out of the room to another room where they believed death awaited them. As they walked, they saw several of their classmates' bodies sprawled in the corridors of the dormitory. It was a horrifying scene that would continue to haunt Ayub for some time.

As they headed toward the end of the hallway, the gunmen told Ayub that he was free to go. They did not see any need to kill him. Because he was holding a holy book, they did not want to kill them. Aden suspected that maybe they saw the Bible and thought it was the Qur'an. The attackers were members of the Somalia-based al Shabab militant group, an affiliate of al Qaeda. Miraculously, Ayub and his roommate walked out of the hostel unhurt. Their Arabic (Muslim) names may have saved them as the militants assumed they were Muslim. The police who were outside, along with the Red Cross staff, greeted them. The medical personnel took Ayub and his roommate to the hospital for a checkup. Ayub knew it was because of God that he could walk out of that death trap safe and sound. Many of his classmates lost their lives that night, but God saved him so that he could share the way God loved and protected him all through the ordeal.

After the terror attack on the university, Ayub went back home, where his family thanked God for the protection and safety granted to him. While narrating the ordeal, he continually repeated that if it were not for God, he would be among the people who died. In that closet, Ayub constantly prayed to God to show His love by protecting him from the hands of the terrorists. God was faithful. He had come face to face with the attackers, but they had not harmed him. He walked away from a terror attack while many others lost their lives.

Ayub shared with the family that before the incident, he had heard the voice of God telling him of His love, which is why he died on the cross for Ayub's and the world's sins. He said to them that he decided to accept the forgiveness of God and become a Christian. He made it clear that the family's reaction would not change his mind because the life he had today was because God gave him a second chance to live and serve Him alone. His father was not happy with that statement, but Ayub was determined. He encouraged them to consider following the ways of God by believing in Jesus. His parents tried to persuade him not to change his faith, but he was adamant that he would never abandon God, who had saved him. There was no protection in life apart from God, he told them.

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The news spread that Ayub had abandoned the Islamic faith. His friends came to the family's home to confirm if it was true that he was now a Christian. Some came to insult him, and the same group of friends, who used to create havoc in the community, threatened him with death.<sup>30</sup> The family considered him unclean for abandoning the family faith and embracing another faith they disapproved of. According to Ayub, life has not been smooth since that day. He could not return to the university because the terror attack had never left his mind. He feels survivor's guilt.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Ayub joined a local church and served there faithfully. His motto is that he "lives a borrowed life." God gave him a bonus life to accomplish the work God had prepared for him. God called him to reach his community with the gospel.

Out of his ministry, three of his family members have come to accept Jesus Christ and left the fold of Islam. However, even though he still lives in the same village, many situations make him feel like he is no longer a part of the family. His family does not involve him in some family issues, but that does not dissuade him from serving God.

He trusts that many will come to know Jesus Christ and make Him their Lord and Savior through his testimony. God is using him to do great things. He is devoted to ministry and works as a local private primary school teacher. His desire to teach has not been quenched, but he believes God uses his gift to serve and bring others to Christ.

His favorite verse is Acts 13:36 "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed." He wants to serve God in his generation so that many will know God and have a relationship with him. He desires that God receives glory for whatever good he does.

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<sup>30</sup> An authentic hadith narrated by Aisha describes the fate of those who leave Islam: "On the occasion of the battle of Uhud (when the Muslims suffered defeat), a woman apostatized. To this the Prophet responded: Let her repent. If she does not repent, she should be executed." Vigilante Muslims often assassinate converts from Islam to honor Prophet Muhammad's instructions.

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### 13. ZAHRA FROM KENYA

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:28-30.

#### Introduction & Family Background



Zahra was born in 1987 into a small family of 6 in a small town in western Kenya. Her father was a well-known large-scale farmer who owned some tracts of land where they grew sugarcane. Her mother was a housewife who kept the homestead in an excellent and comfortable condition. Zahra can trace her lineage to the famous Nabongo Mumia Shiundu, a traditional ruler.<sup>31</sup> Nabongo was chief during the pre-independence period. Tradition states that he welcomed Muslims into Kenya's western region. This is why Mumias town has a higher percentage of Muslims than any other town in the greater western region. Zahra has two brothers and a sister. They were growing up in a loving family until her parents divorced. They attended *madrassa* and prayers were mandatory, along with participating in all religious festivals and fasts mandated by the Muslim faith.

When Zahra was nine years old, her parents divorced. She was greatly distressed because she wanted to live with both parents. Within a short time of the separation, her father remarried. In their community, the children remain with the father when there is a separation between the couple. Therefore, Zahra and her siblings lived with their father and stepmother. Life changed drastically, and the love that they enjoyed was no longer there. Having a stepmother like Zahra's, was not something that she would wish on anyone. Her stepmother was very harsh with the siblings. Beatings became a regular part of their lives. Their stepmother forced them into hard labor even at their tender ages and forced them to walk over three kilometers to collect water for the family.

What made the situation even more challenging was that whenever her father was around, her stepmother treated them well. However, they received severe punishments when he was away for minor infractions or even for doing nothing wrong. One day, Zahra complained to her father that their stepmother was mistreating them. Her father became angry and harsh with them. Their father's anger seemed to allow their stepmother to mistreat them even more. The reasoning seemed to be that the children hated the stepmother; therefore, punishment would cause them to respect her like their mother. This abuse went on for several years. Going to school was not a relief because they could only attend *madrassa* and the five daily prayers. The mosque was less than a kilometer away, so there was no reason for them to miss it. They went as a requirement but did not see it as a form of worship. Zahra and her siblings became despondent and felt life had no purpose or happiness.

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<sup>31</sup> Nabogo Mumia Shiundu (1849 - April 24, 1949) was the legendary king of the Wangga Kingdom in pre colonial Kenya. Nabogo was also the Paramount Chief of North Kavirondo.



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At fifteen years old, Zahra was taken to Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, to work as a house helper for a Muslim family friend. The idea of being away from the home where she grew up, knowing she was unwanted and unloved, seemed like a dream to her. Being a domestic worker was better than being at home with a father and stepmother who treated her poorly. She would have food and a comfortable place to sleep at her workplace. Beatings would no longer be a part of her daily life. She began to be very excited and romanticized life in the big city.

Things didn't go as she expected in the big city of Nairobi. Her job was very demanding, and she was overworked. She would wake up at 4:00 AM to prepare breakfast for the family. She ensured the school-aged children were prepared and ready for school on time. Once everyone left for the day, she had to clean the house, do the laundry, prepare meals, and all the other aspects of caring for a home. She would fall into bed after 11:00 PM, deeply exhausted, only to wake up in less than five hours, repeating the same daily routine.

As a fifteen-year-old left with the full responsibility of caring for a home, she was utterly overwhelmed. Additionally, the family she worked for did not treat her like a family member but as a servant, only there for work. She was accused of wrongdoing whenever anything went wrong, even if it was beyond her control. The world seemed so unfair to her, and she began to think about running away. She could not go home because of the psychological, emotional, and physical abuse there. She had no contact with her mother, who left them when they were young, so she could not turn to her for assistance.

She continued to be devoted to Islam all this time, hoping, and praying that all the misery would end one day. Her life was full of tribulations, and she had nothing to look forward to since she had not received a good education or her parents' love. When she reached her limit, Zahra ran away from her cruel employer, looking for another better place to work or live. Her running away angered her father because he had arranged for Zahra to work for this family and even received her salary and only gave her a small amount of what she earned.

She spent several days on the street because she had no place to go or money for bus fares back home. Life was getting more challenging for her. She came to depend on a particular restaurant where they could give her some food to eat, and in return, she would clean the place. She later met another lady she had gotten to know from prayers at the mosque. They developed a friendship, and the lady invited her to her house after Zahra explained her predicaments.

Zahra desired to find happiness and forget her past because her situation drove her to depression. To relieve her hopelessness, she turned to alcohol. Within three years, Zahra became an alcoholic moving from one bar to another and looking for someone to buy her drinks. The company she was keeping pushed her into increasingly unhealthy behaviors.

Eventually, she began selling her body as a source of income for alcohol and sustenance. She never wanted to do all this but felt that the frustrations she had gone

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through pushed her unfairly to that lifestyle. She found no comfort or satisfaction in this lifestyle, but desperation pressed her into her hated lifestyle. She detested her life and the people around her.

As she continued to experience harsh conditions and unkind treatment by those around her, her heart hardened, and she felt more miserable. She felt those around her were only using her. She had continued receiving pressure from her siblings at home to support the family financially. Her only source of income was prostitution and occasionally stealing from clients. She was drifting slowly further into depression, and her health was breaking down.

### **Encounter with Christ**

None of her Muslim siblings would help her because of her sinful lifestyle. Zahra began to question the value of life at all. Her existence felt worthless, and several times she contemplated committing suicide. One day, as Zahra planned to go to a pharmacy to buy drugs to die peacefully, something changed. She lost her money on the way and could not purchase the drugs. She felt desperate that the day would pass like all the horrible days before.

As she returned to where she was staying, she passed by a place in the neighborhood where people were singing. There was a local church that had organized an open-air prayer meeting. In her miserable state, contemplating how to accomplish her suicide plan, she stood by the roadside and listened to the man speaking to pass the time. She did not know that would be the turning point of her life.

The pastor spoke about taking our burdens to Jesus. The powerful part was that he said some people had carried the afflictions of life to the point that today they had decided it was better to die than to live. His words shocked her because that was what she was planning precisely. Zahra felt strongly that the pastor was speaking to her directly. If not for the money she lost on the way, she would have bought the drugs and killed herself. Zahra heard the gospel so clearly through that message and decided to take the burdens of her life to Jesus Christ. If He could not help, then she could carry through with her plan to take her life because she had tried everything else to erase the pain in her life, but nothing worked.

When the pastor gave the altar call, she surrendered her life to Jesus Christ. Growing up, she has never heard about offering your life to another and allowing them to give you hope. That is why Jesus Christ died on the cross so that all can have abundant life. She prayed that Jesus would wipe away her misery and give her a new life.

After prayers, the pastor invited her to speak to a counselor who would help her learn how to live a new life in Christ. It was overwhelming for her as she narrated how she had planned to end her life that day, but God had spared her for a reason. The church members felt sorry for her difficult experiences and stood with her to provide some basic needs such as food. From that day on, they would visit her to check on how she was doing and to encourage her.

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The church members who prayed with her showed her genuine love that she had not experienced in a long time. The following Sunday, she went to church, an experience significantly different from what she knew growing up. Her burdens were becoming lighter daily because of the concern the church people showed her. The transformation was visible; she stopped going to bars to get drunk, stopped selling her body, and stayed away from the friends that influenced her to engage in those harmful behaviors.

The believers in the church supported her tremendously by helping her find casual jobs. They also helped her to walk in ways that pleased God. She desired a happy and peaceful life, and being a Christian even for a short time, she had experienced happiness beyond words. At last, there was peace in her life, and all the depression and frustration she had felt before faded away as she continued to grow in her walk with Jesus Christ.

### **Persecution**

Eventually, Zahra informed her father that she had decided to give her life to Jesus Christ and to live for Him alone. The news made her father angry, and he yelled at her with abusive words and curses. In the end, her father disowned her and said that because she had decided to be a “*kafir*”, an unbeliever, then she should count herself as no longer a part of the family. Zahra was heartbroken by her father’s words.

One day her father came from Mumias to see if her Christian conversion was true. He tracked down where she was staying and showed up at her house. Without greetings, he descended on her with beatings and insults while cursing her. Zahra had to run away for her safety.<sup>32</sup> Eventually, the neighbors intervened, and her father went away. Despite humiliation by her father’s action, she decided not to abandon the God who had given her peace. Joy overflowed in her heart, and she was unwilling to trade it for anything, even if it meant losing the people in her life.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Later on, Zahra moved to another neighborhood for the sake of her peace and security. She still serves God in the local church that helped her see the light. She believes that God allowed her to go through her experiences so that she could be a testimony that God can give you hope when there is no hope. If God restored her, He could give anybody a second chance. She is also thankful that God spared her life in that she did not contract venereal diseases even while she was working as a street girl for those years. God rescued her from death and gave her a new life so that she could impact other people.

Zahra has a business in the catering industry to support herself and a few of the girls with whom she used to live. She is independent and can support herself financially

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<sup>32</sup> Killing converts from Islam is used as a deterrence to discourage Muslims from leaving the faith: “A woman Umm Ruman (or Umm Marwan) apostatized. Then the prophet ordered that it would be better that she be offered Islam again and then repent. Otherwise, she should be executed.” Narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah. A second report adds, “She refused to accept Islam. Therefore, she was executed.”

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through her catering, where she cooks for parties, weddings, and special events. This has become her passion.

She also feels God has called her to start a full-time ministry to reach prostitutes and give them hope in life. She understands what they go through and believes she can connect with the girls caught up in that lifestyle. Since she gave her life to Jesus Christ, God has continued opening doors for her, and she is so thankful that she decided to follow Jesus.

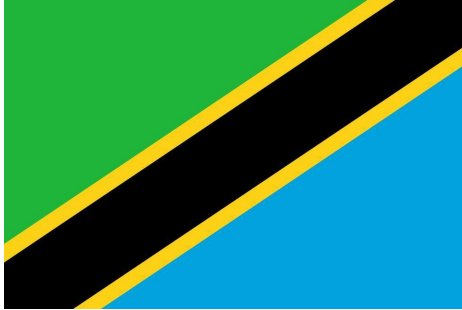
The verse that has blessed her from the first day she gave her life to Jesus Christ is Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." This verse gives her hope, and it is through believing in Jesus Christ that she has peace and happiness in her life.

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## 14. FARAJ FROM TANZANIA

*“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’”* John 14:6-7.

### Introduction & Family Background



Faraj is the firstborn in a family where he had one brother and three sisters. They grew up in a humble family where his mother was a housewife devoted to taking care of the family, and his father worked as a miner. Faraj was born in Moshi, Tanzania, but the family moved to Zanzibar when he was little. In Zanzibar, his father worked in hotels before he ventured into mining. Mining required Faraj’s father to spend most of his time away from the family, working many hours and long days to extract tanzanite, a semi-precious gemstone found only in Tanzania.<sup>33</sup> His father was absent most of the time, and the heavy responsibility of raising the children fell on his mother. About once a month, his father could come home to check on them and monitor their progress at home and school.

Faraj’s family was a strict Muslim family. The community respected them for adhering to Islamic teaching and practices. Legend has it that his great-grandfather gave a portion of their family land to build a mosque and an institute to advance Islamic religion in the area that would later impact the whole of Tanzania. Because of this history, the community around Moshi town respected the family for being devoted to propagating the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings. Faraj’s parents raised him and his siblings to know only this religion, which they embraced. Even in the absence of their father, they became strong in their faith. Their mother was demanding and ensured that they upheld all the teachings from the imams and at home.

Faraj understood well what the *madrassa* taught them, and he quickly memorized the entire Qur’an. Some of his siblings had struggled to recite the Qur’an, which resulted in a lot of punishment. Most of their childhood was devoted to learning, understanding, and practicing Islamic teachings. Every time their father was around, he would assess how they were growing in their knowledge of Islam. They looked forward to the time of *salat*, prayers, and wherever they were, they willingly joined in the prayers.

From an early age, Faraj understood that his father was an imam who served as a spiritual leader for the other Muslims in the mining fields. He devoted himself to serving that group as their spiritual guide for quite some time. Faraj was also inspired to be an imam and teach others about the Islamic faith while converting non-Muslims to Islam, especially Christians.

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<sup>33</sup> Tanzanite blue and violet variety of the mineral known as zoisite, Tanzanite is only found in Simanjiro district, Manyara region of Tanzania.

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Faraj saw Christianity as a religion for lost people who did not know Allah. They would vigorously debate religious matters with other children at school. Whenever he felt that the answers he was providing were not satisfactory enough, he would become violent toward the children from a Christian background. Then he would run to his *madrassa* teacher to get the answers so that he could outshine them the next time he argued about religion.

### **Encounter with Christ**

One day Faraj's father came home at his usual time to visit and check on the family. But on this particular day, he did not follow his regular pattern of lining up the children to question them about what they had been learning at the *madrassa*. It was so strange that even Faraj's mother was concerned about the difference in her husband. Before they retired to bed that night after dinner, he called everybody together and shared his encounter with Christ. Everyone in the family was shocked.

Faraj's father had witnessed the love of God in one of his fellow miners, and after many questions and arguments, he decided to surrender his life to Christ. The emphasis on God's love for all humanity motivated him to follow Jesus. Christ died on the cross on behalf of all sinners to demonstrate his love for the whole of humankind. The Holy Spirit convinced Faraj's father that he was a sinner and needed a Savior to redeem him from sin's bondage and help him live a forgiven life. After that moment of prayer, he felt a love he had lacked his whole life. Knowing that there is a God in heaven who loves him so much fulfilled a lifelong desire for Faraj's father.

That evening was highly unusual. Faraj's father had always been so strict in matters of Islamic faith, yet here he was in front of his family, sharing how God had forgiven him and encouraging the rest of the family to ask Jesus Christ to be in their lives. Faraj's mother did not like the direction her husband was going. She was the first to oppose changing the faith she had followed since birth. However, after several days God worked in their hearts and lives, and eventually, Faraj's mother and the children followed Jesus. At this time, Faraj was 12 years old. He was the only holdout in the family.

Due to the risk, they could not expose themselves as Christians in the community, so it was not safe for them to continue living in that community anymore. The persecution forced his family to relocate to another neighborhood to practice their new faith without any problem.

Faraj's family began secretly meeting with other Christians for fellowship and discipleship. It was not safe for them to meet openly. Several months later, while attending a Bible study, Faraj was convicted of his sinful nature, surrendered his life entirely to God, and asked the Holy Spirit to dwell in his life. After that moment, he felt relieved of a considerable burden dragging him down and experienced a sense of calmness that swept through his heart. At that time, Faraj understood why the Holy Bible says God gives peace that transcends human comprehension. That peace was all he wanted, nothing else. He made a promise that he would not look back, even if it meant losing everything or everyone that mattered to him.

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## Persecution

The entire Muslim community was furious when they discovered Faraj's family had converted to Christianity. One day some men came to their house and beat them up for forsaking the Islamic faith. They came with crude weapons to punish them, not even sparing the women or the children. It was a traumatizing moment for the whole family. One of Faraj's brothers had his hand broken in the beating. The area was predominantly Muslim and did not tolerate Christians. To make matters worse, the community knew that they had been a Muslim family who had now rebelled against the faith; therefore, they would face more punishment for that revolt.

The frequent attacks made it difficult for them to continue living in that same community, so they relocated to another part of the town. They secured an apartment and stayed there peacefully for a few days until one of their former friends discovered where they were staying. He informed the owner of the house, a Muslim, that these new tenants had moved in because they had run away from their community after converting to Christianity. The landlady was unhappy with the situation and felt she was doing the worst thing in the world by accommodating someone rebelling against Islam.

The landlady took every opportunity to frustrate Faraj's family so they would return to Islam, but they were determined to hold on to Jesus despite the challenges. The first thing the lady did was disconnect the water and electricity to their house. Zanzibar is a tropical island. The lack of running water forced them to buy water from vendors, which is very expensive. They could not cool their apartment with fans or air conditioning without electricity. They struggled to cope as they looked for a new house. Securing one was a considerable challenge because word about their conversion to Christianity had gotten out.

One day Faraj's father was falsely accused of mutilating a copy of the Qur'an; this greatly angered the Muslim community. He was arrested and taken to court. Although Faraj's father knew very well that he did not do it, he pleaded guilty, and the judge sentenced him to two years in prison. He decided it was better to claim guilty and be kept safe in jail than to be released only to be killed by a mob who would not give him time to explain or defend himself.<sup>34</sup> A few Christians preferred jail for their safety, and they would accept the punishment to avoid being killed by a mob.

Life became extremely difficult for the children because the breadwinner was in prison due to false allegations. Faraj's father knew that was the price he had to pay for being a child of the light. What kept them strong was the belief that, in due time, God would vindicate them from all this injustice. Although facing all the accusations and punishment was difficult, they found solace in God's presence. They remembered many godly people in the Bible had suffered because of God but had never given up. The same God that stood with the people in the Bible was with them that day, and He would bring them through and make them strong.

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<sup>34</sup> Killing apostates enjoys a wide acceptance among Muslims because of hadiths like this one: "During the time of Abu Bakr a woman named Umm Qarfa became a *kafir* [apostate] after accepting Islam. Abu Bakr requested that she repent but she did not. Abu Bakr had her put to death." Daraqutni and Bayhaqi.

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Faraj and his siblings' education was hugely affected because they could not continue to study beyond the primary level. Without proper education, it wasn't easy to get meaningful employment. Faraj had to find a way to support his mother in caring for the family's needs. He picked up manual jobs, such as carrying luggage for other people, selling water using a hand cart, cleaning cars, and even sometimes, collecting rubbish in the neighborhood to earn a living. It was hard labor, requiring much energy. Plus, his earnings were too small to meet their basic needs.

However, they continued to grow in their faith in Jesus Christ. For fear of exposing other Christians who converted from Islam, they decided not to meet in person with others who had converted from Islam and chose to depend on Christian radio programs that could encourage them. They also attended a local church to be nourished spiritually. A local church in Zanzibar was instrumental in helping them grow in their faith. This church tried as much as possible to help them weather the persecution and encourage them to continue their walk with the Lord.

Those years when their father was in prison were challenging as a family, and they struggled to meet the family's needs. When he was 17, Faraj decided to go to Dar es Salaam to escape his frustration and look for a better job to support the family in his father's absence. While in the big city of Dar es Salaam, things were not any easier. Finding a good job was a struggle. However, Faraj felt God leading him to a specific church for worship and to make it his home church as he searched for something to do. He was delighted to have that opportunity to worship God without the restrictions he had in his time in Zanzibar.

When they saw Faraj's commitment after several months, the church decided to employ him as a night guard, and sometimes when there were manual labor jobs to enhance the church compound, he would do that. It made him happy that he could do something in the house of God. With his wages, he could send money to his mother to support the family.

In the meantime, prison did not quench the father's burning desire to serve Jesus. In jail, he had ample time to read the word of God in depth and took every opportunity to preach to the other inmates. He found favor with the prison administration, who put him in charge of the other prisoners. Even in desperation, God's blessing was still with him. He was confident that God had sent him so that the other prisoners could be transformed by hearing and accepting God's word. In less than two years, he left prison, and by the time he was released, he had led more than fifty inmates to Christ! If not for the time in prison, he would not have met them or planted the seed of God's presence in that prison in Zanzibar.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Faraj has continued to serve God in his church for over five years and has seen God lift him up. He is now actively involved in evangelism in the community. He senses a calling to reach out to the world and point them to the One Who is the way to reach the Father in Heaven. His family moved from Zanzibar to Dar es Salaam because of the persecution, and God has continued to open doors for ministry there. Despite the many



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challenges that they went through as a family, God has kept and blessed them. His younger siblings were able to continue their education, and two of them are in universities which is a testimony that God has blessed them beyond what they could imagine. All his siblings are strong Christians, and they serve God in their everyday life. One of them is in Bible college, training to be a pastor, and the rest have taken different paths in life, but they still hold on to the faith their father introduced to them.

The mission philosophy of Faraj is that before he leaves this earth, he will have influenced the Islamic community to know “the way, the truth, and the giver of life”, Jesus Christ. His area of ministry is reaching the Muslim community in Tanzania, and God has opened doors for him to share the word of God. His favorite verse is John 14:6-7 “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’”

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## 15. SHAIBU FROM TANZANIA

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* John 3:16-17.

### Introduction & Family Background



Shaibu was born and raised in Newala, Mtwara Region on the southern coast of Tanzania. Mtwara borders Mozambique on one side and Malawi on the other side. Newala, one of the five districts of the Mtwara Region, is predominantly Muslim. The only non-Muslims you will find in this area are not natives of the town. The majority of those who are Christians are people who went there to work as teachers or government officials. Local people do not convert to

any other religion.

Shaibu is the third born of his mother, his father's first wife. His father married other women because, according to Islamic tradition, a man can marry up to four women simultaneously. But his father was a man who would marry a woman and then divorce her quickly so he could replace her without exceeding the maximum number of wives allowed at once. The father sired nine children in total. His mother had three children, but the other wives had only one child each. His father was a Muslim because he was born and raised in that community but was not a devoted Muslim. He was also an alcoholic who was violent toward his wives, eventually leading to Shaibu's mother running away from home.

Shaibu's parents divorced when he was only nine years old, and his father placed him under the care of one of his stepmothers. Like any other child raised by a stepmother, life was difficult for him and his siblings. Mistreatment was the order of the day, and their father was not concerned about their welfare. All that mattered to him was his drink and moving around with other women to satisfy his ego. Shaibu grew up not knowing a parent's love. Eventually, his elder sisters ran away from home because they were overworked and not given enough food.

At some point, his mother had compassion for them and came to pick them up to go and stay with their maternal grandparents. Life in that village was not the best, but it was a reprieve from his father's home for a while. Shaibu's life continued like any average village child, but he still dreamed of making it big. His mother had remarried and had other children with her new husband. The culture of that community prescribes that women are not allowed to enter into marriage with children from another marriage. Therefore, Shaibu and his siblings could not go to their mother's place. The only safe place that she could provide for them was to live with their grandparents. Shaibu has approximately 12 siblings. Some he knows, but others he does not know because of his father's reckless lifestyle.

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As he grew up, he attended the regular government and Quranic schools. Being in an area that is predominantly Muslim, attending *madrassa* was mandatory. The *madrassa* was a place for teaching young people to understand and embrace Islam seriously. Their teachers taught them that only Islam was the right religion, and the other religions were wrong. They knew this to be true because whenever Muslims went to worship, they washed their faces, hands, and feet before praying. They observed that Christians prayed with their shoes on their feet and considered Christianity a misguided religion. The only church in the area was a Roman Catholic congregation, and all the worshipers were outsiders. No locals attended the Catholic church.

Witchcraft was a defining characteristic of Mtwara province, and many people lived in fear. Everyone takes precautions to protect themselves. Locals do not engage in any development because they believe that if a person advances in life, such as building a good house or buying a good car, people will bewitch them, and they will die. Most people who advanced in life in Mtwara were not natives of that place, and the community respected them to a degree.

Mtwara province respected Christians who brought development to the area because they built solid houses and exposed the locals to modernity. But when it came to matters of religion, the community disrespected Christians. A sign of kindness to the outsiders was to give them food. However, whenever a chicken died in the community, they would give it to Christians, who would eat it without knowing the meat was carrion. For someone to give a dead chicken to a Christian was a mockery of the Christian faith. Muslims only eat halal meat from animals lawfully slaughtered.

Shaibu enjoyed attending *madrassa* to learn his faith well. He was able to memorize the whole Qur'an without any struggle. Every child was motivated by the idea that if they attended a *madrassa*, their brains would expand and grasp all the necessary knowledge. And to some degree, it was true. Qur'an memorization developed their minds and skills, and they could memorize large amounts of information in regular classes. Shaibu could read and speak Arabic fluently. Because all original Islamic literature is in Arabic, he would translate it into their local language so that people who do not understand Arabic could comprehend it. He engaged in *mihadhara* (Kiswahili for Islam versus Christians debates), where they debated and confronted Christians in matters of faith. *Mihadhara* became his area of expertise, and he did well according to the standards set by the other Islamic community members.

At the age of twenty, Shaibu moved to Dar es Salaam. Village people believe Dar es Salaam to be a city of great opportunities. He had high hopes of securing a good job and living a comfortable life that would help him to forget all his childhood struggles and harsh living conditions. He was able to secure a good job, but he fell into the same trap as his father—that of alcoholism. His life was not advancing despite having a well-paying job. He would get drunk and even fail to report to work the following day. Eventually, his lifestyle resulted in the loss of his employment. Through all of this, he never failed to attend Islamic prayers. It was something he grew up doing and became a tradition for him. Then, he started using drugs to suppress the pain he experienced, including the loss of his job. His life was deteriorating every day.

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He had married a Muslim lady, and God blessed them with two children. Yet, despite his marital status, he could not change his lifestyle of daily drinking and abusing substances. His health was affected, and he was not able to work effectively.

### **Encounter with Christ**

One day as he was walking along a road, he saw a very bright light ahead of him rising into the sky. In this vision, he saw two paths; one was dark, and the other was so bright that he could not look at it clearly. At the end of the shining path, he could make out the figure of someone there. He had never seen such brightness in his life, and the figure spoke to him, calling him by his name: "Shaibu, I am the way, the truth, and life. Follow me." He was terrified by what he saw with his own eyes and could not understand what was happening.

He feared sharing this vision with anyone and tried to continue his life as usual. But deep in his heart, he had no peace after seeing that vision. A few days later, the exact figure appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "Shaibu, I bought you at a high price. Follow me." Because he had been drunk that night, he assumed it was just the effect of the alcohol. The following day, he shared his dream with his wife, who told him it was only a hallucination. What perplexed Shaibu the most was that it had happened to him twice in a few days.

It never occurred to him that it could be Jesus speaking to him. In his understanding, God did not appear to simple people like him. He also feared sharing it with anyone because he believed God spoke with Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet; therefore, God can't talk to people today. He did not know any Christian whom he could tell. But certainly, the voice was clear, and what he saw demonstrated that Jesus was calling him because he is the way, the truth, and the life. One can get to heaven only through Jesus Christ, whom the Muslims deny his deity and salvific ability.

One day he shared his dream with a friend who was a respected Sheikh, a Muslim cleric. The Sheikh told him that someone had sent evil spirits to him and they were planning to destroy his life. He also said that charms for self-protection were the solution, and those strange dreams would not appear to him again. Amulets were familiar to him. When he was a small child, his mother gave him a talisman to always wear around his waist. The Sheikh gave him two charms; a piece of paper inscribed with some words and a shawl-like piece of cloth to always put under his pillow at night. The Sheikh also told him those items were for self-protection and that anybody with bad intentions toward him would not succeed.

Shaibu struggled to understand the dream and the vision. Eventually, he decided to change his whole life. At that time, he did not know about confessing and repenting, but he decided to stop drinking alcohol and carousing with women. He then developed a desire to visit the church. At age thirty-three in 1997, he attended a worship service for the first time. That's where his journey of transformation started.

That night, Shaibu had another dream that scared him after attending church. In the dream, he saw a graveyard. On the left side of the cemetery were graves for the

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Muslims, and on the right were graves for Christians. The exact figure he had seen in the previous visions came to him in the graveyard and asked him, "Which way will you follow?" Before he could answer, the figure turned to the left side and shouted, "Hallelujah!" There was no response. Then he turned to the right side, calling "Hallelujah!" and a vast chorus of "amens" emerged from the graveyard.

The following day, as he went to the shop for groceries, he passed a nearby Muslim cemetery. Then he met a few men whom he later learned were church elders who sometimes engaged in evangelism to Muslims. That day they started talking to him and asked if he had accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He said he had not, but he would like to do so. There with the Muslim graveyard to his left, like in his dream, Shaibu knelt, and the elders prayed with him to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

### **Persecution**

It was difficult for Shaibu to tell his family that he had given his life to Jesus Christ. For them, a Muslim converting to Christianity was incomprehensible. They could not imagine why one would move from a pure religion to one that was misguided in their view. The first person that he shared with was his wife. She was raised in a Muslim family and did not take his conversion kindly. She said that his unreasonable decision resulted from his long-term drug use. Over time, however, she saw that her husband was serious about this new faith. Eventually, she joined him in the church to make him happy, but she never gave her life to Christ. She also never changed her lifestyle, which included abusing alcohol. Her unwillingness to change was an incredible frustration for Shaibu.

Sometime later, other family members learned that Shaibu had abandoned Islam, and they were less agreeable about it than his wife. His father and brothers were so furious with his decision that they went to Dar es Salaam to meet him and try to dissuade him from following Jesus. During their conversation, they concluded that Shaibu was out of his mind. They said he had a mental illness that affected his decision-making skills.

As a result, Shaibu was taken forcibly to a psychiatric hospital, which admitted him as a mentally disturbed person. As much as he protested that he was of sound mind, none of them would listen to him. Both his wife and brothers insisted that he was crazy and needed help. The experience at the hospital was traumatic for him. The doctors treated him for mental illness, and being around actual mentally disturbed people made him more frustrated.

One thing that encouraged him while in that psychiatric hospital was that God continued to speak to him. At first, he fought the injections that the doctors gave him. Then, he heard the voice of God telling him, "Do not be afraid! I am with you." Those words gave him peace in his heart. From his first month in the hospital, he had the assurance that God was with him. He was eventually released and went back home.

His brothers continued frustrating him so he would get weary and recant his faith. Over time, they claimed that their brother was bewitched because they came from a

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background that believed in witchcraft. His brothers visited several witch doctors to reverse the spell cast on him. They were not genuinely looking for a solution or trying to make him revert to Islam this time. They only wanted him to be declared insane to serve as a lesson to anybody considering renouncing Islam and converting to Christianity. He would be an example to others that only insane Muslims convert to Christianity.

There was a time he was taken forcibly to their home in Mtwara so that they could “cast a spell” on him. His brothers took him to his paternal grandmother’s house for “help.” She was a known witch doctor in the town. He was tied up and beaten to force him to recant, but he kept his stand, knowing that even if they killed his body, his soul belonged to Jesus Christ. They drugged him, and he became unconscious. To punish him more, he was taken to the morgue so that, when he woke up, he would find himself amidst dead bodies. The goal was to disturb him psychologically; it was not to bring him back to Islam but to torture him. When he woke up, he was shocked to find himself in a morgue, but he could get out and go home. That experience affected him for a while, but he had the assurance that God was with him in all of this, so he was not afraid.

After all these episodes, he continued growing strong in his faith in Jesus Christ. Eventually, his wife saw that he was not relenting even after being taken through all those troubles, so she decided to pack up and leave. Her family pressured her to leave the marriage because she should not be married to a person of a different faith. She left behind their two children aged four years and eighteen months. Caring for his children was another phase of challenges. But, thanks to God, he cared for them for almost five years as a single dad before he remarried. He and his wife have now been together for 18 years. In all these situations, God continued to reveal Himself to Shaibu and always kept the promise to be with him.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

After his conversion, there were still the charms he had kept which were given to him by the Sheikh and his mother, as spiritual protection from the witches. He came to realize that these things were hindering his spiritual growth. He had kept them to please his mom, but he felt these charms were demonic and evil. He discarded them. He also got rid of the Qur’an he had for years. He felt the Qur’an was hurting his spiritual life. The witches and his family persecuted him so that they could destroy his life, but God preserved his life so that it could be a testimony that God has power over all the forces of the world.

One of the sad things that happened to him is that both of his parents died before giving their lives to Jesus Christ. He often tried to share the truth of the gospel with them, but they were unwilling to follow Jesus Christ. He desired to see all his brothers and sisters give their lives to Christ so they could enjoy eternal life with the Lord Jesus Christ. He has devoted his life to sharing the love of God with others. He could also return to his home area to tell his brothers that he had forgiven them for the persecution he experienced at their hands. Through their persecution, he built a closer relationship with God, and in those moments, he heard the voice of God.

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The verses that he has always cherished are John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Muslims reject the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because the Qur’an says differently, and, there is a verse in the Qur’an that denies that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>35</sup> But John 3:16-17 makes it clear that Jesus is God’s Son, who died for the whole world’s sins.

Shaibu is currently writing booklets addressing topics Christians should know about Islam. He is well-known in Islamic circles in his hometown. He challenges them whenever they have *mihadhara* (public debates) because he is now well-versed in both religions. He is also involved in the apologetics ministry within Dar es Salaam and other areas of Tanzania. He is serving in a local church in Tanzania and looking forward to pastoring in the future.

He is thankful that God has spared his life and saved him to proclaim God’s goodness to this generation. His many challenges have strengthened his faith to withstand all the enemy’s oppression that could have destroyed his life.

His prayer is that Christians have open spiritual eyes to see the spiritual warfare the dark forces have waged against them. Spiritual sight can only happen when Christians live holy lives and devote themselves to reading the word of God so that it can strengthen their faith.

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<sup>35</sup> “O People of the Book! Do not go to extremes regarding your faith; say nothing about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger of Allah and the fulfillment of His Word through Mary and a spirit ʿ created by a command from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers and do not say, “Trinity.” Stop! —for your own good. Allah is only One God. Glory be to Him! He is far above having a son! To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And Allah is sufficient as a Trustee of Affairs.” Qur’an 4:71. Translation by Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran.

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## 16. MUSA FROM KENYA

*“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”* Isaiah 1:18.

### Introduction & Family Background



Musa is from a devoted Muslim family. His father was a Sheikh, and his mother was a respected local government official. He was born in Mombasa, Kenya. He attended the best school in Mombasa, where he thoroughly enjoyed his studies. His parents, being well-to-do, were able to give him a good education and a comfortable life compared to some of his peers in the community.

Due to the nature of his father’s work, he would sometimes bring other children into their home to help them with education or even shelter for a time. But being the only child in the family, he was spoiled by his parents. However, their benevolence taught him to be generous and take to heart the Islamic teaching of giving alms and helping the less privileged in society. It was not an act done occasionally during Ramadan, but a culture they had developed in their home.

His parents could not have other children because his mother had medical complications, and doctors performed a hysterectomy to save her life. Her surgery happened when Musa was only five years old. Eventually, his mother convinced his father to marry another wife so he would have more children to carry on his name. His father married again, but the marriage did not last because the woman was unfaithful, so they divorced. Again, he married another woman, and she died during childbirth. With so much tragedy, his parents decided to stick together, for they felt Allah was not allowing another person to join the family. However, they helped so many children to compensate for not having more children of their own.

Like any other faithful Muslim child, he adhered to the requirements of attending *madrassa* and sat under the teaching of the great teachers of Islamic education in his town. He believed everything the imams and his teachers taught, forming his worldview. He memorized the Qur’an, and it was fun for Musa to learn alongside others. The exciting part was competing with his friends to see who could remember the most. Musa made sure that he was always ahead of the rest. He made his father so proud. His father, as a Sheikh, oversaw several mosques in Mombasa, and he was delighted that he was raising a son who would be great in matters of the Islamic faith.

Like any other young man who grew up as a Muslim, Islam’s teachings, and belief system shaped Musa’s worldview. He believed what Christians taught was not correct and that Christians were blasphemous. He assumed that destruction was the destiny of all non-Muslims and that they would not make it to paradise in the afterlife.

His upbringing conditioned Musa to give up his life willingly to defend his faith. In Islam, jihad is considered a virtue. Jihad generally means struggle, but for most Muslims, it



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means giving up their lives to defend their faith in return for rewards in the afterlife. It was a dream for every young man to go out and die for the cause of Allah. In early 2005 a radical Sheikh was preaching in Mombasa, calling on young people to be prepared for jihad, a holy war, because the *kafir* (meaning Christians) had compromised their Islamic faith.

At the same time, the Kenyan government had deployed the army to Somalia to fight al Shabab and other terrorist groups that had made their bases there and in some parts of Kenya, where authorities believed they had sympathizers. In retaliation for the deployment, the Sheikh was radicalizing young Muslims to take revenge on Kenya. Several of his friends signed up for the war and went to Somalia for training. Musa could not join the group because his father was so protective of him. His father tried many methods to prevent Musa from leaving for Somalia to join these Islamic terrorist groups. But he was willing to go, and given a chance, he would not look back. The indoctrination was so deep that whenever Christians gathered, he felt a force pushing him to cause trouble there.

He had learned the Arabic language to understand the teachings of Islam clearly. He attended *madrassas* and Qur'anic classes to learn more about the faith and be able to pray to Allah correctly; he prayed five times a day and did the ritual washing to maintain the expected cleanliness. All the festivals of Islam and adherence to prayers times were attractive to him because he saw his parents following them strictly. He memorized the entire Qur'an because imams had told him that if you have the eternal word of Allah in you, you will not burn in hell.

At the age of twenty-five, he had several encounters that led to personal research to understand Christianity and what makes it different from Islam. He would read the Bible and the Qur'an simultaneously; as he continued reading, more questions formed in his mind. His research also demonstrated many contradictions within the Qur'an.

One day he asked his mother, "Why do Muslims have to pray in Arabic but not in Kiswahili or any other local language?" His mother's answer opened his mind, propelling him to embark on a journey to find the truth. His mother told him that a good Muslim obeys and submits. He realized that Islam required Muslims to follow whatever they learned blindly. He continued to pray the five ritual prayers daily out of fear and did not understand what he was praying even though he had learned Arabic.

Another thing that he practiced religiously was fasting during the month of Ramadan. Muslims practice Ramadan because Allah will look at their commitment to fasting to determine if an individual Muslim will be saved or go to hell. Islam teaches that Allah will put both right and wrong actions on a scale; whichever outweighs the other will determine your destiny. If the right outweighs the wrong, then you will go to paradise. Therefore, every Muslim strives to save themselves by doing good deeds and living according to the laws prescribed in Islam. However, there is no assurance of being saved on the Day of Judgment.

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## Encounter with Christ

As a young man, there were so many things that Musa wrestled with in his life, especially trying to understand salvation. He embarked on a journey to find the truth about his beliefs and what Christians believed. He bought a Bible and locked himself in his room for several months to have an intensive study to understand. He bought three different versions so that he could have a clearer understanding. He did this without the knowledge of his parents.

Musa spent most of his time reading the word of God while comparing it to what the Qur'an said. He was especially interested in the issue of having an assurance of salvation. Musa's life was a web of correct and wrong decisions. He did not want to live here on earth, unsure of his eternity, but as he looked for answers in the Qur'an, he could not find assurance that the path he was following would lead him to paradise.

After careful consideration and studying the Qur'an and the Bible, Musa concluded that there were areas in the Qur'an that did not answer his questions or fill the vacuum in his heart. He decided to give his life to Jesus Christ and abandon the Islamic faith because Islam was not answering his questions. Musa longed for the assurance or guarantee of salvation; Islam could not do that. One of the discoveries that Musa made that motivated him to give his life to Jesus Christ was that, according to Qur'an 3:45, Isa ibn Mariam is the word of God and Messiah; therefore, he is the Savior. Another discovery was in Qur'an 3:55, which says that those who follow Jesus Christ (Christians) will be above those who do not follow him at the time of the resurrection. Also, Qur'an 19:19 recognizes that Jesus Christ is without sin, and Qur'an 40:55 asks Prophet Muhammad to pray for the forgiveness of his sins. The Hadith also teaches that baby Jesus is the only newborn infant that Satan did not touch when he was born.<sup>36</sup>

After comparing these verses to what the Bible says about Jesus Christ, he concluded that he was on the wrong path. The Bible convinced him that the only assurance for eternal life was when he had peace with God. The love of God caused him to send his only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem and save humanity. No good deeds or following rules could save. With this revelation, he had assurance that God had revealed the answers for which he was asking. Jesus delivers all from captivity and sets people free, even from the bondage of sin, not just the physical needs people experience. However, in the Qur'an, according to Qur'an 46:9, Prophet Muhammad did not know where the Muslims would be after death. Jesus assures his followers that He went to prepare a place for them.

That night after deciding that Jesus was the only way to God, Musa slept more soundly than he ever had. The night was peaceful. Musa had a dream; in the dream, he saw himself in a desert where there was no hope of life. There were no trees or buildings anywhere. He was thirsty and hungry in that wilderness, but there was no food or water and no one to help him. As he walked around, not knowing where he was going, he became wearier and disillusioned with each step. He ran to look for help, but there was

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<sup>36</sup> "Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "When any human being is born. Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead." Sahih al-Bukhari. Volume 4, Book 54, Number 506.

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no help. In that confusion, he fell and lay there waiting for help from anybody passing. Then he saw a cloud covering him and he heard a voice saying, "Musa, Musa! If you trust me, I will show you the way. I am the Lord you are seeking." The voice was so clear and glorious.

He woke up quickly and found that he had fallen to the floor. He was weak in his dark room and cried to God to forgive him of his sins. And that is how he gave his life to Jesus Christ.

### **Persecution**

Musa's mother was the first one to notice the complete change in him because, like any loving mother, she always saw if there was a change in the behavior of her child. She entered Musa's room unnoticed one day and found him watching a preacher while clutching his Bible. It was a Friday and time for collective prayers, so he was expected to be at the mosque, but here he was, listening to Christian preaching and holding a Bible.

His mother was concerned because, for several weeks, Musa had not attended prayers as he had previously done. She wondered what was happening to her son. Her first reaction was to scream at Musa, "Stop watching those *kafirs*! They will corrupt your mind!" He told his mother not to call them infidels because he was one of them. His mother did not believe what she had heard and asked him to repeat it. As he recounted his confession of faith, a slap landed on his face as his mother started cursing and threatening him with death if he abandoned their family faith.

Musa's father was informed immediately of the new development with their son. They could not believe their only son had done this. His father arrived quickly and beat Musa severely with a cane. The scars from that beating are still visible on his arms and back today. Musa's paternal uncles also came in and joined in the beating. They wanted to ensure that Musa saw the seriousness of the issue and force him to recant.

His father told Musa that he was no longer a part of the family and that they would accept him back into the family when he renounced his confession as a Christian. For the next five weeks, his father kept Musa in his room, where he was denied all amenities and had only biscuits and water to keep him alive. No one gave him food, and nobody went to check on him. His family detained him to punish him so he would be frustrated and give up on Jesus Christ. They also wanted to prevent him from going out and sharing with others about his newfound faith. His father confiscated all his money, and he was not allowed to leave the family home.

Thankfully, they did not take his phone away. He could listen to Christian radio stations, where the messages and songs strengthened his faith, and he could also access the internet to read the word of God. He could relate to Daniel's experience in the lions' den, where he felt the presence of God with him. His body might be captive, but his spirit was set free from the bondage of sin. The forced detention helped him to grow closer to God because he did not have much else to do. He just slept, ate whatever they gave him, and had more time to read the word of God and pray. During this time, God

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helped him to be more prayerful, and several times Musa had dreams where he had prayed for people, and God healed them. At first, he did not think it was something he could do, but later in life, he felt God had given him the gift to lay hands on people for their deliverance from whatever was bothering them.

After five weeks, the family felt that Musa would never recant, so they chased him away from home. Having nothing but his phone and a few books, he ventured into the streets because none of his Muslim friends would welcome him into their homes. His friends deserted him, and Musa felt the world turned against him because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His friends and family considered him unclean because he had moved from a pure religion to an unclean one, as they perceived it. Therefore, they did not want to associate with him. He did not have a place to stay for a few days, but eventually, he reconnected with a school friend, who welcomed him into his home.

After narrating what he has gone through, his friend sympathized with him and reassured him that he would support him in finding a place to stay or a job or get him some capital to start a small business. Musa joined the local church where he has been fellowshipping since then.

He tried to keep in touch with his mother despite being disowned because he knew his mother had a soft spot for him being the only child. She tried to convince him to recant his faith, but Musa kept his stance, knowing that he had seen the light and was unwilling to return to the dark.

One morning Musa received the sad news that his mother had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. This news devastated him because he did not want her to suffer, and from what he had heard, very few people survived this kind of ailment. Even if his family did not want him, Musa needed to see his mother. Before he took the step to visit her, he felt God was asking him to take a few days to pray and fast because he would be engaging in spiritual warfare. Obeying the Lord, he took one week to fast to rebuke the spiritual forces that he was battling and to prepare him to meet his parents after a long period.

When Musa arrived at his parents' home, many relatives were there. His mother's condition was grave and had worsened. According to his father, they had given up hope of her living. The family was spending time together and trying to keep her comfortable. They had visited several doctors, who had drained the family's finances without significantly improving her health.

In that helpless moment, Musa remembered that all things are possible with God, and nothing is impossible. They talked briefly, and he decided to offer prayers, knowing there would be opposition against him praying, especially in Jesus' name. But he made a bold move and prayed for his mother. He also petitioned God to use his mother's sickness to reveal His powers to the Muslim family. He prayed and used anointing oil to apply to his mother's forehead, and as he finished, he noticed his father was watching him. He never objected to the prayers, enabling them to talk together as father and son. The situation had brought them together again.

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Several days later, God answered Musa's prayer! His mother was out of bed, acting like she had just had a slight fever. They had lost all hope and thought she would not survive, yet she was strong again and walking with fewer struggles. There was joy again in the family, and his parents asked him to return home to be part of the family. They promised that they would allow him to continue with his faith. He used their openness as an opportunity to witness to them. He shared with them the love of God.

Eight years have passed since his mother's brain tumor diagnosis, and she is still strong, despite occasional health challenges. Musa believes that God is the one who has kept her so that He can show Musa's family that He is powerful. Even though they have not yet surrendered their lives to Christ, they have been tolerant of him and are not as strict in their religious practices as they once were. Musa still believes that they will see the light and give their lives to Christ in due time.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Musa currently serves in a local church in Mombasa and is employed at an NGO, a non-governmental organization, helping the community. He desires Muslims to know the truth because the Holy Scripture says, "Know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The Qur'an advocates for the violent killing of enemies, as stated in Qur'an 9:5, while in Matthew 5:44, Jesus advocates for loving our enemies. Also, in Qur'an 10: 94, Prophet Muhammad asks the Muslims to turn to Christians to know the truth. There are many verses in the Qur'an that, when read with an open mind, can lead one to know that Jesus is the Savior of the world. It is only through having a relationship with Him that anyone can be guaranteed eternal life. There is no other way to God except through Jesus Christ alone.

Musa's favorite verse is Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." When someone comes to the Father through Jesus Christ, He forgives regardless of how great their sins have been. God calls us to come to Him as we are, and He will change our story to be His child.

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## 17. MARIAM FROM KENYA

*“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Highest will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”*

Psalms 91:1-4.

### Introduction & Family Background



Mariam was born and raised in Northeastern Kenya. She is a Somali Kenyan. She grew up with the slogan, *“To be a Somali is to be a Muslim”* engrained into her daily life.

There was no separation between religious and personal life. Her community consisted of her extended family, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles, and cousins, who all lived together on the same homestead. Children

belonged to the community, not to a single family. Everything they did was as a community, giving them a deep sense of belonging. Those who had moved away kept in touch with those who had remained behind in the village.

The main economic activity in that semi-arid community was raising livestock. Mariam’s parents had sheep, camels, and some cattle, and their livelihood depended on their herds. Mariam ensured that she cared well for the family’s livestock as she grew up. She, and the other children, would go to school very early, and then after school, she would take the animals for grazing before taking care of other family chores.

As she neared the end of primary school, bandits, who came to steal the animals from their village, killed her father. They attacked that fateful night, and to protect their livestock, the villagers engaged in a gun battle that lasted for a long time. The robbers killed several people, including Mariam’s father. The death of her father forever changed her life.

One of her father’s cousins came to the village and decided to take her to Nairobi, where he lived with his family. Mariam was excited. Her uncle selected her from all the children to go. It was a dream come true; she had often dreamed about moving to the big city when she grew up. She had heard many people discussing how life in Nairobi was better than in her village. Her uncle saw that she was a bright girl who, if given an opportunity, could be a better person and return to their village to uplift the lives of other community members.

When she got to the city, Mariam was excited that she had reached the place of her dreams, the place she had only heard people talking about and only envisioned in her dreams. The only other option for her, if she had remained in the village, was to be married off. The custom in their community was that when a girl reached the age of thirteen, she was ready to marry, and the marriage was always arranged. In most cases, the girls were married off to older men who would give more cattle to the family in the

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form of dowry. Her community saw girls as a way to increase their wealth. Fathers would educate their sons but not their daughters.

Mariam counted herself lucky to have escaped the tradition of early marriage, and she felt a deep sense of gratitude to her uncle, who rescued her and gave her a chance to redefine her life. When she went to school in the city, she had to repeat a grade because the standards in Nairobi were much higher than in her village. Despite the slight setback, Mariam enjoyed her sojourn in the city, made friends, and quickly adapted. She made friends from many different places.

Her uncle was a Muslim, although not significantly devoted. He and his family practiced Islam because it was their identity as Somali Kenyan. They attended prayers and participated in all Islamic rites as required. She worked hard and, after some time, was accepted into one of the best schools in Nairobi, guaranteeing that she would have a good education and hope for the future.

### **Encounter with Christ**

Mariam was diligent and brilliant, so she soon became a favorite of Mrs. Thomas, one of her teachers. She had Mrs. Thomas for several subjects, and they had a strong friendship before long. Mrs. Thomas invited her to visit her house on weekends or evenings. The teachers lived on the school compound; therefore, she had no problem visiting the teachers at their houses.

Mrs. Thomas treated Mariam much better than she expected. She was very kind to her and would invite her to eat with her family. Mariam was not used to being treated so kindly. She noticed that Mrs. Thomas would pray, and at the end, she would say, "In Jesus' name." Like any Muslim, Mariam knew Jesus as one of the twenty-five prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, and Muhammad is considered the last prophet. She believed that Islam was the only right religion and that no other religion was better than Islam. She considered anyone who was not a Muslim an infidel and saw them as unclean and unwanted in Islam.

Mariam struggled to understand how her teacher could be so kind and good to her since she was not a Muslim. She knew that Mrs. Thomas could not be a Muslim because she was praying in the name of Jesus. How could an infidel be good? With this question in mind, she learned the truth about God, where she came from, and what the future holds. Her dear teacher allowed Mariam to ask whatever question she had about Christianity, and Mrs. Thomas also wanted to learn something about Islam. However, one question that kept ringing in Mariam's mind was how could Mrs. Thomas pray and talk to God as a child talking to her father? Mariam desired to have that level of friendship with God as with her father so she could share anything going on with him.

Mrs. Thomas told her that God no longer calls us slaves, but we are his friends and children, for the servant will be given wages, while the child is entitled to get an inheritance. If one wants to inherit what the father has, one must accept the gift of adoption into the family of God. Adoption can only happen when you ask Jesus to forgive your sins. That is all that is needed to be called a child of God.

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Mariam desired to know more about this loving God willing to adopt her into his family and offer her an inheritance of everlasting life. Mrs. Thomas gave her a Bible to study independently to discover the loving God for whom she longed. She hid the Bible under her bed to read it privately. She was raised to think that holding a Bible was *haram*, forbidden in Islam. If someone saw her, they might cause trouble for her. Mariam eventually gave her life to Christ Jesus as she read and continued conversing with her teacher. She had peace in her heart, such as she had never experienced. That feeling that she was now a child of God made her so happy that everyone noticed the changes in her life.

She went to her uncle's home during the school holidays, and they talked about religion. Her uncle was surprised that she was questioning Islam for the first time. The uncle and her cousins did not find her inquiries amusing. It was apparent that she had been taught something new while at school. After being questioned and threatened, she confessed that she had accepted Jesus Christ and was now a Christian. The atmosphere changed at once.

### **Persecution**

After confessing she was a follower of Jesus Christ, everybody in the house began yelling at her. She never thought she would experience verbal abuse from anyone in that house. For several days she had no food and was not allowed to leave her bedroom. They became so hostile towards her, throwing all kinds of insults at her, calling her infidel and *haram*, unclean. imams were also called to their house to convince her to denounce Christianity, but she kept quiet.

Her auntie would make her watch videos late into the night with hate propaganda towards Christians. These videos depicted how *haram* Christians were, but this did not change her stand on following Jesus. They only made her feel worse whenever they spoke badly about her and ranted about how evil spirits possessed her.

Her uncle eventually sent her back to the village and swore never to support her with her education. Her dream of pursuing a good education in the city abruptly ended. She understood that life in the village would not be the same as before because of the issues that affected her family. Her mother was also unhappy with Mariam's decision to change her faith.

The village now saw Mariam as an outcast. She had gone against the social norms because for them to be a Somali is to be a Muslim. Nobody wanted to be associated with her, and insults and ridicule were everyday occurrences. One day her brother even attacked her with a bottle of hot water. According to her community, being a Christian was the lowest any community member could go.

Her mother pleaded with her to renounce her faith in Jesus so she could be taken back to her uncle's place in the city, but she did not relent. The Sheikhs and imams in the village came to cast out the evil spirit that they suspected had made her confused. They took her to the mosque and started chanting Arabic words to cast the alleged spirit out. They spit on her as they chanted and even brought her a bowl full of holy water



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contaminated with saliva to cleanse herself. Then, the imams gave her a copy of the Qur'an to read some selected passages so she could be readmitted into the faith again. Everybody was against her, and she felt so lonely in that time of tribulation. And yet she had the assurance that she had made the right decision.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Amid all this turmoil, Mariam felt the Lord's presence every day, which gave her the strength to continue holding onto Jesus. For the sake of peace, she pretended that she had recanted and turned back to their religion so that people did not continue insulting and frustrating her by calling her *kafir*. One day Mariam told her mom that the humiliation and suffering at the hands of her family were enough and did not intend to live there anymore. She was planning how she could run away from home.

One evening, when her mother was out, she took some of her clothes and walked eight kilometers to the bus terminal to board a night bus back to Nairobi. At least in Nairobi, she thought, she could be sure that she would have peace of mind and nobody would bother her about her faith. She took the bus to the city, far away from those who had shown so much hatred towards her. The bus ride took almost fifteen hours to reach Nairobi.

The journey went smoothly until about 200 kilometers from her hometown, and then the bus developed a mechanical problem. The bus driver instructed the passengers to remain silent and not to make any noise because that place was known for terrorist groups who attacked buses and other travelers on that road. Fear almost overwhelmed her as she wondered what would happen if they were attacked. Recently, some people were shot and killed on that road, and an Islamic extremist group claimed responsibility. They intended to scare away non-Muslims from the northern part of Kenya.

The night progressed, and she fell asleep. She dreamed that an angel of the Lord came to protect her from harm and the people around her. The voice called her by name and reassured her, "Do not be afraid, my daughter. You are in my plan. My plan for you will not allow anything to destroy you." Those words were reassuring, and she felt God surrounding her with his peace.

After about four hours, bandits attacked the bus. The assailants were speaking in a local dialect that Mariam could understand. They were out to get non-Muslims on that bus and kill them. She was terrified and tried to hide the copy of the Bible that she had so that the militiamen would not get hold of it. The attackers asked everyone to disembark from the bus, and they had to introduce themselves by speaking the local dialect of Somali. Somalis believe their language and the Muslim religion are not separate; therefore, they assume all Somalis are Muslim. By God's grace, the attackers did not kill anyone because all the people on that bus were natives of the northern part of Kenya, which they believed to be all Muslim. God had protected her along with other passengers.

By morning, mechanics repaired the bus, and the journey went smoothly to the city where she had decided to live without the frustration and tribulation of her family back in

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the village. She was determined to ensure that she lived a life pleasing to God. She could not finish her high school education, but she believes she can one day return to school and fulfill her dreams.

Mariam now lives with Christian friends who hosted her to help her find her footing in the city. She has not met or heard from any of her family members but fears they might harm her if they find out where she is staying. She keeps a low profile to avoid this possibility. Her conversion did not make her change the way she dresses; her lifestyle still depicts a Somali woman, but inside her heart, she believes in Jesus Christ and is growing spiritually every day. Eventually, she wants to reach out to her community to share the message of salvation and hope.

Mariam's favorite verses are Psalms 91:1-4, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Highest will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." These verses reassure her that God protects those who trust in him and those, who plan evil, will not succeed. She still desires to learn more about her faith and is unsure of God's will for her. But she prays for her family that they will know Jesus and surrender their lives to Him in due time.

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## 18. KHADIJA FROM ALBANIA

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* John 14:6-7.

### Introduction & Family Background



Khadija was born and brought up in a small city in Albania. She grew up in a Muslim family that strictly followed Islamic rules and regulations. Her family taught her early in life to live a complete Muslim lifestyle, eat only *halal* foods, pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, and respect elders. She grew up following these teachings, and Islam became part of her life. It was difficult to separate religion from culture; Islam was their identity, not a choice of what one believed. She viewed the Qur'an as a compass that directed her life. The other things that she learned in the Qur'anic classes shaped her worldview; therefore, whatever she did was dictated by what the *madrassa* teacher taught her.

As a family, their belief stopped with the Prophet Muhammad; he was the last prophet to them, and there was no further revelation after him. However, in matters of the world, Khadija's father encouraged her, and her siblings to be open-minded and question things that did not make sense to them. Her father told them that knowledge was power; therefore, the more knowledgeable they were, the more powerful they would be. As she grew up, this open-mindedness propelled her to learn more about the Islamic faith and its doctrines. Khadija learned that 99% of Muslims are born into the religion and follow it by default rather than by choice. It is the religion they inherited from their forefathers, and their parents do everything they can to ensure their children remain Muslim. Following rules and regulations and doing good deeds are the ultimate responsibilities of all Muslims, and this is their only hope for salvation.

Despite Khadija's strict Muslim upbringing, she became more fascinated with her interactions with non-Muslims when she enrolled in college. She began to study what others believed as she compared their beliefs with her faith. She was convinced that her faith was perfect and that all other religions were wrong. The people she had looked up to in her family and the political world were all Muslim. She intended to understand the Christian and Jewish faiths to convince their adherents to abandon their faith and become Muslims.

During her years in college, as she was pursuing her dream to be an accomplished lawyer, she was married off to a devoted Muslim man, a police officer. In Khadija's culture, parents pre-arranged marriages without their children's input. Therefore, she had to agree to the wedding even though it was against her wishes. She wanted to be allowed to choose whom to marry, but her family customs prevailed. She was unhappy in that marriage because her husband was so domineering, and she felt like merely a piece of property in that relationship. Her father had taught her to ask questions and find a solution to any problem, but her husband was different. She was never allowed to

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question anything he said, and her place was to accept all his orders and follow them without reservation. Further complications to this situation were her police officer husband's expectation of everyone obeying his orders and his cultural background that regarded women in the same category as children.

In Islam, it is the husband's prerogative to punish his wife if she went against her husband's expectations, which led to domestic violence.<sup>37</sup> That was not the life Khadija envisioned for herself, but now she was in it, and there was no way she could run away or return to her parents' home. She was not allowed to leave the house and had become enslaved in her own home. The physical and emotional abuse wore on her to the point that she wondered how she would bear it.

She had been taught as a child that her primary role in marriage was to please her husband and Allah so that she could enter paradise after death. Whatever hardships she might go through were a way of pleasing her husband, which would guarantee her place in the afterlife. This perspective forced her to leave the life she wanted to pursue in academia and focus on being a full-time housewife. All the people she turned to for help gave her the same advice; her primary obligation was to serve her husband, and the rest would follow. As much as she wanted to find an alternative way, all doors seemed closed. There was no way she could go against the teachings and traditions of Islam.

A few years later, a colleague shot her husband over work-related disagreements while on duty. He was often in and out of the hospital, and his injuries confined him to a wheelchair. As the wife, she had to submit to her husband and care for him in that condition. But the more she tried to be a good, loving, and caring wife, the more her husband was cold and distant. The whole matter broke her heart, and every night she would cry her heart out to whoever could hear it and pray for deliverance from the bondage of her tribulation.

The painful part was that, in Islam, women are not equal to men. Whenever Khadija could question his actions, her husband would always tell her, "You are my wife, and I can do anything I want, and if you do not like it, I am allowed to marry up to three other women." His attitude showed her that she was despised and not given the same rights as men. She had no communication with her siblings and her parents. There was no way to escape her horrible marriage.

Khadija prayed to Allah to rescue her, but there was no response. She felt unworthy, unwanted, and ugly because of what society, her husband, and his family put her through. In those desperate moments, she contemplated killing her two children and committing suicide. But looking at her innocent children, she had compassion for them. Her children were the only people she could trust.

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<sup>37</sup> "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, as Allah has given some of them an advantage over others, and because they spend out of their wealth. The good women are obedient, guarding what Allah would have them guard. As for those from whom you fear disloyalty, admonish them, and abandon them in their beds, then strike them. But if they obey you, seek no way against them. Allah is Sublime, Great." Qur'an 4:34.

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After eight years of marriage, she decided she had had enough emotional and physical abuse and left. She went with almost nothing. Armed with the few clothes she could carry, her two children, and around USD 50, she decided to start her life afresh, far away from her family, husband, and in-laws. She moved to the capital city, where she met a former college classmate and friend who was able to accommodate her after hearing her sad story.

### **Encounter with Christ**

As she began a new life away from her husband, she questioned the existence of a supreme being. In her time of need, she had prayed to Allah, but he never came to her rescue. Yet looking at the universe instilled hope in her that someone powerful was in control. So, Khadija took the opportunity to devote herself to reading religious books. She wanted to understand and answer the questions she had about God both from the Christian perspective and the perspective of other religions.

She and her friend had deep discussions about different faiths. When they talked about Christianity, her friend shared much information that illuminated her mind to the reality of a true God who answers prayers and is more loving to his people. Yet even in all those conversations, she would defend Islam even though she had questioned Allah's existence and contemplated being an atheist.

However, the more they talked about Christianity, the more she understood the nature of this real God who is so loving and caring to the point of showing his love by sending Jesus to die on behalf of humanity. The intriguing part for her was that this God only asks people to obey him and not to prove their worth through actions and deeds. This love differed significantly from Islam, where actions and deeds are necessary to enter paradise.

When Khadija compared the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus, she was shocked to learn more about Muhammad's marital history, treatment of non-Muslims, war captives, and those kidnapped for belonging to non-Islamic faiths. According to Khadija, a face-value examination of Islam paints a gloomy picture of the Islamic faith, its founder, and adherents.

There are many instances in which Khadija struggled to defend Islam. For example, the Qur'an 4:34 permits a man to beat his wife as a punishment, and Qur'an 9:29 advocates for violence toward non-Muslims. She knew the practices were against the current standards of morality. Muslim ethics motivated her to search for a religion that recognized her value as a woman.

The comparison between Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ was striking. Prophet Muhammad was a mere man with a questionable family life; he presumably died because of poisoning by his enemies.<sup>38</sup> Jesus is God incarnate who came to the world

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<sup>38</sup> "Narrated by Anas bin Malik: A Jewess brought a poisoned (cooked) sheep for the Prophet who ate from it. She was brought to the Prophet and he was asked, "Shall we kill her?" He said, "No." I continued to see the effect of the poison on the palate of the mouth of Allah's Apostle." Sahih al-Bukhari,

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to save people to the extent of willingly dying on the cross for them. Her friend encouraged Khadija to pray to God to show her the truth, for he is faithful and would lead her in the way she should go. Her consistent prayer was that God would reveal which way she should follow because she was desperate to know the way and the truth.

One night after midnight, she was heartbroken, frustrated, hopeless, and unloved. She poured her heart out and spoke to whichever god would hear her. She was desperate to have peace in her life. She could care less which God answered. Even if it was Allah himself, she was ready. At that desperate moment, she wanted whatever could get her out of that state of helplessness. Eventually, exhausted but with no answer, she fell asleep.

The following morning, she woke up earlier than usual and took the Bible her friend had given her. She just wanted to read and understand what God said compared to the Qur'an. Khadija had read the Bible previously, but it did not make sense to her because she had been reading with a bias of disapproval. But on this day, she opened it up and read the gospel according to John. It stunned her to read what seemed like a letter to her! The gospel of John answered the questions burdening her heart. She was relieved to find a book that finally addressed most of her issues. Reading John's book helped her understand more deeply the God she wanted. All her anxiety and heaviness of heart settled, and a total transformation took place in her. The words of John 14:6-7 gave her the answer she had been looking for. "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'" She decided to follow Jesus and ask him into her life so that she could live as a child of God. That was the first time in a long time that she experienced peace; she knew it was from God.

Joy and peace flooded her entire being. The feeling of rejection and the abuse she had known for so long, she gave over to Jesus Christ. He was working in her life to bring restoration. She knew Jesus Christ was the only person who could heal her wounds and carry her burdens. Khadija decided that nothing would make her walk away from the love she found in Jesus Christ.

## **Persecution**

Immediately after she became a follower of Jesus Christ, she confronted her family with the news that she had left Islam and embraced Christ. She explained the circumstances that led her to make such a life-altering decision. Her family members did not take the news kindly.

At this point, she was living in a city far from her family, and there was no way they could quickly come to where she was living to harm her. Khadija decided that she would cut off those who did not help her grow in her faith in Christ, but she continued praying for them and sharing the love of Jesus Christ with them. Her relationship with Jesus was an answered prayer after going through all those hardships.

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3.786. See also: Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, Volume VIII: The Victory of Islam*. Translated by Michael Fishbein. State University of New York Press, 1989, 123 - 24.

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She understood Jesus' words about daily carrying the cross and for her to lose the people who were close to her was the price she paid to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. None of her siblings communicated with her because she decided to follow Jesus. Her family considers her an outcast, and even her children are seen as a bad omen to Muslim society.

Although she was separated from her husband when she accepted Jesus Christ, their divorce was not formalized. Khadija's husband died from the injuries he had sustained three years before. Her grief over his death was that he died before she could share the gospel with him. His family disowned her and the children, and she was not allowed to inherit any of her late husband's property. She vowed to raise her children to be God-fearing and serve Him throughout her life.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

After her conversion, Khadija found a divine calling. She felt intensely in her spirit that many ladies were going through similar traumatic experiences, especially within the Islamic faith, and they did not have a place for emotional support. With her life experiences, she felt that God was calling her to be a support system for those women. She had met and interacted with many mistreated women desperate for reprieve.

She started a ministry that meets her city's traumatized ladies' emotional and psychological needs. She organizes events and meetings for ladies where her primary goal is to share Christ with them and develop a support group to walk with each person. Although this has had both good and bad reception in the Muslim community, she has dedicated all her life to seeing girls empowered in a society where women do not often have a voice.

Khadija raises financial support from friends and well-wishers to help the vulnerable restart their lives. God did not save her to be a comfortable Christian but to go and make a difference in society. She works to restore hope to those who have lost it and show them the way.

She believes that Jesus Christ will restore all things for the glory and honor of His name. Her mission is to point to as many as she can to the way that leads to God, through Jesus Christ alone. She considers herself a God-sent missionary to the Muslim community, where she reaches out to the women and girls through her compassion and love for them. She keeps praying for the Muslims to see the truth and follow it.

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## 19. AHMED FROM KENYA

“...my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. “Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored your God’s law, I will also ignore your children.” Hosea 4:6.

### Introduction & Family Background



Ahmed was born in a village outside Malindi, Kenya. The name of the town means one coconut. He was named Aden at birth. He was the second-born child and the only son in a family of twelve children. Their growing up was very humble as they survived as subsistent farmers. Their village was well known for producing excellent coconuts in the coastal area of Kenya. His parents were not overly religious, but they considered themselves a good Muslim family. Their norm was to attend the mosque and observe the Islamic religious rules and regulations.

Ahmed and his agemates went to the local community-funded school. In addition, they attended a *madrassa*, where they learned the Qur’an and what it meant to be a good Muslim. Ahmed loved the classes in the *madrassa* more than the secular education. However, in the *madrassa*, they were pushed to the limits to memorize the whole Qur’an. Their teachers would cane them whenever they failed to learn the required portion assigned. Wishing to avoid these beatings, he and his sisters memorized the Qur’an.

He desired to be a politician because he wanted to be influential in society and work to help his community alleviate the poverty that had affected the community since time immemorial. Most of the people in the community were Muslim, and his strong belief in the faith could be an advantage to him in achieving his dream. He closely followed national and regional politics.

His Muslim community taught Ahmed to believe that only Islam was the honorable religion, that other religions were not acceptable, and that Christianity was blasphemous because they called Jesus Christ the Son of God. He learned in the *madrassa* that Jesus was one of the twenty-five prophets named in the Qur’an.<sup>39</sup> He also learned that Prophet Muhammad was the last and established Islam as the final revelation from Allah.

People considered Ahmed a good man because he did not engage in any vices, such as eating pork, drinking alcohol, smoking, or other evil things. The desire for others to

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<sup>39</sup> Adam (Adam), Idris (Enoch), Noah (Nuh), Hud (Heber), Shaleh (Methuselah) Ibrahim (Abraham), Lut (Lot), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph), Ayyub (Job), Shu’aib (Jethro), Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Dzulkifli (Ezekiel), Dawud (David), Sulaiman (Solomon), Ilyas (Elijah), Alyas’a (Elisha), Yunus (Jonah), Zakaria (Zachariah), Yahya (John), Isa (Jesus), and Muhammad.



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perceive him as a good man was a huge motivation to live a clean life. The added advantage was that those good deeds could secure his place in paradise.

Islam is about following rules and giving your life to defend the faith. In the Qur'an, Muslims are instructed to kill non-Muslims.<sup>40</sup> This belief seemed to contribute to young men, especially in the coastal region, being recruited by Islamic militia groups, such as al Shabab and other Islamic extremist groups. A militant group invited Ahmed to join the group with the promise of a considerable sum of money based on the pretext of defending Islam. The offer was tempting. However, on the day he was supposed to join the group in Somalia, he got sick and was too weak to go.

In the *madrassa*, their teachers stirred up hatred toward non-Muslims, and some attacked Christians in neighboring regions. But Ahmed never engaged in physical violence towards Christians, although he grew up believing everything he learned about Christians, Jesus, and the Bible. He never questioned the authority of Islam or its sacred traditions even those propagating anti Judeo-Christian belief systems.

### **Encounter with Christ**

As Ahmed grew up and became more independent-minded, he started questioning many aspects of life, such as the meaning of life, why there is suffering in the world, and many religious questions. Questions related to faith were most of the inquiries Ahmed had.

His questions about life and faith continued to grow to the point of causing a disturbance in his heart. He wanted a definite answer on how to please Allah and secure his place in paradise. He struggled to do good deeds to be counted righteous in Allah's eyes and in the afterlife. He lived a life driven by doing everything in his power to reach God by following the rules prescribed in the Islamic faith.

Ahmed continued with a heavy heart. When he would replay in his head all the things he had done, the many sins he had committed came to haunt him. He tried to fight the guilt by assuring himself that the good deeds he had done would cover up his evil deeds. However, the shame overwhelmed him, and he did not know where to turn for reprieve from that sense of guilt. He tried to recite the verses of the Qur'an and attend all the prayers, but it did not help alleviate the remorse. Eventually, he turned to the imams to help him fight that feeling, but, to his surprise, they told him he was bewitched. He was told to visit a special place to get medicine to help him overcome the witchcraft. He lived with the guilt for a while, but it weighed him down daily. He felt helpless to find a solution.

One evening, as he was walking home along the road after a long day of hustling in the town, he felt a unique feeling surrounding him. It was something he had never experienced in his life. Something lifted him high to where he saw everything; it was

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<sup>40</sup> "And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful." Qur'an 9:5, Sahih International.

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glittering and beautiful. He could not see anybody in that vision, but it felt like he was on tour to see this beautiful place. Then he heard a voice saying to him, “Aden! If you believe in me, this will be your inheritance. I came to look for you.” Ahmed was terrified; he did not know who was talking to him, but he knew this was someone who knew his birth name. As the vision ended, he realized he may have encountered a divine being.

Ahmed did not know with whom to share this experience. But he knew one thing for sure, he had spoken to someone mighty. Suddenly, as he entered his house, he realized that the person speaking to him was Jesus Christ. Only Jesus came to seek the lost and could take him on a virtual heavenly tour. He knew the only thing that he had to do was to believe and trust Jesus Christ. In his house, he knelt and cried out loud for Jesus to help him. “Jesus, forgive me! I trust you from today forward.” After that prayer, he felt the heavy burden of guilt and shame that he had been carrying lifted from his shoulders. No one had shared Jesus Christ with him, but Jesus showed Ahmed the way. He discovered the real meaning of “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.”

That day, Ahmed decided to follow the way the Messiah showed him. In Islam, there is no assurance of eternal salvation; it is all about earning enough merits to be saved.<sup>41</sup> However, not even good works guarantee salvation. Islamic soteriology is very puzzling. However, the salvific emphasis is on doing good and working toward paradise; this is different from what Jesus Christ teaches that God sent his Son to redeem humanity. The other thing that encouraged Ahmed to become a follower of Jesus Christ was that in Qur’an 10:94, Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to turn to Jews and Christians to find the truth, proving that the Judeo-Christian faith is the true religion.<sup>42</sup>

Another confirmation that he had made the right decision was that, after evaluating the lives of Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad, it was evident that Jesus Christ lived a holy and sinless life (Qur’an 19:19). In contrast, the Qur’an repeatedly exhorts Prophet Muhammad to seek Allah’s forgiveness for his sins, Qur’an 40:55.<sup>43</sup> The high status given to Jesus in Islam is plainly seen in the Qur’an and the Hadith. See the addendum of the book. Islam contains enough general revelation to show seekers that Jesus is the world’s Savior. However, it does not have enough salvific merit like the Holy Bible.<sup>44</sup>

After giving his life to Jesus Christ, he decided to be no longer associated with anything he deemed Islamic. He even decided to change his name. He had to change all his documents to reflect the new life and forsook the former. He removes anything associated with Islam from his life, including dress code, lifestyle, and names. Ahmed is now a new creation, pure and born again. Ahmed is another name for Prophet

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<sup>41</sup> “Those whose scales are heavy—those are the successful. But those whose scales are light—those are they who have lost their souls; in Hell they will dwell forever.” Qur’an 23:102-103.

<sup>42</sup> “So if you are in doubt, [O Muhammad], about that which We have revealed to you, then ask those [Jews and Christians] who have been reading the Scripture before you. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so never be among the doubters.” Qur’an 10:94, Sahih International.

<sup>43</sup> “So be patient, [O Muhammad]. Indeed, the promise of Allah is truth. And ask forgiveness for your sin and exalt [ Allah ] with praise of your Lord in the evening and the morning.”

<sup>44</sup> In Christian theology, general revelation which is also known as natural revelation describes God’s revelation made known to all people through natural or general means in nature (physical universe) and reasoning, among other ways. See Romans 1:20, Psalms 19:1-6, and Matthew 5:45.

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Muhammad. Many Muslims consider Ahmed to be a more esoteric name of Prophet Muhammad.

### **Persecution**

Ahmed understood that sharing his conversion to Christianity with his family would not be received kindly. That would spell doom for him, so he kept it to himself as he sought a way to run away from home. He did not share with anybody about his new faith.

He stopped associating with Muslims he considered detrimental to his walk with the Lord. He did not attend church right away for security reasons. He had access to online Christian media, such as sermons and good worship music. He would spend most of his time alone while cultivating his spiritual life. His family found his behavior strange because he was known as an outgoing person who never wanted to be away from people.

One morning, he took a few belongings and left the village. He did not know where he was going. He did not contact any relatives who lived in different parts of Kenya. He wanted to be away to practice his new faith without harassment. He headed to Mombasa to start a new life, and eventually, he would tell the family that he decided to move away because of his new faith. He took on odd jobs to sustain his life.

After several months, he sent his father a text message informing him that he had left home because he had decided to follow Jesus. The only response he received was, "You are lucky I do not know where you are but count yourself an orphan." Clearly, he was no longer welcome in the family, and he has no relationship with any of his family members to this day. From that day, he decided to change everything to have a new identity; he had not met anybody from his village and did not communicate with any of his family members. With the change of name and all avenues of communication cut off, it would be challenging for them to trace him.

Although he never wanted it to be that way, he felt it was necessary for his security and to focus on what he wanted. He heard of many people who have been persecuted for the sake of their Christian faith but decided for himself it would be better to lose his earthly family than his eternal life.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Ahmed is a Bible student in one of the local Bible colleges in Mombasa, where he is preparing for ministry. He feels that the Lord has called him to reach the Muslim world with the message of salvation. His favorite verse is Hosea 4:6 "...my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. 'Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.'" This verse reminds him of the many Muslims who have rejected the truth and closed their hearts to God. They were ruined by believing lies and following the wrong path that would ruin them eternally.

Ahmed is preparing for the ministry ahead and hopes one day it will include returning to his village to preach the gospel. He utilizes every opportunity to share the goodness of

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Christ. He has developed a small accountability group from the Christian brothers who were once Muslim. The vision of this group is to encourage one another and to stay strong in their faith in Jesus Christ.

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## 20. QUULE FROM SOMALIA

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die....’”* John 11:25.

### Introduction & Family Background



Quule was born in Hargeisa, Somalia, in 1960s. His father was a plumber working in Djibouti, and he spent most of his early childhood in Djibouti. He was the first of six children, although two of his siblings died in childhood. Being from a Muslim family, his mother sent him to a *madrassa* when he was about six years old. There he studied the Arabic alphabet and the recitation of the Qur’an. Quule was a sensitive child who did not feel at home in the *madrassa* after witnessing the Qur’anic teacher beating some children.

One event that left a lifelong memory was when the teacher and the *kabir*, the senior student in the *madrassa*, punished a boy by tying his hands and legs onto the center pole of the *madrassa* building and left him there for many hours. Quule’s stomach turned, and he almost vomited at the difficult situation the poor boy was going through. Over the next few years, Quule excelled in his Qur’anic recitation, working daily at home to memorize the portion of the Quran assigned to memorize. He would then recite it before the teacher the next day. He learned early on that you get walloped by the teacher if you make mistakes in your recitation. Repeating or forgetting the portion you were assigned to memorize also resulted in beatings. Eventually, he excelled in his recitation to the extent that he would bring home awards for weekly completions, usually becoming the first or the second in his level for many weeks. His mother was delighted and very proud of Quule’s achievement.

His father, however, did not pay much attention to his successes. He would go to work early in the morning and come home late in the afternoon. Then he would go to the mosque and later join his Somali community friends to chew *khat*.<sup>45</sup> His father was a very tall and hard-working man. Although not overly religious, he did pray and fast regularly and gave alms to the poor. Frequently, his father would bring home a beggar from the mosque and invite him to eat at the family table in the afternoons. His father’s life revolved around work, daily chat-chewing, regular religious duties, and socializing with his clan friends.

Quule was a curious boy, asking his mom and others hard questions. He asked many unwelcome questions. “What lies beyond the ocean and above the sky?” “Who is Allah?” “How does a baby go into the woman’s belly before it is born from there?”

When he was about eight, Quule became very ill, and his mother took him to a local dispensary run by French Catholic nuns dressed in white. The nuns treated him well

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<sup>45</sup> Khat (*Catha edulis* Forsk.), also known in Somali as *jaad* and *qaad* is a narcotic plant in which its leaves and stem tips are chewed for their stimulating effect. Khat is a popular social drug in much of east Africa and Yemen.

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and gave him some candy. He and his mother returned there a couple of days for a follow-up appointment, and on the way home, he asked his mom, “Who were the nuns?” His mother said that they were Christian. Being a curious boy, he asked her, “Who are the Christians?” His mother told him Christians worship Nebi Ciise (Prophet Jesus). He then asked her, “Who was Prophet, Jesus?” His mother replied, “He was a holy Prophet who healed the sick and could raise people from the dead.” Quule was surprised at that and became more curious about this powerful Prophet. He never investigated the matter further, but his mother’s statement stuck in his head for a long time, especially the words that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. Later, when he was a bit older, he even wondered why Prophet Muhammad did not heal the sick and raise the dead as Prophet Jesus did.

When Quule was nine years old, a new teacher replaced his old teacher at the *madrassa*. This new teacher was even more harsh and eager to use a cane to beat students severely, often using his bare hands. Quule was brutally beaten up one day with the cane cutting into one of his thighs which bled profusely. Even after many decades, the scar is still visible on his thigh. The teacher also hit him on the back, and the head with his fist, and Quule went home crying and wounded that day. After his mother saw what had happened, she immediately canceled his studies in that *madrassa*. A week later, Quule started going to a different *madrassa* farther away from his home, where he continued his Qur’anic studies.

In the early 1970s, Quule’s father married another wife. As a Muslim, he was allowed to marry up to four wives concurrently. But this event shattered the peace in his family, and his parents constantly fought, even physically in the following months and years. Finally, about two years later, his mother had enough, and she took Quule and his three younger siblings to Hargeisa, Somalia, when his dad was out of town. Quule was eleven years old at the time. In Hargeisa, life was more relaxed and easygoing. Quule was able to join another school to continue with his studies.

His curiosity continued to blossom, but sometimes his thoughts terrified him, especially about Islam and what happens to a person immediately after they die and in the grave. He learned as a Muslim that as soon as the person enters the grave, the soul returns to the dead person, and a testing angel visits them and asks them questions like, “Who is your God? What is your religion? What is your holy book? Who is your Prophet?” He also learned that one should answer these questions precisely, or the angel would strike them so hard that the person falls to the seventh hell; from there, he gets severe punishment for a long time with the most graphic and torturous punishments imaginable.<sup>46</sup> If the person answers those questions precisely and correctly, then good angels would attend to the person and treat them nicely. These good angels would also light up the grave and make it spacious for the person. This testing in the dead person’s grave and the punishment and torture associated with it terrified Quule. It made him to carefully prepare and memorize all the right and relevant answers to pass that test. He always heard about the anger, rage, fear, torture, and punishment that Allah would

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<sup>46</sup> ‘*Adab al-Qabr* (Punishment of the Grave) is a central Islamic doctrine detailed in the Hadith. See: Sunan Ibn Majah 909. In-book reference: Book 5, Hadith 107. English translation: Vol. 1, Book 5, Hadith 909.

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exact on those who did not strictly follow the practices of Islam. He never heard or experienced Allah's love, compassion, forgiveness, and grace and how his heart thirsted for those! But Allah was a god to be feared.

Another Islamic doctrine that caused Quule to wonder about the nature of Allah and Islam was the doctrine of *al-qadr*, or predestination. Muslims believe that Allah predestines every aspect of a person's life in the womb. Some Sheikhs go so far as to say that despite any religious merit earned during their lifetime, Allah predestines if a person is going to hell or paradise after death. You can be a good Muslim, follow all the Islamic rules and rituals, and carry out all the prescriptions of the religion, and Allah can still send you to hell after you die, even if you were faithful to him all your life. Because of this doctrine of *al-qadr*, people often do not take responsibility for their lives and actions. Instead, they blame Allah for their wrong actions, stupidity, terrorism, clan wars, or diseases.<sup>47</sup>

Another thing that stood out to Quule in his teenage years was the hate and curses spewed daily against non-Muslims by ordinary people. Muslims called non-Muslims derogatory names, such as infidels, the *kafir*, *gaalo*, and many others. And yet, the few non-Muslims Quule knew in Somalia were decent people who were there to help the suffering Somalis by doing humanitarian work. More questions entered Quule's mind. "If these non-Muslims are as bad as people say, why are they helping all those poor people? Why are they helping in hospitals and other places?" At the end of every prayer in the mosque, when the imam finished the ritual Islamic prayers, he would lead the congregation in a collective *du'a*, prayers, for Allah to damn the non-Muslims, kill them, humiliate them, and defeat them in battle. Then the community would respond with loud amens. Those cursed pronouncements against the non-Muslims were especially obvious after Friday, prayers.

During Quule's teenage years, organized and radical Muslim sects from the Arab world flooded Somalia. Within a few years, the Wahhabi Islamists took over most mosques, *madrassas*, Islamic schools, and other Islamic institutions.<sup>48</sup> They banned the more tolerant Sufi traditions and practices, calling them un-Islamic. During this time, a civil war broke out in northern Somalia in 1988, and there was chaos and much bloodshed. Quule felt the war was unnecessary because peaceful dialogue could have resolved much of the conflict. So Quule, his mother, and his younger siblings crossed into Ethiopia, fleeing the senseless violence, and bombing in Hargeisa.

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<sup>47</sup> "Abu Darda reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Everything has a reality, and the servant will not reach the reality of faith until he knows that what afflicted him could never miss him, and that what missed him could never have afflicted him." Source: Musnad Ahmad 26944. Grade: Sahih (authentic) according to Shekh Al-Albani. See Iso Qur'an 16:93 "And if Allah had willed, He could have made you [of] one religion, but He causes to stray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And you will surely be questioned about what you used to do."

<sup>48</sup> Wahhabism is a strict version of Sunni Islam that follows a literal interpretation of the Qur'an. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703 – 1792) established it in the 18th century in Najd, central Arabia, and later adopted by the Saudi Royal family in 1744. Almost all extremist Islamist factions, whether armed or unarmed, can trace their roots back to Wahhabism.

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They arrived at a refugee camp in eastern Ethiopia in late 1988. Quule spent about a year in that camp, reflecting on the atrocities in his country. Thousands of people, mostly civilians, died in the first few months of the civil war, and most of the country's infrastructure was destroyed. Thousands of people from Hargeisa were in the camp where Quule was, all fleeing from the war. Some months later, an armed rebel group, the Somali National Movement, started forcing young men in the refugee camp to fight for them across the border in northern Somalia. Quule hated that group and did not want to go to war for them, even though they were from his clan. Quule and a friend fled the refugee camp to avoid conscription, paying extra money to move to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. When they arrived in Addis, their little money quickly ran out, and they were close to starvation and homelessness. They contacted well-to-do Somalis in Addis Ababa and went to the Djiboutian and Somali embassies, telling them they were stranded in the city and wanted to return to Somalia. However, when they received some money, they decided to travel across Ethiopia and go to Sudan.

### **Encounter with Christ**

About two weeks later, they reached Matama, the border town between Ethiopia and Sudan. Unfortunately, before they crossed the border into Sudan, they were apprehended by Ethiopian border guards while they were walking to the Sudanese side. After a day, officials transported them back to Gondar, the Ethiopian town closest to the Sudanese border. Arriving in Gondar, the police threw them into an overcrowded and stinky police station, where they spent two terrible months. In that police station, the food was very scarce, and there were all kinds of insects and bugs. They suffered greatly during that time.

In March 1990, Quule and his friend were transported back to Addis Ababa for further investigation. Again, officials threw them in jail, a high-security detention center where most of the population were political prisoners. This detention center was much better than the police station in Gondar because all prisoners were Ethiopian elites, rich Tigrayans, Eritreans, and others who were imprisoned for their political views. In this high-security detention center, there were clean bathrooms and clean showers. A television was available every night until 10:00 PM. There was also a barber and a library, and Ethiopian music and government news were broadcast daily. Food was abundant as the inmates daily received choice foods from their well-to-do families in Addis Ababa.

The library mainly contained books about socialism, communism, and scientific materialistic books, promoting the socialist philosophy of Marxism and Leninism, which Ethiopia adopted about two decades earlier. Quule had, for many years, wanted to learn about the world and understand the perspective of non-Muslims. He had even contemplated reading the Bible. Since others told him he would be there for quite a long time, he took it as an excellent opportunity to explore the world's various viewpoints through reading books. The Bible was high on his priority list, but unfortunately, he could not find an English Bible in prison. However, he found other books there and gorged himself on those rare treats, mainly socialist literature. He read them ferociously and borrowed one after another, trying to understand those ideologies fully.



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Quule shared a large room, Room# 11, with nine other detainees, including a high-ranking, bearded Tigrayan Orthodox clergyman, a highly educated, kind-hearted priest, who was a good man of God. The first-day Quule arrived, he was fragile from starvation and sickness. He was also filthy, not having showered for months. However, the priest, who could speak English well, welcomed him, gave him a pair of slippers and some clean clothes, and made him feel at home in the cell.

Every night inmates from other cell rooms would come to Room# 11, and the priest would preach to them in Amharic, encouraging them and leading them in prayer. He was the *de facto* chaplain. Quule would stay and listen to the sermons and prayers without understanding much of what the priest was saying. It was a good experience. The priest, who had severe asthma, told Quule he was in the detention center for seven years without ever going to court. He was a political detainee along with most inmates; others had stayed there even longer, some ten to twelve years.

After resting and feeling stronger, Quule started borrowing books and reading them all day in the room or the yard. When the priest saw that Quule was reading most of the time, he told him he had a unique book for Quule. The priest gave Quule a little pocket-sized red Gideon New Testament and said he would answer Quule's questions. He gratefully accepted the book. He had plenty of time in prison, so he devoted himself to reading it. He later learned that the priest borrowed the Bible from another inmate, who dragged his feet for some time about letting another person take his beloved book. That man was a well-known Muslim from an Oromo royal family in Jimma, Ethiopia.

Starting from the gospel of Matthew, the first thing that jumped out at Quule and profoundly touched and impressed him was the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Since his youth, his heart had hungered for deep spiritual justice and moral righteousness, but nothing in Islam quenched that thirst. As soon as Quule read those chapters, he realized he had found the truth he had sought for many years.

He continued to read the gospels, devouring Christ's teachings one chapter after another. Amazingly, it seemed as if everything he was reading in the gospels was familiar, already in his heart, but he had never read the New Testament. He was even more amazed and positively mystified when he came to the Gospel according to John. In the Gospel of John, he read chapter after chapter about how Jesus responded, taught, questioned, criticized, and superbly lambasted his hypocritical opponents repeatedly.

Reading the gospels deeply touched him, especially the numerous miracles Jesus performed. The one miracle that touched him the most was the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11. When he read that miracle, he had to pause and digest what he had read before repeatedly reading it again and again. He started crying when he read John 11:25, where Jesus says to Mary and Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die...."

Over the next few months, he read slowly and carefully through the New Testament at least four times which convinced him that Jesus was far different from Muhammad.

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From the bottom of his heart, he knew that Jesus was God in human flesh. But he was not ready to give his life over to Christ yet.

After eleven months in prison in Addis Ababa, Quule and his friend were taken to court and sent back to the same refugee camp where their journey had started over a year earlier. Since he was not allowed to take anything out of prison, Quule returned the little New Testament to its owner. He was sent directly to the refugee camp empty-handed.

### **Persecution**

After about a month in the refugee camp, Quule decided to join his mother and siblings in Djibouti. It was an arduous undertaking without documents or money, and he almost lost his life a couple of times on the way, but with God's help, he made it to Djibouti. After arriving in Djibouti with no source of income and his siblings and mother living in extreme poverty, he started selling bread for a bakery, getting a little money each day, just enough to eat.

During that time, he was able to get a Somali Bible, a complete Bible, from the Red Sea Mission team in Djibouti. He continued reading the Bible every day, getting emotional and spiritual rest from its chapters and verses daily. In those days, because of all the upheavals, clan wars, bloodshed, prisons, poverty, religious doubts, and severe threats to his life and the lives of his loved ones, reading the Holy Bible kept him from depression, stress, and anxiety.

Finally, in 1992, he knelt in the middle of the night and invited Jesus into his heart, giving his life to him as his Lord and Savior. As soon as he said that prayer, a colossal burden left his back and heart. He felt peace. He started forgiving those relatives and neighbors, showing him hatred and distrust. He has never been the same. It was like coming home; he grew spiritually by leaps and bounds. In less than three years, the Lord has blessed him with undeserved maturity, knowledge, wisdom, material blessings, and a deep desire to share with others what he found in God's word and through His Holy Spirit.

In Djibouti, he started sharing the gospel with Somalis, especially with the Somali refugees from Somalia. During the evenings, he also held the occasional friendly debate with some people in the local teashops. In addition to that, he also interpreted from English to Somali the weekly preaching held at the Red Sea Mission.

However, due to those activities and his boldness, Quule generated deep hostility from local Muslims. In the early morning on November 10, 1994, someone came to assassinate him in a narrow alley that he used to take every morning on his way to work in Djibouti City. As he was about to pass him, the man pulled out a handgun, shouted "Christian," and pulled the trigger. The bullet grazed the upper part of his forehead, and blood started dripping on his face and shirt. The man stood a few feet away, staring intently at Quule, expecting him to fall and die as he saw the blood. Then he aimed his gun at Quule again, trying to shoot again. Suddenly, something happened that only the gunman and God knew; he did not fire his weapon again, or it jammed, but he told Quule in the Somali language to leave.

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Quule started walking in the opposite direction, thinking the gunman would shoot him in the back when he turned. But as he started walking, the gunman did not fire. He continued walking away from the gunman for about two minutes. Looking back, he saw the gunman was still standing there, staring at Quule, expecting him to fall because, by this time, Quule's shirt, face, and chest were red from the bleeding. As soon as he found another alleyway, he started running to the main street, where he could find a taxi. That morning he happened to have some money in an envelope in his shirt pocket to send to his mom in Hargeisa. He delivered the money to a relative going there and told him to give it to his mom. His blood soaked the envelope and the money inside. When the man asked what had happened, Quule told him what had just happened and continued walking to the main street to catch a taxi. Instead of going to work at the Djibouti hospital, he went to a house of a Christian friend and told him what had happened. Realizing that Quule was not seriously wounded, they agreed he should go into hiding. His Christian friend took him immediately to a safe house on the other side of the town, and ten days later, he left Djibouti for good.

### **Following Jesus Daily**

Quule ended up again in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where he spent the next nine years. While in Addis Ababa, Quule also began sensing God's calling him to ministry. His local church gave him the opportunity to study at the Evangelical Theological College. Leaders in his holiness denomination recognized his calling and sponsored his education. He graduated with his degree in theology in 2000.

His ministry has taken many different forms and styles in the intervening years, but he has faithfully called people to encounter the same Jesus who saved his life in many ways. Quule is one of the most faithful and most well-known Somali Christians all over the world; his courage and integrity know no bounds. In fact, this book is dedicated to him.

Eventually, Quule relocated to Canada with his family. There he continues to serve the Lord in ministry. His favorite verse is John 11:25, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die....'" He shares with all who will listen how this same Jesus he encountered many years ago was his resurrection and life from the persecution he faced. Despite the persecution he experienced and still experiences, he continues to be a bold witness for Christ.

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## CONCLUSION

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* Timothy 4:7.

Many Muslims come to the Lord today because of the kindness and the testimony of a disciple of Christ. The heart of Muslims is open to the gospel when facing severe challenges. This is when Christians need to step in and provide unconditional love and support. No love is more significant than contributing to the salvation of the lost. Once a Muslim is saved, the Muslim community will not be indifferent; they will persecute the new disciple of Christ to force them to recant their faith and return to the fold of Islam. Leading a Muslim to the Lord is only the beginning, walking with them during severe persecution is essential. While successful Islamic ministries are often based on established relationships, there are documented instances in which the Lord uses what some may describe as “hit-and-run” evangelism. The bottom line is that no ministry opportunity should be wasted even if we only have a few minutes to testify.

Some converts from Islam keep their Christian faith secret until they are strong enough to survive or thrive in the coming persecution. This appears to be wise. Such Christians can thrive in any persecution when their spiritual roots are deep enough. Some new believers may continue attending their local mosque to cement their underground faith. Sometimes such believers will meet other local believers in the mosque, and secret Christian fellowships flourish in many mosques in the Muslim world. Christians from a Muslim background best understand their security situation; they should be able to decide independently when to come out to their friends and family.

Christians should always be ready to share their faith with Muslim friends, neighbors, and coworkers. The sharing of the faith to be successful, Christians should live a holy life. Muslims need to imitate Christians as Christians imitate Christ. Christians should also know their Bible well and have a basic knowledge of Islam. Any Christian who wants to share their faith with Muslims should read the Qur’an, the Hadith, and the history of Islam. This knowledge can facilitate any ministry to Muslims. Ignorance is not acceptable when ministering to Muslims.

Many Islamic resources are available online for free. This includes the Hadith, the Qur’an, and the history of Islam. For better understanding, resources written by both Muslims and Christians should be read. Antagonism and debates do not work well in such ministries. Respectful dialogues are among the best tools to share the gospel successfully. This is often called friendship evangelism. Nowhere in this book did the Muslim background believers lead anyone to the Lord by arguing with them; their ministry approach was gentle and caring.

Two main reasons for writing this book are to be used as an evangelistic tool and to encourage the community of faith. Sharing one’s testimony is one of the most effective ways to evangelize. Many books in the Bible like Acts of the Apostles contain a significant portion of testimonies. The Psalm of David, the Lord is my shepherd (Psalm 23:1-6), is a testimony of what the Lord means to David. This is one of the most popular portions of the Bible. Testimonies are always practical and easy to verify – thus, their

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ability to change hearts. The testimony of every Christian is powerful enough for God to use it; share it and see what the Lord does with it.

***Dr. Aweis A. Ali***

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## WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK 2/2

The stories shared in this collection are captivating and deserve to be widely read. However, they face three major obstacles. Firstly, Islamic Law mandates the death penalty for individuals who leave Islam, and these personal accounts detail the various forms of persecution experienced by those who have converted to Christianity. Secondly, Western societies often fail to recognize the importance of protecting these converts' freedom of conscience and human rights. Lastly, some Christian organizations downplay the significance of persecution in these individuals' spiritual growth and strengthening. Nevertheless, the collection and presentation of these testimonies can significantly help to overcome these challenges.

***Gordon D. Nickel, PhD***  
***Professor of Islamic Studies***

This book is a timely reminder that persecution is still a very real issue for believers today, despite many considering it a problem of the past. Through real stories of those who have suffered, it encourages the global church to rethink its approach toward the persecuted. Thank you, Dr. Ali, for this insightful masterpiece.

***Tonny Ashubwe***  
***Africa Services***

Many remarkable and inspiring stories are coming out of the Muslim world today. People from places like Albania and Somalia are following Jesus in increasing numbers. Although these new Christians face many challenges in practicing their faith, their stories are a great source of inspiration and a reminder to pray for their continued strength and perseverance. This book is a powerful testament to the transformative power of faith and how it can change lives for the better.

***Stig Magne Heitmann***  
***Open Doors, Norway***

The inspiring stories of these faithful disciples provide insight into how God will use them to bring more people into the Kingdom. It's important to remember that Jesus is still the way, the truth, and the life for all communities, including Muslims worldwide. This book is a powerful reminder of how God works through the Holy Spirit to build His church, as seen through the stories shared within its pages.

***Patrick Mburu Kamau, PhD***  
***Senior Lecturer, Africa Nazarene University***  
***Nairobi, Kenya***

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This book contains 20 testimonies showcasing how God has brought salvation to the Muslim world. The stories feature various paths to discovering the truth of the gospel, including dreams, acts of kindness, and individual hunger for knowledge. Despite facing persecution, the individuals in these stories remained committed to their faith and shared the gospel with other Muslims. These powerful testimonies will encourage other Muslims to seek the truth and inspire them to follow Christ.

***Brian Maret***  
***SIM USA***

Encounter with Christ is a description of Christianity at the frontiers. Every story is a personal encounter with Jesus. Every chapter is a journey of loneliness, painful family separations, tough decisions, intense determination, and inner wrestling of the soul, but above all, it is a book about God's love and grace. This is a timely reminder to leave our comfort zones, deny ourselves, carry the cross again, and follow the Lord. Dr. Ali has written an essential book that will not easily be forgotten. It will remain forever a treasure to those whose hearts beat for the spread of the gospel.

***Prof. Osam Temple***  
***Executive Chair***  
***Society of Christian Scholars***

Dr. Aweis Ali is a remarkable Christian leader who demonstrates the importance of fostering understanding, faith, love, and grace to display the universal appeal of Christ's message, even in resistant regions. Dr. Ali skillfully opens our minds and hearts in this enlightening book, revealing the profound power of Christ's transformative message.

***Ehab Jabour***  
***CFO | Senior Vice President***  
***Davar Audio Bibles***

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with particular expertise on the Somali church. He became a disciple of Christ in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1986 through the ministry of SIM. Aweis was a co-pastor of a house church in Mogadishu, Somalia, in the mid 1990s when 12 of its 14 members were martyred for their faith. Aweis has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a BTh degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an MDiv degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." Aweis is the author, editor or translator of 14 books and more than a dozen articles. He is the founder and the Series Editor of the annual *Maansada Masiixa* (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry) as well as the *Somali Bible Society Journal*, the official biannual journal of the Somali Bible Society. The author's research interests include the persecution of Christians, church history and church growth in the Muslim world; Waaqism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Somali peninsula; global paremiology and Somali poetry. Dr. Aweis can be reached at: [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com), Twitter: [@DrAweisAli](https://twitter.com/DrAweisAli), <https://aliaweis.academia.edu/>



OTHER BOOKS BY DR. AWEIS A. ALI



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## GLOSSARY

**Alhamdulillah:** Arabic for “Praise God.”

**Al Qadr:** Arabic for “predestination.”

**Bismillah:** Arabic for “in the name of God.”

**Dik-dik:** A small antelope.

**Du’a:** A prayer of supplication in Islam.

**Five Pillars of Islam:** These are the fundamental aspects of Islam that motivate the Muslim life; they are 1. Shahada (declaration of faith in only Allah and belief that Muhammad is his prophet), 2. Salat (five daily prayers), 3. Zakat (giving to the poor), 4. Fasting during Ramadan and 5. Hajj, see below.

**Hadith:** Sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad.

**Halal:** Something that is lawful or permitted in Islam.

**Haraam:** Something that is forbidden or prohibited in Islam.

**Hajj:** Pilgrimage to Mecca; one of the five pillars of Islam. It is required that every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it should perform the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime.

**Imam:** A religious leader who often leads the daily prayers.

**Isa ibn Mariam:** Arabic for “Jesus, son of Mary.”

**Jihad:** Arabic for holy war or struggle.

**Jinni:** A spirit invisible to humans, often malicious.

**Jummah:** Friday midday community prayers.

**Kabir:** An honorific title for a Qur’anic teacher’s main assistant.

**Kafir:** In Islam, anyone who is not a Muslim.

**Khat:** A mild stimulant plant, chewed throughout the Middle East and Africa. It is highly addictive.

**Madrassa:** A Muslim school for learning the Qur’an and other Islamic teachings, usually connected with a mosque.

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**Ramadan:** The holy month of fasting in Islam; one of the five pillars of Islam. Fasting from all food, drink, smoking and sexual relations from sun up to sun down is required for all able-bodied adult Muslims.

**Salat:** Prayers, particularly the five compulsory daily prayers.

**Sheikh:** Title for Muslim religious leaders.

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## ADDENDUM

### Jesus in Islam

Jesus is the most revered Prophet in Islam. However, he is not considered divine. Muslims have historically taught the sinlessness of Jesus Christ and even sometimes his mother, Mary. Following are two Qur'anic verses Muslims traditionally used to support their view that Jesus was sinless unlike any other prophet in the Muslim canon:<sup>49</sup>

“[Mention, O Muhammad], when the wife of Imran said, ‘My Lord, indeed I have pledged to You what is in my womb, consecrated [for Your service], so accept this from me. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing.’ But when she delivered her, she said, ‘My Lord, I have delivered a female.’ And Allah was most knowing of what she delivered, And the male is not like the female. And I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in You and [for] her descendants from Satan, the expelled [from the mercy of Allah].” Qur'an 3:35-36, Sahih International

Prophet Muhammad interprets the above verses in an authentic hadith

Narrated by Said bin Al-Musaiyab:

Abu Huraira said, “I heard Allah’s Apostle saying, ‘There is none born among the offspring of Adam, but Satan touches it. A child therefore cries loudly at the time of birth because of the touch of Satan, except Mary and her child.’” Then Abu Huraira recited: “And I seek refuge with You for her and for her offspring from the outcast Satan” (3.36) (Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 55, Number 641; see also Volume 4, Book 54, Number 506).

Prophet Muhammad states in another hadith:

Narrated by Abu Musa:

Allah’s Apostle said, “Many amongst men reached (the level of) perfection but none amongst the women reached this level except Asia, Pharaoh’s wife, and Mary, the daughter of Imran. And no doubt, the superiority of ‘Aisha to other women is like the superiority of Tharid (i.e., a meat and bread dish) to other meals.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 55, Number 623; see also Volume 5, Book 57, Number 113).

### Miracles of Jesus According to Islam

The Qur'an also attributes powerful miracles to Jesus which include:

1. Speaking from the crib when few hours or days old, Qur'an 3:46, 19:30-33.
2. Creating a living bird out of clay, Qur'an 3:49, 5:110<sup>50</sup>.
3. Bringing the dead to life and knowing people’s secrets, Qur'an 3:49.
4. Healing the sick and restoring sight to the blind, Qur'an 3:49

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<sup>49</sup> “The Islamic Teaching on the Sinlessness of Jesus”, Answering Islam, n.d. [https://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Osama/sinless\\_jesus.html](https://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Osama/sinless_jesus.html) Accessed 11 February 2023.

<sup>50</sup> This miracle is not recorded in the New Testament but is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century extra-canonical book of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (2:2-5), not to be confused with another extra-canonical book, The Gospel of Thomas, which scholars date from AD 60 – 140.

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5. Bringing down food from heaven, Qur'an 5: 112 -114

While Islam honors Jesus as a powerful Prophet and Messiah, he is considered as a mere prophet, not the Son of God or God incarnate. Islam's respect for Jesus can serve as common ground to witness to Muslims. This prevenient grace in Islam should be used for testifying to Muslims whose holy book resembles our Bible.<sup>51</sup> In fact, Muslims who know the Qur'an and the Hadith are more likely to follow Jesus than those who don't.

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<sup>51</sup> Prevenient Grace is a Christian theological concept that emphasizes the grace of God in someone's life before they follow Jesus Christ. While this concept was first developed by Augustine of Hippo, it has long enjoyed a consensus in the global church.

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