



In *God of the Impossible: Stories of Hope from the Muslim World*, you'll encounter the amazing testimonies of people from a Muslim background coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ. In these riveting stories, you'll learn how to reach Muslims in your own community and become encouraged in your own faith by witnessing the power and promise of the gospel.

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CHAPTER 1

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Brother Abukari
GHANA

“ONE DAY, YOU WILL BECOME A CHRISTIAN.”

Abukari was jubilant. The crowd’s response had unquestionably identified him as the winner of the debate at the Catholic boarding school he attended. The debate was a religious one: Islam versus Christianity. Although a Catholic school, it had a sizeable number of Muslim students. The excellent quality of education offered at the school attracted them. One of those Muslim students was Abukari.

As Abukari confidently left the debate, he ran into the headmaster of the school, a Catholic nun. He could tell that she was upset by the outcome of the debate. Sternly, she looked at him.

“You!” she said. “One day, you will become a Christian.”

“No way. No way!” Abukari laughed at her, as he walked away.

THE COUNTRY OF GHANA IN WEST AFRICA

When in 1957 the West African colony called the Gold Coast declared its independence from Britain, it adopted the name “Ghana,” a reference to the ancient great kingdom by the same name. Ghana was the first black African country to the south of the Sahara to gain its independence from European colonial rule. It proved to be a trendsetter. A meager ten years later, almost all African colonies had become independent from their European overlords.

This country, about the size of the state of Oregon, has around thirty million inhabitants. These belong to various tribes and language groups. At least seventy-five different languages and dialects are spoken throughout Ghana, reflecting a variety of tribes and ethnicities. The Akan people are prominent in the southern part of Ghana, while the Dagomba are an important tribe of Ghana’s North. Given this great variety, it has proven beneficial for Ghana to adopt one official language: English.

Ghana is a country rich in resources. Its colonial name, the Gold Coast, already reflected this fact. Today, both gold and cocoa beans are a few of the important aspects of Ghana’s economy.

MUSLIM COLONIZATION IN NORTHERN GHANA

The first Muslims to reach Ghana were most likely the Dyula people who, from the fourteenth century onward, have come in from the North (from the already Islamized parts of northern Africa). These tradesmen from present-day Mali wanted to benefit from the profitable gold trade. The resulting immigration was the key to a progressing Islamization of northern Ghana. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the local Dagomba kingdom was dominated by Islam. Today, about 20% of Ghanaians are Muslims.¹ They continue to live mostly in the country's North.

British colonial rule facilitated the spread of the Christian message in the south of Ghana, where most of the colonial British administrative facilities were located. As a natural consequence, the coastal regions of the country were the first and primary focus of Christian missions in this British colony, while the predominantly Muslim North was neglected. However, many formerly colonized countries experienced a considerable expansion of Islamic influence during their colonial period.

REACHING GHANA'S NORTH FOR CHRIST

During the last couple of decades, the former missionary neglect of northern Ghana has been in the process of being reversed. For example, for more than thirty-five years now, our mission organization, Call of Hope, has been spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in Ghana's Muslim North. As a result of this pioneering work, thousands of former Muslims have turned to Christ and have been baptized. Many churches have been established and

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tens of thousands are reached every year via radio ministry and the distribution of gospel literature.

When in 1991, a missionary of Call of Hope gave a gift of an evangelistic booklet titled “What Do You Think about Christ?” to an imam (an Islamic cleric)—he could not have imagined what the result of this simple act would be. Out of customary politeness, the imam had to accept this gift. He laid the booklet aside and, not long afterward, a visitor from a distant village came to visit the imam. While he was waiting for the imam, he noticed the booklet and picked it up. The man read some of it and then took it back with him to his own village. Being absolutely captivated by what it said about Jesus, he called the people of his village together and read the entire booklet to them! The eventual result was that many of the villagers wanted to learn more about Jesus, and receive Him as their Savior and Lord. Nearly everyone in this man’s village professed their faith in Jesus! The gospel continued to spread rapidly as many churches of former Muslims were established.

ABUKARI LIVES IN TAMALE

A visitor venturing into Ghana’s North can hardly bypass Tamale. It is the regional capital of that part of the country. Approaching this city of more than five hundred thousand inhabitants, the third largest in the country, one cannot help but notice its thoroughly Muslim characteristics. There are many different mosques of different sizes and shapes. The building of many of these mosques has been funded by Saudi Arabia or Iran, which are always seeking for ways to further Islam and increase their regional influence.

In the city of Tamale lives Abukari. He is a member of the Dagomba tribe, which is the dominant tribe of this part of the country.

Abukari grew up in a remote village in the north of Ghana. The name he bears is a clear indication that he is of Muslim background. In fact, to be a Dagomba is almost synonymous with being Muslim. Almost every facet of this tribe's culture and lifestyle is permeated by the religion of Islam.

Abukari's father was a man of considerable influence in his village. He had four wives, which is the maximum number of wives that Muhammad permitted a Muslim to have. The only exception to this rule was Muhammad himself! By decree of Allah, the prophet of Islam was allowed an unlimited number of wives.² Overall, Muhammad had thirteen wives during his lifetime.

Nearly everyone in this man's village professed their faith in Jesus!

THE BEAUTIFUL HYMN

As a child, Abukari was first sent to an Arabic-Islamic school. While there, he was indoctrinated to hate Christianity. He was taught that the Bible of the Christians was corrupted and that Christianity was a falsified religion. Later, his father decided to send him to a Catholic boarding school, where the Muslim students were allowed to practice their faith. Once a month, however, they were required to attend mass.

Even as a teenager, Abukari was already a proud and convinced Muslim. He loved debating his fellow Christian students on issues

of religion. Because he was gifted as a speaker and debater, he usually prevailed in their discussions. One “victory” he achieved in a public debate held at the school was particularly special to Abukari. Even a Catholic bishop had been among the attendees.

About a month after that specific debate, all students were required to attend mass again, as usual. They were handed hymn-books for singing. The song that was sung that day was the well-known hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

Abukari was awestruck! Never in his life had he heard such beautiful words:

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

The profound words of the hymn extended a captivating influence on Abukari’s heart. Later, he explained: “As Muslims, we are a very community-oriented people. We are very sociable and always have a lot of company. But on the inside, in fact, we are very lonely. There is this profound loneliness. And now this song tells me about Someone who offers to be my friend, a real friend!”

The third verse of this hymn closes with these lines:

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

I absolutely must have this hymnbook, Abukari thought.

Looking in all directions, he made sure that no one was observing him. Quickly, he took the hymn-book and placed it under his jacket. Again, he glanced around; no one had noticed anything. It was important that he, the leader of the Muslim students, should not embarrass himself and “lose face” in front of the others. Then he went home and hid the book in a secret place. From time to time, he pulled it out to read the words again. What a friend we have in Jesus.

“As Muslims, we are a very community-oriented people. But on the inside, we are lonely. And now this song tells me about Someone who offers to be my friend, a real friend!”

THE KOREAN MISSIONARY

Scarcely two weeks later, as Abukari was hanging around in the neighborhood with five of his friends, they were approached by a Korean missionary. He greeted them in their mother tongue, Dagbani, and offered them two booklets. One booklet had the title, “What Must I Do to Be Saved?” and the other, “Jesus Christ in the Gospel and in the Qur’an.”

Abukari was elated!

Wonderful, he thought. I have once again found someone to argue with and show how wrong the Bible really is.

He did not know then that these discussions concerning the Bible and the Qur’an would last a full two years.

The missionary opened up his personal library to the teenagers. “Please, take any book, and once you’ve read through it

entirely, you may take it home, and it will be yours.” That was an attractive offer. Coming from a poor background, Abukari did not possess any books of his own.

The Korean missionary did something else. He allowed the boys to play tennis on his personal tennis court. For the first time, Abukari was holding a tennis ball in hands. What an amazing feeling!

“Actually, it would be nice to have a couple of these nice tennis balls at home,” the boys said to one another. So they concocted a strategy. Every week, one ball was “lost” while they were playing tennis. Later, they secretly “found” the ball and took it home. Of course, the missionary knew what was going on. But he was a man blessed with patience and wisdom and said nothing.

STUDYING SCRIPTURE

It is not easy to reach a Muslim with the message of Christ. It is not a quick thing. This is no fast-food restaurant where you can quickly serve the gospel, and everyone will be gladly and quickly satisfied. It takes time, patience, and the building of a personal relationship. And prayer, lots of prayer.

Prayer is key, as it says in James 5:16: “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

While Abukari and the missionary were reading the Bible and the Qur’an together, they stumbled across an important verse in the Qur’an. There, it says: “And We sent none before thee, but men to whom We made revelation (i.e., previous prophets before Muhammad)—question the People of the Remembrance (i.e.,

the Christians and Jews), if you do not know” (16:43 and 21:7).

The Qur’an contains many references to Christianity and Judaism. In fact, Islam considers them its precursors, and itself as the rightful and true heir to these religions—the last revelation of God. A comparison of the Bible and Qur’an, however, quickly shows that these religions are incompatible. Either the one or the other must be true, but both cannot be true. That is why Muslims are not allowed to read the Bible, lest they discover the truth. It is the Word of God that is most effective in leading Muslims to Christ.

Abukari and his friends showed this Qur’an verse to the imam of their village. He became enraged.

“Where did you get this? You are dangerously close to becoming Christians!”

The imam stirred up the whole village against these boys. And Abukari’s father prohibited further visits to the Korean missionary.

Abukari objected. “The missionary is teaching me English!” That was an important issue for his father, so he relented. “Well, in that case, okay, you may go.”

Thus, the visits continued and also the faith discussions.

ABUKARI FINDS HIS TRUEST FRIEND

It did not take much longer after that. For two years Abukari had studied the Bible. He had come to realize that it is the true Word of God. He had also come to realize that Jesus is Lord, and that He offers to be his personal Savior.

At sixteen years of age, he trusted Jesus with his life. Finally, he

had found this very personal friend. What a great joy!

Outwardly, however, this was the beginning of a lot of troubles for him. In becoming a Christian, Abukari had brought shame to his father's house, and even to the whole village.

Abukari's father told him: "You are either a Muslim and can enjoy all the privileges of being a son in my home; or you are a Christian and you have to leave my home and look after yourself." His mother cried a lot, but she as well insisted: "Please leave our home."

So, Abukari was chased from his parents' home. No money, no clothes, no food.

The local church stepped in to help. They paid his school fees and provided food for him to eat.

After his graduation from high school, Abukari went to Tamale, where he found a job as an assistant in a mission organization's office. It was a distribution center for Christian and evangelistic literature. When he saw the literature that was printed and distributed from there, he was astonished. Those were the very booklets that the Korean missionary had given to him that had played such a vital role on his journey to finding Christ! He had, in fact, started working in the literature center of Call of Hope in Ghana.

Today, Brother Abukari is in charge of this literature center and is coordinating the ministry work of Call of Hope in Ghana. Thousands of Muslims in northern Ghana, especially young people, are reached from this ministry with gospel literature and in various other ways every year. The light of the love of God that reached his heart is now reaching others. Abukari has followed in the footsteps of the Korean missionary who reached out to him. He is now reaching out to many others.

One final note: After Abukari had become a Christian, he went back to the Catholic nun at his school and confessed to her that he had stolen the hymnbook from the church. He wanted to give it back. This time around, she was the one laughing. “You may keep it,” she said. “You have now become a Christian.”

HOW CAN I REACH MUSLIMS FOR CHRIST?

This story shows us an important principle for winning Muslims to Christ: The power of relationship! Reaching out to and building up a relationship of appreciation and friendship with a Muslim neighbor or colleague is a powerful evangelistic tool. Abukari came to Christ in no small part because of the love and patience of a missionary. Abukari and his friends were welcomed into the missionary’s everyday life. They played tennis and shared stories and meals over a period of time. The missionary was a good listener and encourager. He respected their family background, culture, and beliefs. Yet all along he found creative ways to bring up the gospel in many instances and conversations.

Relationship and hospitality allow Muslims to see God working in our lives. Listening to their stories, learning of their heritage, and their family and background are the first steps for us in the West. It may take some time, but lays a solid foundation of trust and mutual respect that opens doors for the gospel. It often is a prerequisite for sharing the love of Jesus and the message of the Bible.

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