

SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation



October 2021, Vol XXXII, No 2

**Making Disciples Fruitfully
and Biblically**

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October 2021, Volume XXXII, Number 2

Making Disciples Fruitfully and Biblically

Editor: S.T. Antonio

Associate Editors:

Jeanne Wu, Gene Daniels, M. Johnson

Book Review Editor: Stephen Strange

Copy Editors: M. James, K.F. and Anonymous

Seedbed is a digital journal by and for thinking practitioners who plant churches and make disciples among the least reached. It is a forum for the exchange of ideas. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the editors or of *Pioneers*.

Letters to the Editor are warmly welcomed and some may be published. Please send all correspondence to editor@seedbedjournal.com.

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Editorial



Editorial

By S.T. Antonio

S.T. Antonio (pseudonym), senior editor of Seedbed, is a church planter with Pioneers in the Middle East, where he and his wife have served since 2015. He is a graduate of Biola University and a perpetual member of its Torrey Honors College, and he holds MDiv and ThM degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Antonio is author of [Insider Church: Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm](#) (2020, William Carey Publishers). He is an American with a Hispanic mother and an Asian wife.



I'm pleased to present the Fall 2021 issue of *Seedbed: Practitioners in Conversation*.

When making disciples among the least reached, we strive to be both biblical and fruitful, finding ways those two priorities converge rather than conflict. This issue offers a variety of articles and reviews, which explore matters of biblical fidelity and fruitful effectiveness of our disciple-making practice from a variety of angles.

Enclosed are contributions from the Arab world, Asia, Africa, and the United States. Many address Muslim contexts, while a couple are informed by Hindu and Buddhist settings. Context plays a key role in shaping our practice, so we encourage contextual reflections on broadly relevant issues in frontier church planting. I find that looking at how a practitioner in another setting approaches a similar challenge I am facing can help me transcend my own context and give me fresh insight into my own challenges.

Five practitioners reviewed books related to movements, fruitful engagement of Muslims, and community development in frontier church

planting. We aim to feature “practitioner’s angle” reviews in *Seedbed* which include personal reflections regarding a book’s helpfulness and relevance to the reviewer’s kingdom work and to likeminded colleagues serving in similar contexts.

Our goal at *Seedbed* is to provide a space for a variety of opinions and approaches. The least-reached labor force is far from uniform, and it is critical to cultivate safe places for diverse views to be heard and discussed, both charitably and constructively. To that end, you will encounter various approaches and proposals in this issue of *Seedbed*, including a response piece to an article published in the last issue. Each article in this issue is accompanied by discussion questions to stimulate thinking and encourage dialogue with colleagues and teammates—the best kind of practitioner conversation.

We enjoy hearing from you. If you have an article idea, would like to review a book, or have feedback or suggestions, please contact us via our website (seedbedjournal.com) or by email (editor@seedbedjournal.com).

My deep gratitude to all the contributors and my editors who helped bring this Fall 2021 issue to fruition.

In God’s joyful service with you,

S.T. Antonio

Seedbed Senior Editor

Articles



“Proclamational” DBS: Biblical Preaching and Teaching in Discovery Bible Studies

By Jon T.

Jon T. is a church-planting practitioner who served for many years on a Pioneers team in Southeast Asia. His team was involved in direct ministry to not-yet-believers while also mobilizing churches to engage in outreach to Hindus and Muslims. He is now helping believers in the States to creatively engage the nations that have come to the States.



In recent years many people from unreached people groups have come to faith in Christ. Reports of movements are exciting and encouraging but sometimes difficult to believe, even for the most optimistic of people. Yet such reports of virally multiplying fellowships of believers continue to emerge from some of the most resistant places in the world (Long 2020), and many workers have adopted new church-planting strategies as a result.

In the past few years, small movements have started to occur in Southeast Asia. These smaller movements can be traced back to larger movements in India and Africa through training networks of leaders which pass on similar approaches to multiplication, saturation evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development (see Vu 2012 regarding the movements in Africa).

My team and I had the chance to meet and listen to many of these Southeast Asian leaders. Their stories were impressive, but we were more impressed by their humility, as well as their insistence that these great

moves of God had nothing to do with their intelligence or unique gifting but rather boiled down to simple, reproducible principles and focus. They made a significant impression on our team, and after a lot of prayer, study of scripture, and an honest sense of desperation, we started to implement the same principles. God worked by birthing disciples who make disciples. A key part of our church-planting approach was discipling through “discovery groups.”

This new paradigm has produced many legitimate questions from people in the established church. One question is how teaching and preaching fit into a multiplication strategy. Based on biblical study and my own experience among Hindus in Southeast Asia, I argue that biblical teaching and preaching can be faithfully expressed through a strategy that features Discovery Bible Study (DBS).

The Discovery Group Dilemma

Whenever a believer or unbeliever indicates interest in learning more about spiritual things and is willing to gather a group of friends or family to study together, a discovery group is formed. The group works through chronological and/or theme-based selections of scripture on a weekly or biweekly basis. Discovery groups follow a simple, reproducible format, with the leader thoughtfully guiding the group through a series of questions. The questions lead the group through accountability for obedience to principles discussed in the previous weeks; thanksgiving to God; prayer for difficulties and struggles; a simple, inductive study of the new passage; and a measurable declaration of how they will apply the passage’s principles in the coming week.

The continuation of a discovery group depends upon the group’s willingness to obey what they are learning and share it with others. If there are no attempts at obedience and sharing the principles with others, the group will be presented with a choice whether to continue. If there is still not a change, the leader will no longer meet with the group.

Within the typical discovery group, there is no prescribed period for a traditional time of teaching. No one stands up and shares for an extended time. There is no lecturing, charts, or systematic breakdown of the passage by one person. It is basically a shared process of discovering the truths in the passage and holding each other accountable to apply those truths.

Within our typical discovery groups, unbelievers often attended and participated in the group. In our experience, there was always at least one believer present, and the facilitator was also being coached and disciplined in a setting outside the discovery group. As unbelievers answered questions about what the passage taught, they were always asked to share the portion of the passage that led them to their observation. This practice modeled the principle that all doctrine, opinions, and teaching must have their source in scripture.

This is discipleship happening in community with new believers maturing and unbelievers growing in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. If it progresses to genuine faith commitment, the discovery group is shepherded toward developing into an “embryonic church” (Trousdale 2012). Many of the elements of a discovery group were designed so that they could easily shift toward fulfilling the biblical functions of church (e.g., worship, prayer, scripture learning, fellowship, accountability, service, etc.).¹ Therefore, even after the church is established, many elements of the basic discovery process and practice of the group, with some modifications, can often remain largely the same.

Here’s where the dilemma occurs for many who come from established evangelical church backgrounds. It is very difficult for some to wrap their mind around these key ideas: no pastor “up front,” no traditional preaching in a lecture style, untrained laypeople and unbelievers

1 Steve Smith (2012) outlines a process by which group leaders can intentionally disciple their groups to study the nature and functions of the church in the New Testament, so the group can identify any missing elements and commit to developing into and identifying as a full biblical church.

sharing what they are learning from scripture, and the simplicity of some people's take from scripture (e.g., one man's application from the creation passage that he needed to take better care of his goats).

Objections can often be framed into two general questions, "What about the gift of teaching?" and "What about the preaching of the Word?" People's most basic ideas of what the conveyance of truth should look like in a church setting—communicating with authority from the pulpit or systematically from the lecturer's desk—are missing in the DBS approach. These objections cannot be dismissed as merely the misgivings of "traditionalists." Teaching is one of the major components of Christ's command in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20). Preaching is all over the New Testament, and gospel workers are commanded to engage in this activity (see Matt. 26:13, Acts 17:13, 2 Tim. 4:2). If any gospel worker's main focus is making and multiplying disciples, yet their primary activities lack preaching and teaching, then a clear biblical response is required. Our strategies, no matter how innovative or successful, must be thoroughly biblical.

In the remainder of this article, I address the two objections that biblical preaching and teaching are absent from a model of church planting that features DBS. I lay out a short explanation of the biblical terms, followed by a discussion of how each critical component to gospel ministry is expressed within the DBS process.

Proclamation and Preaching in the New Testament

The New Testament uses many terms for preaching or proclaiming the Word of God. In this article, I focus on two of the more notable terms, *kerusso*, "to proclaim as a herald, to announce publicly" (fifty-nine occurrences), and *euangelizo*, "to announce good news" (fifty-two occurrences), with additional reference to *dialegomai*, "to say thorough-

ly, to discuss” (thirteen occurrences) (Swanson 1997).²

The background of *kerusso* is the idea of a herald publicly “belting out” the latest important information. The word is not inherently theological; it was used in other writings of the time to describe making general announcements, conveying military orders, and giving public updates of information. In light of this, the meaning of *kerusso*, in the context of gospel proclamation, is not limited to proclamation from a pulpit or restricted to a church setting (Walvoord 1985; Rom. 10:14–15).

It is clear the New Testament use of this word focuses primarily on “the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world” (Dodd 1964, 7). It is used often to describe the activity of Jesus, his disciples, and John the Baptist as they proclaimed the gospel, the kingdom of God, Jesus’s crucifixion, and repentance. It is significant that only four of the fifty-nine occurrences of *kerusso* in the New Testament do not appear to refer explicitly to a proclamation about Christ, repentance, or the gospel.³

The word *euangelizo* is even more gospel-centric. While its meaning overlaps significantly with *kerusso*, *euangelizo* is directly related to the word for gospel (*euangelion*), carrying with it the added element of the purpose and content of the proclamation—announcing good news (e.g. Matt. 11:5, Luke 2:10, Acts 5:42). The word can be used to bring any good news, but in the New Testament, it refers especially to bringing the good news of the gospel (Thayer 1995, “*euangelizo*”). Unlike *kerusso*, the object (good news) is implied in the verb, and it is often translated as “bring good news” or “announce the good news” or “preach the gospel.”

Another New Testament word, *dialegomai*, is often used to describe reasoning and discussion with a view toward persuading listeners to act.

2 Another is *kataggello* (eighteen times in the New Testament). *Laleo*, which means “to speak,” is also on rare occasions translated as “preach” or “proclaim.”

3 Acts 15:21, Rom. 2:21, 2 Cor. 11:4, Gal. 5:11.

Although this term can be used for general disputing or arguing, a great example of its use in regard to gospel activity is found in Paul's custom, in which he "**reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:2-3 ESV, emphasis mine). In this usage, *dialogomai* is similar to *kerusso* in that it verbally states a truth that confronts the listener with a point of decision, like a fork in the road with a response required.

These words, especially *kerusso* and *euangelizo*, were used in the New Testament primarily to describe evangelistic activity, taking the good news about Jesus to not-yet-believers and announcing it openly to the world (Adams 1986, 5-6). Even though preaching occurred among believers (Rom. 1:15, Eph. 3:8, 1 Thess. 2:9), most preaching in the New Testament was specifically evangelistic activity toward unbelievers (cf. Acts 8:5, Rom. 10:14-15, 1 Cor. 1:23, etc.).

An interesting question for modern-day believers is how a term used primarily in the New Testament to denote proclaiming the gospel to not-yet-believers evolved into a term referring to an activity generally confined to church buildings with the audience being predominantly Christian. Why is a "preacher" generally thought of as the man standing behind the pulpit talking to Christians for thirty to forty-five minutes every Sunday? I greatly appreciate the rise of gospel-centered preaching and gospel-centered churches. Christians need to hear the gospel repeatedly because it is so easy for us to drift from its simple power and forget the implications of God's love for us. However, this does not change the fact that the bulk of New Testament words used for preaching and proclamation are within the "context of evangelistic proclamation to non-believers" (Griffiths 2017, 34).

The popular understanding of preaching as biblical exposition and exhortation, while rooted in biblical priorities, can obscure the historical,

biblical meaning of this term if we are not careful (Wood 1996, 950). (As we will see below, much of our modern usage of the word *preach* better corresponds to the biblical term for teach: *didasko*; see Adams 1986, 5–6). The biblical use of *kerusso* implies an expectation for all believers to be engaged in proclaiming publicly the good news about Jesus, crucified and resurrected. Even in 2 Tim. 4:2, where Paul uses the strongest language to charge Timothy to preach the word, should be seen in the light of 2 Tim. 4:5, which highlights Timothy’s ministry as an evangelist (*euangelistou*). While some have tended to view Timothy as a pastor (e.g., 1 and 2 Timothy are called “pastoral epistles”), it can be argued that the pastoral functions Timothy fulfilled were temporary assignments undertaken in the larger context of his primary calling as an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

With this brief outline of the biblical terms for preaching/proclaiming, let us look at the ways these actions can be faithfully expressed in a DBS.

Proclamation and Preaching in a DBS

In a DBS, biblical preaching/proclaiming happens in at least three ways. First, every week as people study the Scripture together, they are asked to share the principles they are learning with at least one other person outside the group. The majority of people in our discovery groups are first-generation believers, so most of their friends and family are from another faith. Since most of the early chronological story sets focus on the themes of redemption and repentance, many of the participants are telling unbelievers about how God saved his chosen people, how there is a promised redeemer who will come to bear our sins, how Jesus has power to forgive sins, and so on. These initial proclamations of aspects of the good news can pave the way for fuller proclamations of the good news later, just as Jesus, the disciples, and even Old Testament texts are described as “preaching the gospel” with partial information before it was fully clarified after the resurrection (see Mark 1:15, Matt. 10:7, Gal. 3:8).

Second, DBS participants are constantly challenged to take the next step in communicating the full message of salvation to others by starting a DBS series with them. The idea is usually presented this way to the participants, "If the way of truth is so important for you, what about the rest of your family? What about your friends? Shouldn't they be studying these important things about salvation as well?" I recently had a conversation with a discovery group participant along these lines. He is wanting to marry a girl, but she is still a committed Hindu. In their local culture, the wife follows whatever religion the husband is. So he said he will just wait until they get married, and then she will be forced to *ikut suami* (follow her husband). I reminded him from the stories we have been studying that everyone who genuinely experienced the true way wanted to share it with those close to them. I told him that those who follow Jesus need to share with others, in essence telling him to start a group with his fiancée. He agreed and committed to start studying with her.

Third, leading the group can incorporate additional elements of proclamation. Some explanations of DBS give the impression of group leaders being only passive question askers. In our practice, the group leaders (and sometimes group members) may at times confront the group with a proclamation of the gospel or some aspect of the gospel present in the text. This can also happen weekly during accountability time as gospel themes are emphasized by the leader. Similar to the Galatian believers, growing disciples in a discovery group also need to be reminded through preaching of the simple gospel truth that righteousness comes from faith, not works (Galatians 3). In sum, preaching, or gospel proclamation, is happening inside and outside of the discovery groups in a variety of ways.

Thus we can confidently say the DBS process fulfills at least some, if not the majority, of the biblical thrust of preaching and proclaiming the Word to all people. It not only teaches participants to engage in this activity, it also holds them accountable on a weekly basis to this commitment. Because of a simple format that does not rely on trained

exposition from an educated person, the discovery group reproduces easily so that more *kerusso* and *euangelizomai* does not remain confined to a group of believers in a church building but can more readily spread and multiply in unreached areas. Now we will turn our attention to how the DBS model incorporates biblical teaching.

Teaching in the New Testament

Some popular-level presentations and trainings may create the impression that there should be no teaching in DBS. It is often said DBS leaders should facilitate and *not* teach, but instead let the Spirit of God directly teach groups through the Word. This sometimes leads to unfortunate misunderstandings that can be corrected by a careful understanding of the meaning of teaching in the New Testament.

The primary word used in the New Testament for teaching is *didasko*, “to teach, provide instruction,” a causative form of the verb *dao*, “to learn” (Swanson 1997). In other words, a key part of the meaning of *didasko* is “causing someone to learn.” *Didasko* is a common word that was widely used in the New Testament and in other writings of the day.

There are two aspects of teaching used in the New Testament. In one sense, teachers were a recognized group in the early church (e.g., in Antioch, Acts 13:1). God has specifically appointed people with the gift of teaching. In 1 Cor. 12:29, Paul rhetorically asks, “Are all teachers?” with the implied answer being “no.” These teachers were a group given to the church for equipping the saints and building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:10–12), with warnings and encouragement indicating they are distinct from other believers in gifting and role (James 3:1, 1 Tim. 5:17). The significance of the gift of teaching is seen in that it is the only gift that shows up in all of the gift lists from Ephesians 4, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and 1 Corinthians 12 (Walvoord, 1 Cor 12). Therefore, Scripture is abundantly clear in affirming the gift of teaching as important and necessary for local churches. However, we should also be careful again not to cast this gift into the mold of what teachers look and act like in our own isolated

cultural understanding. Teaching—like all the gifts—operates best when functioning contextually in the cultural setting.

However, there is a second aspect of teaching in the New Testament that opens it up as a responsibility for every believer. In Col. 3:16, we see that as the word of Christ dwells richly in each believer, it should lead to teaching (*didasko*) and admonishing one another. In 1 Tim. 3:2, the qualifications for an elder focus on character qualities except for one, the ability to teach (*didasko*). However, 1 Tim. 5:17 indicates that not every elder is equally engaged in the work of preaching and teaching, which suggests that not all elders have the gift of teaching. So it appears that even though not every elder/overseer will have the gift of teaching, he must be able to teach.

In 2 Tim. 2:2, Paul sets into motion a multiplying movement by commanding the entrusting of the message to other men who will be able to teach (*didasko*) others also. This multiplication is still happening today around the world and not just among those with the gift of teaching. In Titus 2:3, the older women of the local fellowship are to teach what is good (*kalo-didaskalous*); in doing so, they will train the younger women such that their obedient lifestyle adorns the Word of God.

Last but not least, Christ's own command to his disciples in Matthew 28:20 is to make disciples by teaching (*didaskontes*) them to obey everything Jesus commanded. The activity of teaching is connected to disciple making, and since the mandate for disciple making falls to every believer, the mandate for teaching does as well. Again, just as with the gift of teaching, this "everyman's teaching" may take on various styles and cultural forms (much like Jesus's teaching did), but it is a responsibility that no obedient follower of Christ should reject.

While teaching means causing someone to learn, teaching also overlaps with other modes of communication as well. In the New Testament, it certainly often included elements of proclamation (*kerusso*, *euangelizo*) and testifying (*martureo*) (MacArthur 1992, 8). As the early church experienced the ministry of prophets, apostles, teachers, and

pastors, it was understood that many of these gifts, offices, and functions could overlap from time to time (Utlely 1998). This is not to equate teaching with preaching but only to point out that teaching can and will employ various modes of communication in order to cause learning.

Jesus was the most skilled of teachers, and his example provides us with several insights for a biblical understanding of teaching. One truth is that teaching is not bound to one setting or approach. Jesus's methods were many and his classrooms diverse. He employed parables, current events, and contextual illustrations; he asked questions, proposed riddles, and liberally dispensed allegories and aphorisms to challenge his listeners to dig deeper for the truth (see Burbules *forthcoming*). He taught the disciples while walking, and he taught from boats. In the Sermon on the Mount, he gave a proper discourse and arguably the most famous sermon ever given. Jesus's example clearly shows us that biblical teaching occurs in a variety of models and places.

Another principle we learn from Jesus's teaching practice is a clear desired end of obedience and action (Matt. 7:24–27, John 8:31). Jesus was not looking for big crowds, nor hoping to be everyone's favorite, nor looking to market himself to the masses. His call to discipleship was a call to a complete realignment of identity with their Teacher. This teacher-disciple relationship was maintained by obeying the master's teachings. He did not want to teach a big crowd of people that were not committed to full obedience. It was the reason why he gave the "drink my blood" speech in John 6, why he told the rich, young ruler to sell everything he owned (Matt. 19:21), and why he often spoke in parables very few understood. "He focused instead on the few who believed Him when He said radical things. And through their radical obedience to Him, He turned the course of history in a new direction" (Platt 2010, 2). It is therefore not surprising that Jesus taught his disciples to do the same—to disciple by teaching to obey (Matt. 28:20). With this understanding of biblical teaching in mind, let us turn to the way teaching is expressed in a DBS.

Teaching in a DBS

Within the DBS process, teaching does occur, but it often does not look similar to, or occur at the same pace as, what educated people from a Christian background have come to expect. Simple questions are asked so participants can dig into the Scriptures for themselves. DBS leaders are trained to purposefully guide this discovery process, without always needing to say too much, as an intentional pedagogical method. If there are some main principles in the passage that the group is not picking up on, they are taught to prompt with a question like, “Why is this phrase in verse 12 important? What does that mean for us?”

This method of teaching is a way to invite the Holy Spirit to work in a group dynamic to lead them to great nuggets of truth. I have been a believer for 23 years, grew up in Sunday School, graduated from Bible college, and yet there are things that a group of men from a Hindu background point out in Scripture that I have never noticed before. It is a work of God that encourages and surprises me.

A common concern is that false teaching will surely arise within the DBS approach, especially since unbelievers are often taking part in the discussion. This is a valid concern and deserves further attention. The best way to address doctrinal concerns is one of the strong suits of DBS, a focus on Scripture. When believers in a movement are constantly pushed to the Word, the overall effect will be biblical orthodoxy. It may not thoroughly impact every single group, but it will be the overall characteristic of the movement (see Smith 2014). In discovery groups that are functioning properly, every comment and observation shared during the group is usually accompanied by which verse of the passage the observation came from. If something sounds like it is not really grounded in the passage, the leader will ask something like, “Where do you see that in the passage?” This helps the group to self-correct.

Ideally the leader of the discovery group also meets at least once a week with a coach or discipler who is developing him as a leader. This

adds an element of outside correction in addition to the self-correction that happens in the group.

Many discovery groups operate among first-generation believers. They are concerned with the basics of the faith and living those implications out in community, not with wrestling with complex theological doctrines. Theological error can and does occur, but this does not warrant the complete dismissal of an entire approach to teaching and/or discipleship. As far as I know, theological error has occurred throughout the world in local churches, seminaries, parachurch ministries, and church plants of the apostle Paul, but I hope this reality would not cause us to broadly condemn *all* local churches, seminaries, etc., as failed systems.

Furthermore, DBS is just one tool as part of a larger strategy. The larger, long-term vision in church-planting movements is to provide ongoing, reproducible leadership training that equips movement leaders with the biblical and theological skills to shepherd their movements toward mature faith and protect them from false teaching (Lafferty 2020).

The DBS leader is often holding back a lot of information. The leader may want to teach so much more from a specific passage but knows that the participants are not ready for that level of teaching. Not fully explaining a concept can be difficult for the leaders, especially for those with the gift of teaching and a high level of education. However, the leaders are encouraged by the fact that Jesus went through a similar process. In John 16:12, he told the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." The leader may not always answer the questions people have, instead challenging them to continue in the teaching until they learn the answer to the question. This can be extremely difficult for teachers, especially those accustomed to an explanatory model of teaching. Jesus also refused easy answers to people that had serious questions (e.g., Matt. 21:27, Mark 10:17–21, John 6:52–53). This practice filters who really wants to follow through from who is just interested in arguing or asking endless questions.

These examples highlight the relatively slow pace at which knowledge is transferred in a discovery group. Many in discovery groups are not coming from a biblical worldview, so the information is completely new and, in some cases, antithetical to their cultural understanding. A slower pace helps to make sure that understanding and obedience are keeping up with the level of knowledge being transferred. Learning the appropriateness of holding back knowledge will allow those you are teaching to develop at a rate consistent with their current maturity level (Hull 1984, 223). Knowledge without any attempt at obedience has the potential to bring pride or to “puff up.” At the same time, a lot of enthusiasm and “worked up” worship experiences without obedience to the commands of Christ also misses the point (Heitzig 2017, 222). This is not legalism or salvation by way of morality. In the DBS approach, there is delight in following the simple (and often slow) process of teaching people the commands of Christ not only as conceptual knowledge but also practical application in the context of life-on-life discipling relationships.

So even though it looks different than some are used to, “Great Commission teaching” occurs every week in a DBS. The question is asked every week, “If this story from the Holy Book is true, what can I do this week to apply/obey these principles/commands in my life?” Another question gets asked at the beginning of each group, “How did you do in sticking to your commitment to obey from last week?” We have found that disobedient people without a desire to obey do not enjoy getting asked if they were obedient on a weekly basis. They usually fizzle out of the group. However, this is not a legalistic or works-focused approach to teaching and discipleship. Grace abounds when participants fall short, and our groups seek to celebrate steps of ongoing sanctification and even failed attempts at obedience. People who struggle with disobedience but have a serious desire for transformation tend to welcome the continued accountability.

In many ways, it is very fun for gifted teachers to take part in a DBS group. It is an interesting challenge to use leading questions and simple

observations that allow the participants to discover truth. Also, because of the group process and accountability, teachers get to see every week if the content is sinking in and the truths are being obeyed. And is that not the greatest test of an effective teacher?

If we use a biblical understanding of teaching or “Great Commission teaching,” the DBS approach does fit as it brings about obedience to all Christ commanded. The one challenge is for people with the gift of teaching, especially for those who conceptualize teaching as lecturing/presenting. Within a larger network of multiplying discovery groups, there are opportunities to gather discovery group leaders for mentoring, troubleshooting, and resourcing. This would definitely be an opportunity for those with the gift of teaching to exercise their gifts among others who are guiding groups in the discovery process. I would also maintain that the gift of teaching can indeed be exercised within a discovery group by asking questions, helping to make connections, bringing ideas from previous studies back to mind, or making observations in the text. Jesus’s teaching methods included similar strategies.

It is interesting to note that discovery groups do not have to be synonymous with basic teaching or beginner knowledge. I have been in discovery groups where the discussions get theologically deep. One of the greatest seasons of my personal theological growth was being in a discovery group that was made up of mature believers, each one bringing something different to the table: tons of ministry experience, MDiv degrees, a wealth of parenting skills, and Bible college educations. All of these things combined with a sincere love for the Lord and for people. Their observations and reflections taught me many deep truths, yet no one ever stood up and lectured for thirty minutes.

Conclusion

Our ministry team has sensed God leading us to use the DBS process as part of our strategy to see disciples multiplied and churches planted in

our corner of Southeast Asia. I have argued that this approach, although somewhat different in style to traditional models, is very biblical. Teaching and preaching, understood biblically, are happening every week as we see groups of people, believers and sometimes not-yet-believers, sharing the truths about Jesus with one another and their community and also learning to obey practical truths from scripture. We constantly return to Jesus's words, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him . . . 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" (John 6:44-45, ESV). We are seeing people coming to Jesus, being drawn and taught by the Father. It is amazing to see how powerful the Word of God can be in the hands of a person who is earnestly seeking to know the truth. It is also very humbling that much of our knowledge and experience is not what saves people, but rather people responding to the Word and the saving work of the Holy Spirit. We are learning to embrace this humble stance as God continues to bring people to faith.

Questions for Discussion

- Do you agree with the author's exegesis and definition of biblical preaching and teaching? What aspects of biblical preaching and teaching are universally relevant, and which are culturally variable?
- Which model(s) of preaching and teaching have been most formative for you personally? Which model(s) do you believe are most missionally promising in your context? Why?
- Do you agree with the author that the DBS model faithfully expresses the full biblical meaning of preaching and teaching? What aspects of biblical preaching and teaching are universally relevant, and which are culturally variable?
- Compare this article with the article "Discipling Muslims Far as the Curse is Found" (by JF) in this issue of Seedbed. Are these two approaches divergent, or complementary? How so?

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Discipling Muslims “Far as the Curse is Found”

By J.F.

J.F., an American, moved as a tentmaker to one of the Gulf states of the Arabian Peninsula over fifteen years ago with his wife and four children. The slow responsiveness of nationals led to diverse avenues and partnerships toward their aim of church planting among locals. Previous Arabic study in Jordan and seven years of immersive diaspora ministry in an immigrant Arab Muslim community in the US provided experience in evangelism and discipleship among local and expat Arab Muslims.

Introduction: The Problem

Habib’s conversion from Islam had all the indications of a work of God! After a lifetime passing through fundamentalist Islam, Sufism, an Islamic cult, and secular hedonism—with antagonistic resistance to anything Christian throughout—God had opened his eyes. Habib was now pursuing Christ. He walked up to me on his first visit to our international church in Arabia and asked to be baptized. Yet even after a decade of discipleship through study, prayer, counsel, and friendship, he was now “stuck.”

He was depressed and unmotivated, and he was experiencing significant tension in his marriage. An abundance of exasperating circumstances made the presence of stress reasonable, but his spiritual depression and complaint against God went deeper. Counsel and wisdom from Scripture didn’t “work.” After years of walking with Habib through trials, I knew he would likely come out of it, but what was my role as a discipler in the meantime? Was my only choice to wait and pray, or could I be a more effective catalyst for change?

God has used my relationship with Habib and other Arab believers from a Muslim background (BMBs) like him to develop my understanding of my role in discipleship. My objective in this article is to briefly review our commission to make disciples, describe the layers of obstacles we must overcome, and suggest antidotes we can employ enabling us to be a catalyst for change.¹ Along the way you'll get a picture of how I helped Habib.²

Commissioned to Make Disciples

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20, NIV).

The Great Commission is our commission. While God likely used the verb *go* to move you abroad, the main command and verb is *make disciples*. In Greek, the other verbs are participles—going, baptizing, teaching—still with the force of command. The command here to make disciples is not synonymous with the way the term *discipleship* is used today, as a growth program for believers. In the Bible, disciples are followers and learners of the way of Christ and his gospel. In this passage, making disciples includes both evangelizing and helping Christians mature.

In Arabia, where we live, there are many obstacles to becoming a disciple: cultural, historical, social, legal, and certainly religious. Muslims are raised to believe that they already have a path to God. What's more, their religion teaches them about Jesus and his message in a way that makes the gospel, as we understand it, false to them.

1 A functioning body of Christ in the life of the disciple is, by God's design, an effective multiplier to these antidotes.

2 This “helping” has been two-way. God significantly used Habib and the other BMBs mentioned herein to draw attention to my weaknesses and God's manifold wisdom and grace.

Evangelism in our context rarely occurs as the linear presentation of a message from A to Z. We seek to steer conversations to spiritual topics and speak (or read) truth from Scripture in a comprehensible form. Evangelism looks less like the preaching of Acts and more like Jesus' manner of storytelling and asking questions (as we read in the Gospels).

Baptizing Muslims who have come to Christ has its complications and requires discernment. Who should do it? Where? In front of whom? When? Some ask for baptism even before they are believers. Others are held back by fears even after years of walking with the Lord and in-depth study on the topic.

In this article, I will focus on the challenges we face with BMBs in obeying the last part of the Commission: teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Teaching Them to Obey

This would be very easy if it merely meant to teach the commands. In fact, many BMBs begin walking in their new faith asking to be taught the Christian version to their Five Pillars (creed, prayer, fasting, alms, and pilgrimage) and our equivalent of other restrictions of Islamic law. What could be easier!? Why not just provide the new believer a list of commands?

First, Jesus commands more. He does not command *knowledge*; he commands *obedience*. Making disciples must go beyond getting people saved and giving *knowledge* of doctrinal truth and ethics, though it certainly involves that. We must teach them to *obey*. This is more than a class, course, program, or book—helpful though these things may be. And second, a Muslim's understanding of obedience is more like that of the Pharisees, which Jesus opposed vociferously. "What times must I pray? What words do I recite? How do I make myself clean to pray? How much do I give? What days must I fast?" The New Testament does not prescribe answers to give BMBs! This is puzzling to them, and we face the task of

reshaping their understanding from rule keeping to life in the Spirit and obedience from the heart.

This is where it gets messy. (Former teammate RB wrote an unpublished article highlighting the immense challenges faced after initial entrance to the kingdom. He titled it, “Hallelujah, New believer! Help, New Disciple!”) For many of us, our knowledge of Jesus’ teaching far exceeds our practice of what he commands. On the one hand, being born again and receiving the Spirit means we are *new*. In Christ, we are now dead to sin and the old man (the flesh). However, that *old* man still has tremendous influence through culture, traditions, habits, old beliefs, and thought patterns.

The joy of *new* life is only the start of this journey. We must keep going in discipleship, and we must go far. But how far must we go?

Far as the Curse Is Found

While serving as an elder in a diverse international church in Arabia, I taught adult discipleship classes on finances, marriage, parenting, and other topics. I often referred to books which had been very helpful to me, but from my context and experience as an American. While believers from other contexts such as Asia, Africa, or Latin America appreciated the teaching, it became apparent that their challenges in these areas were different. My teaching wasn’t going far enough.

Isaac Watts’s famous hymn “Joy to the World” is traditionally sung at Christmas (though it is really about Christ’s return). This verse gave me a new vision for teaching disciples:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

By *curse*, Watts is referring to the destructive aspects of Adam's sin, which we all inherit and walk in. The curse goes far—not only *geographically* to the ends of the earth and all nations, but also very far in our lives. Ott, Strauss, and Tennant write, “The gospel has not taken hold in a culture until it transforms a culture’s inner beliefs, values, feelings and worldview” (2010, 445).

We want to see the blessings of the gospel go *that far* in the life of BMBs—beyond just “looking good” at church. We want to see transformation that flows from the heart, impacting every sphere of influence of the believer, toward the fulfillment of “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

Paul described *his* vision this way in Colossians: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that *we may present everyone mature in Christ*. For this I *toil, struggling* with all his *energy* that he powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:28–29, ESV, emphasis mine).

“Mature in Christ” is the objective of Paul’s (and our) teaching. Why isn’t simply *giving* the command enough? Why does helping others toward maturity require so much toil, struggle, and energy from us?

One reason is that maturity requires *growth*. Think how messy it is to raise children. When infants, children are *literally* messy. As they get older, the challenges change from outward behavioral conformity to heart problems in full bloom. Helping BMBs grow to maturity is messy because in the process of transformation, God will expose many layers of the extent of the “curse” in their lives. As you will see, a simplistic approach is not likely to be the necessary catalyst for change.

Seven Layers of the Curse

We will now walk through seven aspects of sin’s curse. I will explain how we teach BMBs to obey everything Jesus commanded. The layers

of the curse can be unpacked in terms of condemnation, ignorance, confusion, stumbling, hopelessness, blindness, and bondage. Each layer has a particular antidote which we must apply, stated in parentheses (summarized in the table at the end of the article).

1) Condemnation (Antidote: Redemption)

Islam is a very sophisticated and self-contained religious system that addresses not only worship but every aspect of one's life and society. Paul says that even religion can compound the curse: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them' " (Gal. 3:10, ESV).

Despite their religious system, Muslims live afraid of God without a certain hope of whether Allah will have mercy on them. They need redemption from the curse—both from Adam and from their failure to keep God's law and honor him. At the most fundamental level the gospel addresses the curse of condemnation from sin and shame through redemption and reconciliation:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:13–14, ESV)

These very verses became Isaac Watts's inspiration for the line, "to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found."

When a Muslim believes, he experiences redemption, is reconciled to God, and can receive all the blessings of the gospel, through the Spirit. However, the BMB does not automatically appropriate these blessings and start walking in obedience! Condemnation is not the only impact of the curse—there are others, including ignorance.

2) Ignorance (Antidote: Teaching the Commands)

Some Muslims come to Christ thinking, “Woo-hoo! Works couldn’t save me, so now works aren’t required!” We must teach the believer, free from condemnation in Christ, how to walk in the Spirit. This is not some new, “whatever-you-feel-like” lifestyle. Scripture gives a shape for the life of the disciple which includes an ethical and moral dimension, without becoming moralism or a new law!

Indeed, a first step is to teach *what* to obey. Where do we start? It depends on the believer’s context. Personally, I don’t start with “Go share your faith.” Hany told me that on his first visit back to his parents in his homeland, he planned to set down his suitcase, take his father out for coffee, and share his faith. I told him, “No way!” I know that sounds strange—perhaps even unbiblical, or at least counter to many methodologies—for a missionary to tell a new believer not to share his new faith! My priority is not to promote fear but honor. I *dishonored* my father in my preaching to him as a new believer. I was more obnoxious than I was faithful to Christ and reaped from my zeal for the rest of his life. Later wisdom and love did not make up for my missteps. I have been so impressed at the courage of many BMBs who are ready to suffer for their faith, but in Hany’s particular context, I was certain that his bold plan was not actually in the interest of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 9:23), but instead reflected his impetuous nature.

Living in a very relational society, I start with the relational commands. My guidance was as follows: “Go home and obey God’s commands to you as a son. Honor your father and mother. Love them. Serve them. Pour out the respect. Live in such a way that they cannot deny you have become the best son of any in their family or neighborhood.” Is the new believer a husband? Wife? Child? Parent? Master? Employee? Subject? Ruler? The Bible describes priorities for these roles (Eph. 5:22–6:8, Rom. 13:1–7), in addition to general teaching on love. Let others see your good works in that role, and you will shine brightly in a dark world. *Then* speak.

Note that the command is not “teach them,” as if you can teach a class, read a book, and consider it *done*. The verb is *teaching*. It is ongoing and involves repetition and reminders. We are lifelong learners, often learning the same lesson over and over.

3) Confusion (Antidote: Modeling and Example)

Christian commands can be puzzling. Kingdom values turn those of most cultures upside down. Biblical teaching is unimaginable. Honest believers may say, “I don’t get it.” They have never seen it! They have no idea what the kingdom might *look* like in their culture. Beyond the command, disciples need *example*. This is one reason God gives qualification standards for elders, so they can show us how to walk with Christ (1 Tim. 3:1–7, Titus 1:5–9). Paul said, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Khalid was in a difficult marriage. It was his second one. He didn’t have a good track record. We spent a lot of time talking about how to love his wife. She was a *difficult* woman. He had never seen a godly husband-wife relationship until he became a follower of Christ and began to observe ours and those of other believers. I couldn’t just *tell* him what to do. To help him communicate in a more godly way, I helped him understand the biblical shape of godly communication by studying Proverbs (addressing ignorance). More than that, I modeled it in communication with him and with his wife, intentionally having him spend time in our home to see how I related to my wife. I also transparently shared about my own shortcomings in my marriage.

BMBs have said: “*Show* us how to do the Christian family, and we’ll figure out how to do the church.” Are you giving disciples the opportunity to see how you obey God?

4) Stumbling in Sin and Folly (Antidote: Spiritual Correction)

Even with teaching and modeling, disciples stumble in sin and folly. This can be puzzling, especially to them! The Bible gives a radical description of the believer’s conversion:

- Death to life (John 5:24)
- Darkness to light (Acts 26:18)
- The kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13, Eph. 6:12)
- Enemies of God to adopted sons (Rom. 5:10, 8:15)

How is it that with all this, and the Holy Spirit living in us, that spiritual growth is so messy? Spiritual growth is hindered by the curse. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of condemnation, and salvation begins transformation. Only some aspects are instant, while most are progressive, occurring bit by bit over the course of our lives, and will not be complete until the consummation of all things in Christ (Romans 8).

Progressive sanctification sometimes involves regress due to sin. We must not be surprised when disciples sin. When Walid met a pretty, young BMB sister, he was sure she was God's gift. The rest of us were very wary as she showed few signs of maturity in the faith. He stopped pursuing counsel and announced an engagement party, which we and the church opposed. Should we attend? My wife and I knew that if we did not attend, we would not be able to continue to speak truth into their lives. We retained a voice into their tensions and conflicts. When Walid finally broke up with—let's just call her Babylon—the reality was worse than we could have imagined. His actions and deception had been grievous. How should I respond?

Arab society is controlled by shame, leading many to hide or cover their behavior and not come into the light. What kind of response would your disciple expect from you?

When sins among Christians catch the world's attention, shame is unavoidable, appropriate, and good. A believer's realization that they have dishonored God becomes an opportunity to ask, "Are my allegiances really with Jesus?" If so, we find God is quick to forgive, though the sting of shame before the world will linger. Ed Welch writes, "*He is the God who turns toward you* and keeps coming toward you until he touches you and makes you clean" (2012, 267, emphasis mine).

Walking with believers toward maturity often requires patience when they stumble, and discernment to be—as Paul says in Galatians 6:1—*spiritual*, to restore them. Rebuke or reproof is sometimes necessary, but we must also be *ready with an extended hand* to help the disciple up and help him walk again.

5) Hopelessness (Antidote: Lament and Comfort)

No matter how mature we are, trying circumstances often make us ask, “Is God really good?” God’s curse of the ground and his judgment after the fall touch all aspects of our lives: pain in childbirth, futility in work, natural disasters, sickness, and death.

Karim came to my home after experiencing significant injustice from his former employer and asked if he was possibly another Job. It is not always pleasant to be around someone who is suffering. Despite his complaints, I tried to spend time with him because I want to see discipleship go “far as the curse is found” into his sufferings. I didn’t want to be like Job’s friends, but I also knew I couldn’t stay silent. I brought Karim to the Psalms to observe biblical lament when it seems that God is absent, and we prayed for God to help. We found comfort in the cross with our God who suffers with us. Other dear friends have also despaired due to trials and spoke of suicidal ideation. Here was a signature of the curse: death. The antidote was comfort and lament as paths toward hope in the face of trials.

Our example is Paul who returned to cities he had preached in, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22, ESV).

You cannot rebuke someone into hope. Going as far as the curse is found requires facing the hopelessness that believers face and patiently walking with them back to trust the Father again. Don’t run from others in their pain. They need you to help them lament and hold fast to God’s unfailing love.

6) Blindness and Conformity to the World (Antidote: Putting Kingdom before Culture)

In Colossians, Paul writes to believers: “See to it that no one takes you *captive* by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human *tradition*, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8, ESV, emphasis mine).

New believers are often captive to many lies which they allow to govern their thinking far more than the things they are learning, studying, or even memorizing from the Bible. A disciple is a learner, and making disciples involves lots of *unlearning*. We cannot merely put new truth over the old lies. The old will still manifest its presence, even through the layer of sound doctrine.

The old self acts like an anchor preventing movement toward maturity. It possesses tremendous inertia through the disciple’s culture, tradition, and religion. Peter wrote how we have been ransomed from “the futile ways inherited from [our] forefathers” (1 Pet. 1:18). Our family of origin and the collective culture are both very influential on our beliefs, values, and behaviors. While there are many positive things we have gained from our forefathers, not all are positive. Traditional Arab Muslim culture includes conflict and revenge, harshness in the home (even wife-beating), a very fluid understanding of honesty, and a preoccupation for the honor of man over holiness and the honor of God.

Unfortunately, we are often *blind* to the patterns of behavior we have inherited from our forefathers through our culture. Culture is a powerful mechanism for instilling behavior and beliefs. Paul generalized about the culture of Crete to Titus: “One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:12–13). Paul was describing the prevailing cultural stereotype of the very men from which Titus was commissioned to choose elders for the churches. (And you think *your* disciples are challenging!)

It is easy to talk about *other* cultures and *their* sins. Friends who are missionaries in Cuba told us stories of the prevalence of stealing there, even by people in the church! ("After all, in communist society, you *all* own *everything*!") We might think, "Thank God *we're* not like the Arabs, Cretans, or Cubans!" But what about my culture? What would Paul say about American culture? Would he commend our rugged individualism? Our constant need for praise and affirmation? Like every culture, Americans have many common traits inherited from our forefathers which hinder our obedience to Jesus's commands.

Missiologist Paul Hiebert writes, "Conversion may include a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the world-view is not transformed, in the long run, the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christo-paganism" (2008, 11). The gospel must challenge and transform our beliefs, values, behavior, and worldview until they conform to the will of God and his kingdom.

Our goal is not to be cultural critics but to help the blind see and display the new values of the kingdom of God from the inside out. How far has the curse reached to you through your *own* culture in ways you don't even recognize? Ask people from other cultures who know you to describe what they see in you, to reveal your blind spots. Do you obey the traditions of men and futile ways inherited from your forefathers or everything Jesus commanded?

7) Bondage (Antidote: Deliverance from False Beliefs and Unclean Spirits)

False beliefs come not only from religion but also from family, tradition, culture, and trauma. They make us captive to the curse. They obstruct the flow of the blessings of the gospel into our lives.

Muslims grow up essentially believing that they can never know if Allah accepts them. In Jesus Christ, God the Father fully accepts them and gives his Spirit as evidence. This is liberating truth, but the new believer

often takes months or years to internalize this and let God's acceptance through grace control their thinking and feeling.

Paul describes the antidote to this captivity in 2 Corinthians: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4–5, ESV). False beliefs about God, his world, and our identity are like a fortress in our mind, impeding the Bible's teaching and promises from penetrating our lives. The outright lies of a false religion are obvious and can be more easily renounced. More threatening are false beliefs which we cover with true doctrines that we can recite from memory. Only superficially covered, these false beliefs are operating in the background and functionally govern how we view God, self, and others.

When lies govern our thinking, they lead to all sorts of mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational distortions. It is frustrating when what we profess with our lips doesn't show up in our lives! We need to become aware of these strongholds of thought so we can take them captive and be free to obey Christ. Being transformed by the renewing of our minds involves more than reading books and memorizing Scripture. Truth must be intentionally and aggressively applied to the lies. Rob Reimer states, "You must hold on to the truth, precisely at the moment that the lie is vying for position in your heart and in your soul and in your behaviors" (2016, 41).

The evidence of such a false belief or lie at work in a disciple may be depression, acts of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21), or addictive behaviors. The aforementioned antidotes don't bring progress. Repeating the commands, reproving more loudly, and the disciple's trying harder all fall flat before such bondage. There are so many factors involved in gaining freedom from lies and false beliefs, including teaching, prayer, a supportive church community, counsel, grieving past sorrows and disappointments, healing from wounds and abuse, and forgiveness for

defiling bitterness. When you come up against this callous layer, get the appropriate help you need to help the disciple.

To help Habib with the issues I mentioned in the introduction, I drew a tree tracing the many influences. The roots included Arab culture and Islam. In Islam, he concluded there was no such thing as love, and therefore there could be no love in his first marriage. Islam considers human nature to be good, and parenting in Arab culture is often through manipulative indulgence or threats. The trunk included his sin and divorce. Years later as a believer, he learned biblical teaching on parenting and felt very guilty for his neglect of his children. When his eldest came to live with him and his Christian wife, the young adult's behavior was very immature and disrespectful of the stepmother.

Habib's wife hid some of this to honor him, which led to bitterness in her, and all the while he was very indulgent to make up for former absence (the branches). Their witness did not lead to the child's conversion, so he felt like an utter failure, believing his absence contributed to all of the child's shortcomings (the twigs). In his pain, he was numb and could not be empathetic to his wife's wounds (the fruit). Over time, we reviewed commands (1 Pet. 3:7), repentance (divorce), and lament (absence); we also deconstructed the distortions of culture, lies from his religion, and the controlling belief that he caused all his child's immaturity and selfishness and therefore had to indulge it, even at the expense of his wife. God confirmed this through other sources and has brought comfort, healing, reconciliation, and wise boundaries.

Bondage, this last layer of the curse, requires deliverance. Jesus came to set us free from the curse. While our bondage is often to lies, it can also be more directly demonic through unclean spirits. Although we don't go looking for these unclean spirits, it is our western scientific worldview—more than the testimony of Scripture—which causes us to dismiss/discount demonic influence. Although I am gaining more exposure, the topic of demonic deliverance is better addressed by those with more experience (search *Seedbed* archives).

Conclusion

Go, make disciples, far as the curse is found, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. Are you appropriating God’s means to experience the blessings of the gospel, going “far as the curse is found” in your own life and the life of those you disciple? Push back against the curse, toward maturity.

When you are teaching believers the truth and see them stuck, when they are not walking in the blessings which flow from the gospel, consider these various layers of the curse and discern where you need to go.

Impact of the curse	Blessing of the gospel	Disciple’s response
<i>When a disciple experiences:</i>	<i>We offer:</i>	<i>We invite the disciple to:</i>
Condemnation	Redemption	Believe
Ignorance	Teaching the commands	Learn
Confusion	Modeling and example	Follow
Stumbling in sin and folly	Correction that is spiritual	Repent
Hopelessness	Comfort	Lament
Blindness, conformity to world	Kingdom before culture	Adopt biblical worldview
Bondage to lies & unclean spirits	Deliverance	Engage in warfare: mental, emotional, spiritual

Table 1. Addressing Aspects of the Curse in the Lives of Disciples.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

May he do so in Arabia, or in whatever field you serve.

Discussion Questions

- What is the author's proposed approach for teaching BMBs to obey everything Jesus commanded? How is this approach informed by Scripture, and how is it informed by his experience discipling BMBs?
- What do you think of the author's framework of seven layers of sin's curse, along with seven corresponding "antidotes" from the gospel (administered by the discipler)? Is this a helpful way of thinking about discipleship, both our own and that of those you are engaging in your context?
- What are some areas where the impact of sin's curse is most evident in the place and among the people whom you serve? In your culture(s) of origin? In your own life?
- Compare and contrast the discipleship approach in this article with that represented in "Proclamational DBS: Biblical Preaching and Teaching in Discovery Bible Studies" in this issue of *Seedbed*. What is the role of the discipler/church-planter? What are the opportunities of each approach, and what are the limits? What can the two approaches learn from one another?

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Fruitful Practices for Language Learning: A Quantitative Study of Language Learning and Effective Ministry in the Arabian Peninsula

By Gene Daniels, M. James, C.J. Young and Heather Simons

Gene Daniels (pseudonym) is the director of Fruitful Practice Research. He was a church planter in Central Asia for over ten years, and has been involved in mission research since 2003. He has a doctorate in religious studies from the University of South Africa. He is an associate editor for Seedbed.

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

C.J. Young (pseudonym) is a teacher in higher education and has been serving in the AP for more than ten years.

Heather Simons (pseudonym) has been serving in the AP for eight years. She is a global professional and language learner, who is passionate about seeing people well equipped for kingdom work in the region.

Introduction

For more than fifteen years, the Fruitful Practice Research team has been studying Christian workers in the Muslim world, with the goal of understanding how to be more effective (Allen et al. 2009; Daniels and Allen 2011). In 2020, research was conducted by quantitative survey with various missionaries in the Arabian Peninsula (AP) concerning their experience with learning Arabic.

The missionary context of the AP includes the role of global professionals (GPs). In recent years, the cities of the AP have experienced a massive influx of people who could be defined as “employees who are able to easily transition from company to company, location to location, and nation to nation.” GPs are highly sought-after because they possess skills that span the support of government operations, business efficiency, quality healthcare, and academic excellence. As a result, many mission sending agencies now actively recruit GPs to “*take your profession to the unreached*” and enter countries traditionally closed to missionaries.

Though it is an easier means to achieve field residency, the path to effective ministry for GPs is often quite different from those following the traditional missionary model. Such missionaries spend years raising support funds, learning the culture, and acquiring the heart language of a people (Brown and McVay 2018; James 2020).

The influx of global professionals has occurred at a time when English is gaining an increasingly high global status, including among many unreached people groups (Gradin 1998). More specifically, English has become the lingua franca of the AP with international flight control, banking, engineering, and healthcare dialogs all conducted in English.

In 2018, SIL International acknowledged that since the majority of the world speaks more than one language, and many individuals, families and communities make extensive use of different languages for different functions, it becomes problematic to assume that one language alone will always and uniquely define and meet the communication needs of a given community (Quakenbush 2018).

While GPs are mobile and able to transition quickly to new employment and residency, they often lack the time and resources necessary for language and culture study, bedrocks of the traditional missionary approach (James 2020). Furthermore, some have pointed out that language learning is not everyone’s forte, and giftedness for cross-cultural ministry is much more than a high language aptitude (Gradin 1998).

The use of English may indeed be a blessing for widely sharing the gospel in the AP, but it has potential for harm (Switz and Lessard-Clouston 2015). It is often difficult to separate cultural values from the language in which the gospel is communicated. Neglecting the local heart language may also mean neglecting an appreciation of the national culture and preventing a deeper connection and comprehension of felt needs because language influences and defines the person. Furthermore, by communicating in the lingua franca, the gospel message is at risk of giving the aroma of colonialism, condescension, and cultural superiority. The unintentional result may be racism (Harries 2017), cultural conversions, and the establishment of irrelevant, nonindigenous fellowships.

Of course, the situation above is not completely unique to workers in the Arabian Peninsula. In many places, workers are grappling with the ministry implications of the global trend towards the professional use of English. While it is true that this language trend is markedly more pronounced in the AP, the lessons gained there have application to many other situations where global professionals are part of the mission force.

Also, this missiological tension over language use is not exclusively a modern issue. The Roman Empire was dominated by Greek and Latin. Yet there were many regional languages: Aramaic, Armenian, Celtic, Coptic, Etruscan, Galatian, Gaulish, Hebrew, Iberian, Illyrian, Nabatean, Neo-Punic, Syriac, Thracian, and more (Millar 2006; MacMullen 1966). To support cross-cultural commerce and governance, the lingua franca of the eastern Roman Empire became *Koine Greek*, which is the language of the New Testament. In other words, the lingua franca of the eastern Roman Empire played a huge role in the spread of the good news of the work of Jesus Christ. What might this say today particularly in places like the AP with an English lingua franca?

In consideration of this context, a survey was conducted in order to better understand the current realities of learning Arabic and its relationship to effective ministry in the AP. The specific research questions were:

1. What Arabic proficiency is necessary for effective church planting (CP) among AP locals?
2. What are the best approaches of language acquisition in the AP?
3. To what degree do relevant stakeholders value language acquisition?

Survey Demographics

The survey was fully completed by 184 respondents, with 13 more partially completing the questions. Responses from all 197 participants were included in the following analysis. The basic demographics were as follows:

- Participant gender was almost exactly balanced at 50/50
- Approximately 78% were married.
- Approximately 79% have served in the AP for 4 or more years.
- Respondents were serving in six named countries, with the majority (83%) in the three largest.

Major Findings

In 1994, all known global professionals ministering in the AP, outside the established Christian churches and hospitals, met together in a conference of about twenty people. Less than 10 years later, several sending agencies held their own conferences which convened about fifty people each. While this represented a significant increase in the number of workers, those actually involved in national discipleship were few. Praise God that this 2020 survey shows more than 35% of the respondents were involved in local discipleship or the training of local church leaders! Perhaps the first finding should simply state that God is expanding his kingdom in the AP.

Part 1: Language Proficiency and Ministry

The focus of the Fruitful Practice Research project has to do with understanding what behaviors help workers to be effective in their

ministry to Muslims. Thus, one of the core concerns of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between language proficiency and ministry effectiveness in the AP.

I. Respondent Value of Arabic Language Study

Almost 95% of participants reported doing intentional Arabic study at some point. Of these, 87% of the respondents indicated that Arabic language study was *important* or *very important* as seen in Figure 1.

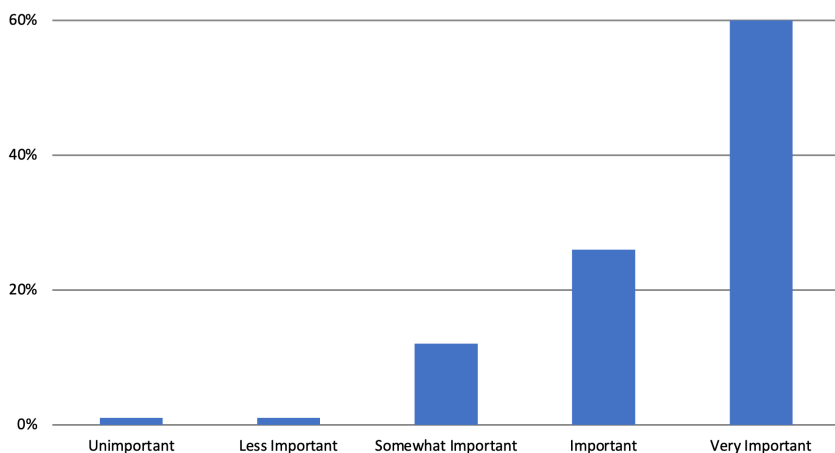


Fig. 1. Importance of Arabic study for ministry (N = 183).

Despite the widespread use of English in the region, the majority of those who are actually on the ground and doing ministry still believe that speaking the heart language is very important for ministry.

Respondents self-assessed their level of language proficiency by choosing one of four increasing levels, *Basic Greetings*, *Limited Conversation*, *1-on-1 Conversational*, and *Group Conversational*. Figure 2 displays the composition of each proficiency group by percentage of valued Arabic language study.

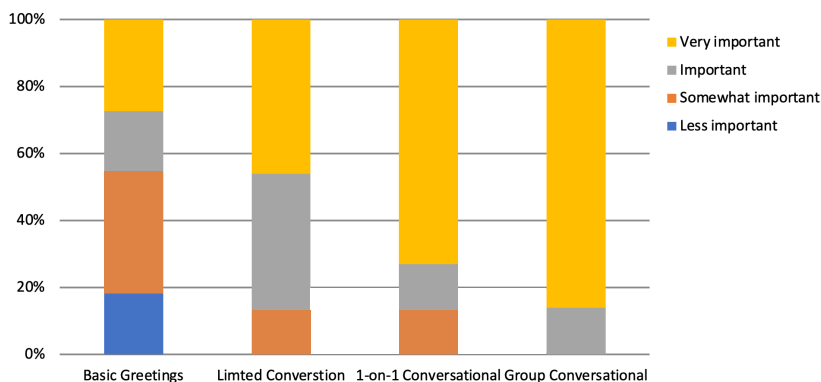


Fig. 2. Value of Arabic study per proficiency group.

As might be expected, the higher the proficiency, the higher the value those workers placed on Arabic study. Therefore, the language attainment of a worker is probably, in some way, related to the importance placed on intentional study. However, it is not a direct correlation as seen in the respondents who indicated a *basic greetings* proficiency yet also placed high value on Arabic study. Therefore, valuing intentional language study is important, but not sufficient by itself to obtain higher proficiency. Therefore, other contributing factors were explored.

II. Respondent Arabic Proficiency

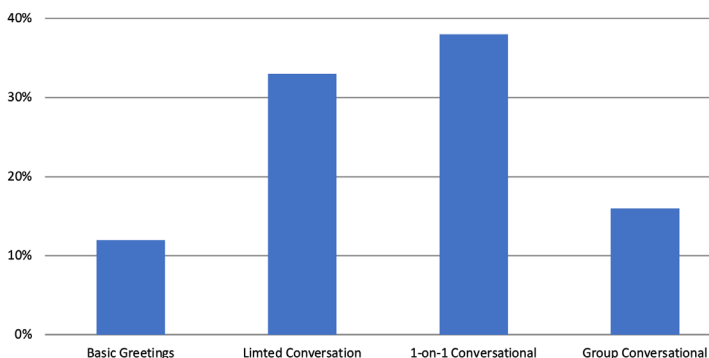


Fig. 3. Respondent Arabic proficiency (N = 184).

Of all the respondents, as represented in Figure 3, over half (67%)

indicated they can communicate well in either an individual or group setting. However, there are many variables that affect the level of a worker's language attainment. One that we felt was critically important was the number of years they were resident in the AP. This combination of data is displayed together in Figure 4.

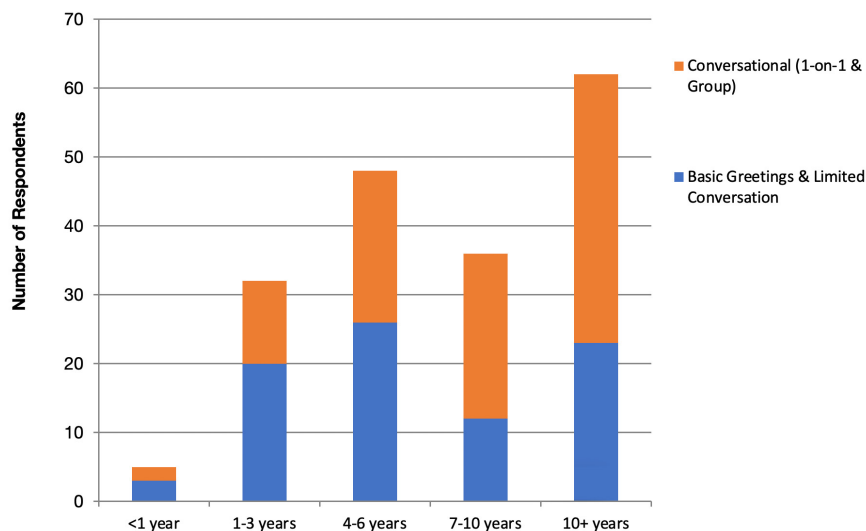


Fig. 4. Proficiency verses years of residency (N=183).

As would be expected, respondents residing in the AP four years or more comprised the vast majority of those indicating strong conversational skills. However, a significant number of workers with more than ten years of residency (37%) indicated they had no more than limited conversational skills.

Perhaps this has to do with changing patterns of ministry in the AP. Only within the past 10 years has it become necessary for discipleship and leadership training of more than a few people. When these opportunities were few, workers may have felt less of a need for stronger Arabic skills.

It was slightly surprising that a significant percentage of respondents with three years or less on the field (38%) indicated they had strong conversational skills. Some of these missionaries added comments about the availability of study and/or their personal experience *prior* to arrival in the AP.

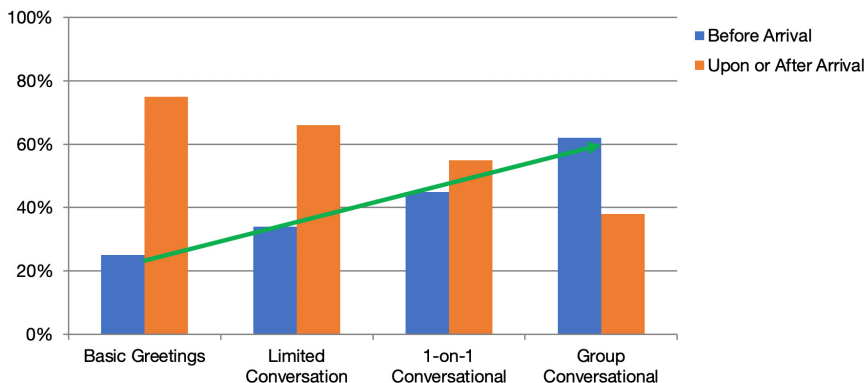


Fig. 5. Proficiency per beginning Arabic studies

We observed a clear association between beginning Arabic studies before arrival and strong conversational skills. The green trend illustrates that the stronger a participant's language skills, the more likely they were to have begun Arabic studies prior to arrival.¹ However, we recognize that we did not ask respondents to define the *type* of Arabic study they had done before arrival. However, several participants used the "open comments" sections of the survey to indicate the type of study. These responses included—but were not limited to—online tutors, language programs outside of the AP, tertiary level Arabic studies, and transfer from an Arabic speaking country outside of the AP.

III. Respondent Ministry Experience

In order to understand the impact of language skills on ministry, the participants' engagement with AP nationals in terms of depth of friendship, frequency of spiritual conversations, and discipling experience were assessed. As with Arabic proficiency, the participants self-assessed and responded accordingly to rate the depth of their closest friendships on 5-point Likert scale.

1 It should be noted that there were only 16 total respondents in the "Basic Greetings" category, thus making it difficult to make strong conclusions for that category.

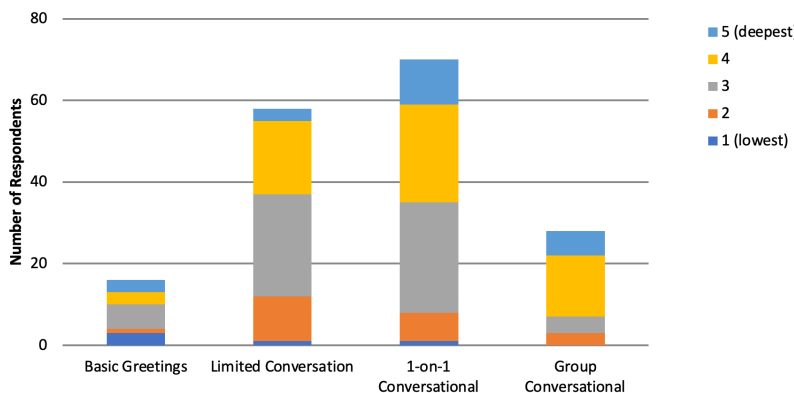


Fig. 7. Depth of friendship per proficiency (N=172).

The frequency of spiritual conversations was scored on a similar scale and indicated the likelihood of a religious discussion during a meeting.

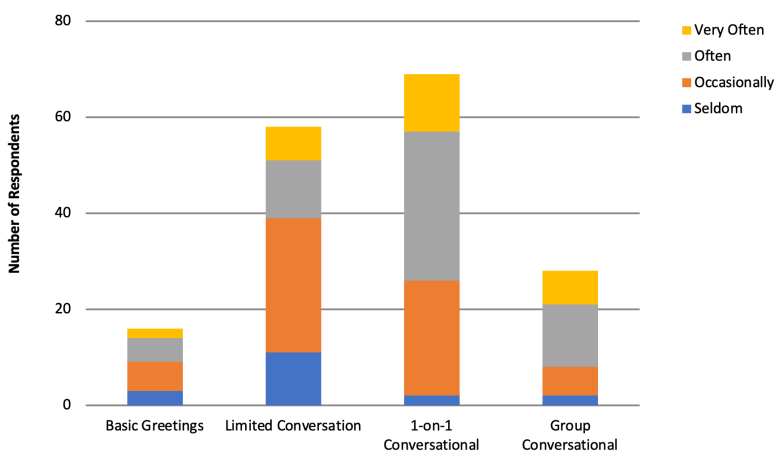


Fig. 8. Frequency of spiritual conversations per proficiency (N=171).

Figures 7 and 8 display a similar picture; those with a strong Arabic proficiency generally have deeper local friendships and have more frequent spiritual conversations. It would seem that although many local Arabs *can* speak English, they *prefer* Arabic for deeper and more personal kinds of communication. One survey participant remarked

about how a national seeker expressed joy in meeting a worker who spoke Arabic, as he was frustrated with the use of Google Translate to explain Christianity.

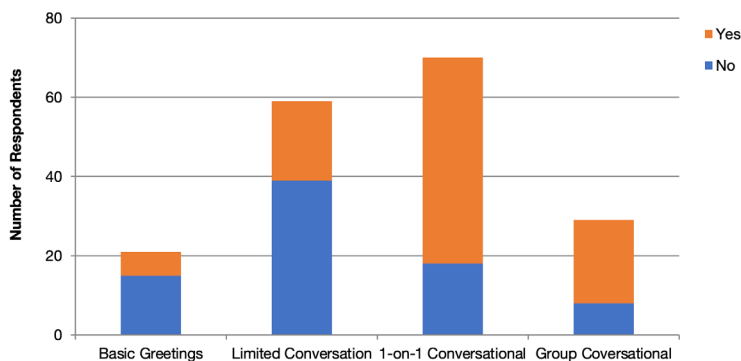


Fig. 9. Involved in a discipling relationship per proficiency (N=179)

Considering discipleship experience, a similar pattern emerged. Those with basic greetings and limited conversation were twice as likely to not have experience in discipling a national believer, whereas those with a higher level of proficiency did. In fact, those higher Arabic language abilities were almost *three times* more likely to have experience in discipling a national believer. In summary, these two graphs show us that Arabic proficiency is clearly correlated with improved opportunities for a discipling ministry.

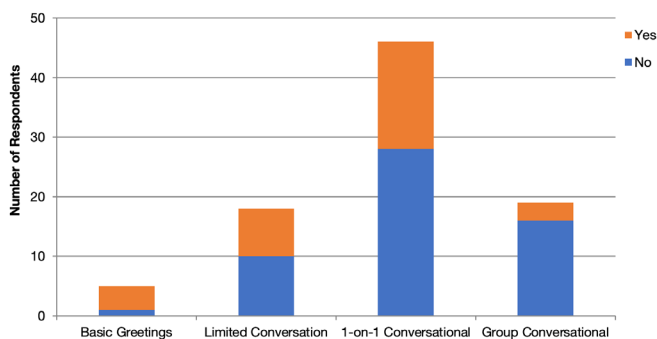


Fig. 10. Those who are with a team and are involved in discipling a local Arabic speaker (N=88)

Among those with discipling experience, respondents were requested to indicate whether the discipling generally took place individually or in a team setting. Over 80% of those with the highest language skills indicated that they included a teammate when discipling. This was significantly more than any of the other groups and reflects one of our findings in our primary research: “Fruitful teams have at least one person with high language proficiency in the heart language” (Allen et al. 2009).²

However, the realities of discipling are not best described with numbers and graphs. Therefore, it was helpful that a number of respondents included comments that dealt directly with the issue of discipleship, such as the following:

- *I think it is easy to speak English with people here and some local people seem to prefer to speak in English with me. However, I find that if I carry on in English, some deeper issues will go over their heads. If I transition to Arabic, there is more engagement on their side and the conversation can carry on more easily, specifically on deeper issues.*
- *While an increasing number of the locals in the region speak English, they rarely understand spiritual vocabulary and topics in English ... [even] college graduates.*

Part 2: Approaches to Language Study

Besides establishing the importance of Arabic proficiency for ministry, the survey sought to determine the optimal learning method. The most common means of Arabic study in the Arabian Peninsula was loosely summarized as language institute, private tutoring, and GPA (Growing Participator Approach). The goal was to understand how a worker’s choice of study method(s) might impact their ministry.

2 The results from this research are available, in several different languages, as a “User Guide” to help teams learn from the experience of others. Please contact info@fruitfulpractice.org for a copy.

I. Respondent Methods of Language Study

The next figure displays workers' choices about the method(s) they used for intentional Arabic study. The vast majority used a combination of two or three methods, with the most common combination being language institute and a private tutor. When considered individually, choices were study in a language institute (88%), followed by those who used a private tutor (67%), and lastly by GPA (42%).

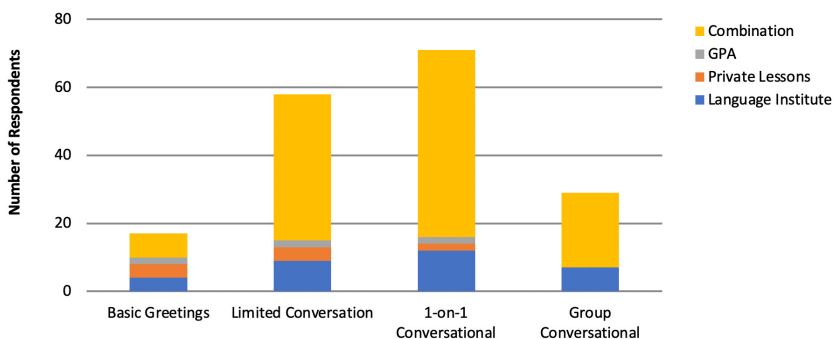


Fig. 11. Distribution of Arabic study methods used (N=175).

The average length of time respondents spent in intentional Arabic study using any study method, or any combination, was a bit less than 2 years.³ Among those who studied for more than 3 years, private lessons were the preferred method.

³ Since the survey asked questions using ranges, we cannot state the average precisely.

II. Intentional Study and Proficiency

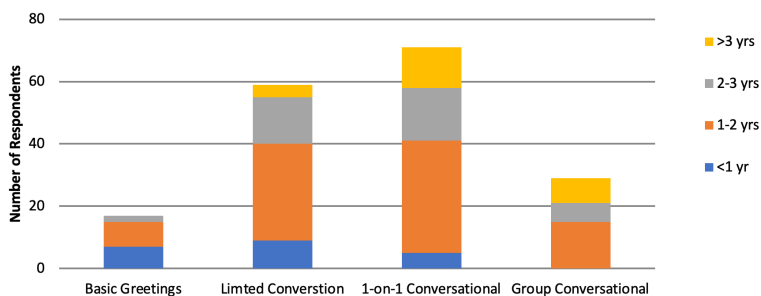


Fig. 12. Duration of intentional Arabic study, all methods (N=176).

When considering how the time spent in intentional study relates to language skills, 44% of respondents who reported strong conversational skills spent at least 2 years studying Arabic, regardless of the learning method.⁴ Also, the majority of those with only basic greetings or limited conversation had studied less than 2 years (72%).

Each learning method and combination of methods were analyzed to determine which led to the best results. However, there was not a significant difference in outcomes between the methods or combination of methods. At the same time, we should point out that none of the respondents who were conversational in group settings reported using either a private tutor or GPA alone, but always in combination with a language institution.

Furthermore, it is quite interesting that 27% of those with only basic greetings or limited conversation ability had spent more than 2 years in intentional Arabic study. Therefore, any correlation between duration of study and outcomes is tenuous at best, and other factors outside of our study must be taken into account. Or as one person emphasized in the

4 Respondents were not asked to define the intensity of their studies. In other words, "one year" of study could mean 20 hours a week, it could mean 5 hours a week, as long as they both lasted the duration of a year. As such we note this as a limitation of the study.

comments, “Attendance of courses is not enough. Significant initiative is necessary to pursue opportunities to speak and practice.” Perhaps this needs to be emphasized more in pre-field training and with new workers.

III. Financial Support Models and Intentional Arabic Study

An interesting relationship was drawn between the method with which a global professional worker funds their ministry and language studies. Respondents categorized themselves as either fully self-funded, partially self-funded, or fully funded by ministry support. Figure 14 displays the financial support model as per time spent in language learning.

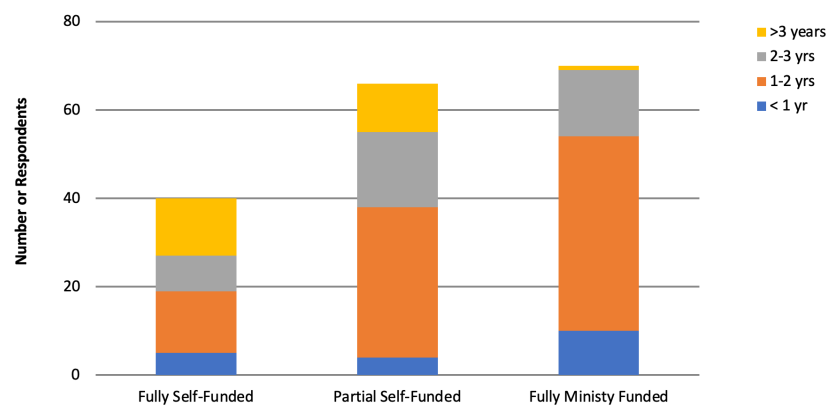


Fig. 13. Ministry support model per duration of intentional Arabic studies (N=176).

Fully ministry-funded respondents were more likely than either of the other groups to spend 2 years or less in Arabic study. Since the survey didn’t differentiate between full-time and part-time study, it is assumed that those fully funded could study full-time for about two years while others were required to juggle the demands of Arabic study and employment. As such, part-time study requires more time to reach a level of conversation. Also, the organization administrating fully-funded study may prescribe a set time. Even so, these various funding models influence language proficiency.

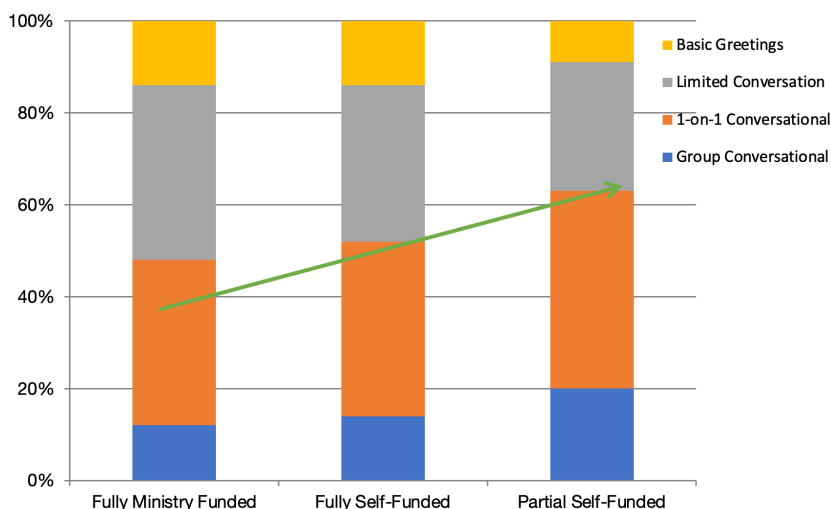


Fig. 14. Ministry support status and Arabic proficiency (N=183).

Going from left to right, there is a clear trend of progressively better language learning outcomes for each funding model. In other words, workers who were fully funded by ministry funds generally had the lowest language-learning outcomes, followed by those who were fully self-funded. And somewhat surprisingly, the partial self-funding model appears to be the best for language acquisition, with a full 63% of this category reaching a conversational level.

As for the relationship between support status and duration of study, the data is not conclusive. Yet it does seem that financial support status is a contributing factor. For example, those who have studied Arabic more than 3 years are almost entirely fully self-supported or receive partial support, as illustrated in Figure 15 below.

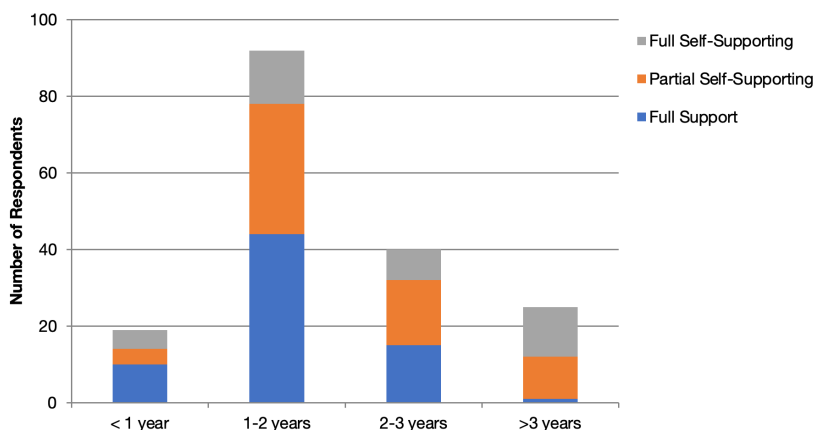


Fig. 15. Support status and duration of Arabic study.

Part 3: Messages received about learning Arabic

Another important part of a worker learning a new language is the support they receive (or lack) from those around them. To determine what degree stakeholders value Arabic language acquisition⁵, we asked respondents about the nature of the messages they heard both before and after arrival in the AP. Figure 16 displays a distribution of the results.

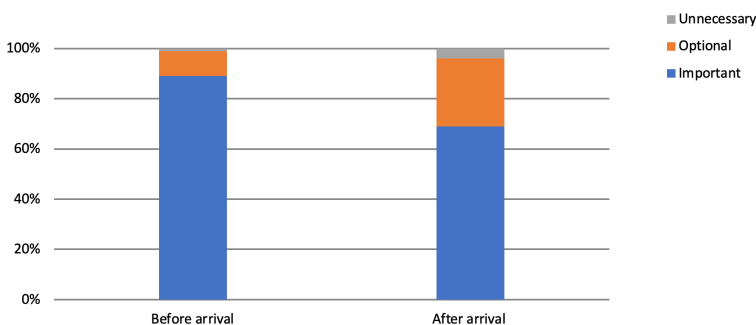


Fig. 16. Messages received *before arrival* about the importance of Arabic for ministry.

5 By stakeholders we refer to sending churches, agencies, teammates on the field, and others who speak into the missionary's life in a significant way.

A majority of respondents received communication affirming that **Arabic was important for ministry**, both before (86%) and after (69%) arrival. However, the respondents receiving communication that *Arabic is optional for ministry* rises dramatically after arrival, going from 10% before to 27% after arrival. And the message that **Arabic was unnecessary for ministry** rises to a noticeable 4% after arrival.

Messages received *before* arrival did not appear to affect respondent proficiency; however, the nature of the messages they received *after* arrival in the AP was correlated with their eventual language proficiency, as displayed in the figure below.

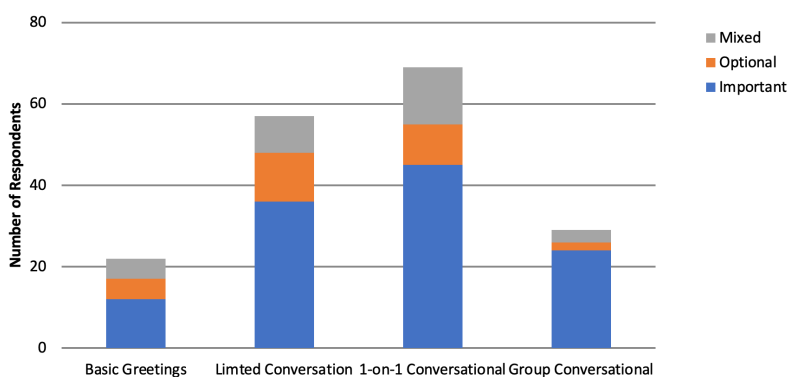


Fig. 17. Messages received regarding the importance of Arabic in ministry *after* the arrival in AP (N=177).

Figure 17 includes a category of “mixed” messages concerning the importance of language acquisition as reported by some respondents. *Before* arrival, there was a negligible number of such mixed responses, but *after* arrival, hearing mixed messages became more pronounced.

Also, there is a recognizable trend in this graph. The lower a worker’s proficiency level, the more likely they were hearing that Arabic was either optional or were receiving mixed messages, *after* their arrival in the AP. It seems fairly clear that when stakeholders devalue language acquisition,

workers have poorer outcomes. This may not be a conscious influence, but it still has a negative one.

Implications

Figures 1 and 17, “Importance of intentional study” and “Nature of messages received about study after arrival,” respectively, display similar trend lines. This suggests that the messages about Arabic study that a worker hears *after* arrival may have an impact on the degree to which they value intentional study, and in turn, impacts their eventual proficiency.

Figures 8 and 9, “Frequency of spiritual conversations” and “Involvement in discipling relationships,” respectively, also show a similarity, although visually inverted. In other words, the more often a worker has spiritual conversations, the more likely they are to disciple a national believer, especially those with strong conversational skills. It could mean that the higher frequency of spiritual conversations is simply a result of being involved in discipling, or it could mean that those who had more spiritual conversations were more likely to find themselves in discipling relationships.

From a holistic perspective, it would seem that the following are fruitful practices for language acquisition in the AP:

- Have a high value of Arabic studies (Fig. 1)
- Begin intentional study before arrival to the AP for employment (Fig. 5)
- Encourage shared disciple-making (Fig. 10)
- Use a combination of different methods to study (Fig. 11)
- Spend at least 2 years of intentional Arabic study (Fig. 12)
- Seek some financial support for Arabic study (Fig. 13)
- Ensure new arrivals are encouraged to study Arabic (Fig. 17)

Conclusion

In 2020, the Fruitful Practice Research team surveyed almost 200 Christian workers in the Arabian Peninsula about their experience with learning Arabic. This study yielded a number of important insights.

1. Despite the strong trend toward globalism and a lingua franca of English, the majority of missionaries still consider intentional Arabic study to be “important” or “very important” for ministry in the AP.
2. There is a clear relationship between the degree of importance missionaries placed on intentional Arabic study and ministry outcomes. In particular, the higher a missionary valued language study, the more likely they were to become conversational in Arabic, and those with a higher proficiency were more involved in discipleship of believers.
3. The best language outcomes were experienced by those who began Arabic studies before their arrival in the AP.
4. The respondents who self-scored in the highest category for language proficiency spent approximately 2.5 years in study, about a year more than the average.
5. The most popular form of language study was at a language institute, followed by private tutoring, and the GPA approach, although the majority used multiple methods.
6. Models of financial support made a difference in the missionary’s eventual Arabic proficiency, with those who were partially self-funded having better outcomes than those either fully ministry-funded or fully self-funded.
7. Finally, the messages a missionary received after arrival on the field, about the importance of language learning, had an impact on eventual language proficiency.

Although this study was conducted in one very specific context, the above insights should be useful to missionaries in other areas where English has become the *lingua franca*. We hope it helps workers around

the world who are wrestling with decisions about how much effort, and what kind of efforts, should be put into learning the local language

Discussion Questions

- What are the similarities and dissimilarities between language learning in the AP and language learning in your context? Are there any of the findings that are more or less relevant to you and your colleagues?
- Discuss the seven fruitful practices for language learning in the AP. Which of these do you believe should be adopted in your context? What might it look like for you or your team to implement these practices?
- The authors note that “the lingua franca of the eastern Roman Empire played a huge role in the spread of the good news of the work of Jesus Christ.” How does this relate to the findings of their study? What are the opportunities and limits of ministry in a lingua franca, and how does this play out in your context?
- What are the biggest barriers that you and your colleagues face in language acquisition in your area? What are some practical solutions to overcoming these barriers?

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A Theological Response to “Evicting the Enemy: Rediscovering Spiritual Warfare in Church Planting”

By David M.

David M. is currently finishing a theology degree in the United States. His experience is with Muslim and Buddhist peoples in East Asia, mainly doing evangelism and nurturing new groups of believers. He works remotely with a team that builds mobile applications for field teams, such as audio distribution apps for recorded story sets.



Note from **Seedbed** Editors: *This article is a response to Derek P.’s article in the previous issue of Seedbed (May 2021) entitled “Evicting the Enemy: Rediscovering Spiritual Warfare in Church Planting.” Seedbed does not endorse any particular view but welcomes diverse perspectives and constructive dialogue on crucial issues in frontier church planting.*

[Read the original article here.](#)

I am thankful for the diverse body of Christ and its many expressions. While I do not know Derek personally, I count him a brother in the Lord and honor him for his many years of service among indigenous peoples in North America. My wife’s tribe was reached by missionaries and experienced a movement of God over a century ago. I am filled with gratitude for the sacrificial service of missionaries such as Derek. With that said, my prayer is that our correspondence is marked by Christian charity. The aim of my response is to sharpen one another so that we may honor Holy Scripture and the Triune God of Scripture with increasing faith, hope, and love.

Let me begin by concisely outlining [Derek's article](#), which is divided into six headings:

1. *(Intro)* This is mainly his personal story.
2. *A Biblical Framework for Spiritual Warfare*. This is a fantastic overview of the Bible's big-picture story through the lens of Satan and demons.
3. *The Deception of Western Secular Syncretism*. Derek helpfully identifies ways the Enemy has infiltrated the West.
4. *Shift in Worldview, Shift in Focus*. Derek describes three shifts. This is where he drills down on the idea that casting out demons should be normative.
5. *Announcing the Kingdom, Spiritual Authority, and Identity*. This section comments throughout Luke 10.
6. *Spiritual Warfare in Practice*. This functions as a mini handbook for how to cast out demons.

With this structural outline in mind, let me set up the conversation in the following section. This may seem longer than a typical introduction, but I believe it is necessary to dwell here first before we can proceed further.

Let's Go Diving: Theology Drives Methodology

Consider an iceberg where the visible bit above the water line represents practical aspects of ministry, such as casting out demons. Below the water line represents the fundamental things we believe. In the opening paragraph of the article, we observe the principle that "theology drives methodology." Missionary-theologian Karl Dahlfred (2013) demonstrates this principle in his book by the same title. The idea is that an organic relationship exists between the moves happening under water (changing our beliefs) and changes in practice above water (the things we do).

To continue with the iceberg analogy, it seems that at least two types of shifts happened for Derek. One shift is a reaction to our beliefs not making sense of what we experience. Since experience is concrete and related to day-to-day life, I am speaking about it as “above the water line.” This describes the dissonance experienced as Derek encountered demons but did not have the worldview to grapple with them. The second type of shift happens beneath the water line. Beliefs change about what Scripture teaches which then send warning signals up to the surface, notifying us that practice is now out of alignment. When the bottom of the iceberg moves, the top must follow suit because of the nature of the iceberg as a whole unit. Similarly, beliefs and practices do not change in isolation but move as an organic whole.

Does the first or second type of shift describe Derek’s journey? I propose that section one (his personal journey) describes the first type of shift. It is about solving the cognitive dissonance felt when what we experience doesn’t align with how we see God’s Word. Sections two, three, and four address the second type of shift under the water line. What do we believe about a biblical framework of spiritual warfare (section two)? How has the Enemy infiltrated how we fundamentally view the world (section three)? What needs to shift at the bottom of the iceberg (section four)? Then section five provides exegetical support for the second shift, and section six gives a road map for how to live out the first. With this u-shaped structure, Derek takes us down and then back up again to the surface. We move from the experiences we don’t understand, to the level of belief, and then back up again to learn how to live in light of our changed beliefs.

On this scuba diving tour, I aim to provide some broader perspectives on our surroundings with the intention of ensuring a safe journey for others. Like pointing out the potentially dangerous coral reef and keeping an eye on the dive watch, the intention of this article is to identify the terrain and offer reflections on the route Derek desires us to embark upon. We will see that his route up to the surface is quite specific

because it leads us to a particular (and disputed) view of spiritual warfare. It is worth noting that I agree with Derek on many points. His second section about a biblical theology of spiritual warfare is top notch. I also agree wholeheartedly about our need to cast off a Western syncretic approach to Biblical interpretation.

I want readers to see that for Derek, a shift away from Western Christian syncretism is a shift to a specific view of spiritual warfare. Let me be clear that Derek at no point explicitly argues this. It is what is *not* said but implied that I take issue with. I take issue with it because readers deserve to see a fuller picture than what is offered in the article. My effort is more like filling in gaps during a conversation rather than offering a rebuttal. I am interested in building out our conceptual infrastructure to shed light on the nature of worldview shifts and the important theological implications of different views of spiritual warfare. We need a fuller-orbed understanding of our environmental surroundings in order to make an informed decision about which view of spiritual warfare we accept. We will see that a range of options exists, and readers must decide which of them give us the theological train to carry the freight of demonic experiences. With that said, let's get our diving gear on and head down together. Our first stop addresses sections three and four of Derek's article. Here we will pick up a conceptual framework to think accurately about what we mean by "worldview."

"Worldview": Stacked Blocks or a Complex Web?

Our young daughter loves to stack blocks. She quickly learned that in order to remove a block in the middle, all she has to do is pick up blocks above it, remove the desired block, and set the others back on top. Five key components of any worldview are God, reality (metaphysics/ontology), knowledge (epistemology), humanity (anthropology), and ethics (Treier and Elwell 2017, 951–52; cf. also Moreland and Craig 2017). If we treat them as stacked blocks, we can remove or alter one without affecting the others. We simply remove it and put the rest back on top.

A better way to understand worldviews is to see them as a web. Philosopher and logician W.V. Quine calls it a “web of belief” (Quine and Ullian 1978). When we consider a web, we realize that pulling one end sends reverberations throughout the rest of the entire system.

Derek believes that “many believers and missionaries from Western countries actually need to undergo a worldview shift in order to see and walk in the scriptural teaching on spiritual warfare” (2021, 27–28). My fear is that he treats a worldview like blocks. The web of belief teaches us that when we undergo worldview shifts that enable us to normalize casting out demons, we must be aware of and consider the larger implications in our worldview and consider them in light of Scripture. It is not as simple as the block approach; we must acknowledge the reverberations sent throughout the interconnected web of belief. Derek fails to acknowledge in his article the theological implications of his worldview shifts. Referring to the two types of shifts mentioned above, we need to be aware that both types have theological reverberations. This is hinted at as he explores Luke 10 and other passages (Mark 5), but it is not explicitly acknowledged or fleshed out for readers.

I cannot clearly identify how the shifts of exiting Western syncretism and accepting the deliverance model of spiritual warfare are distinct, overlapping, or interrelated. The nature of a complex web makes these things hard to sort out. But we can say with confidence that both shifts are essentially theological because any discussion of worldview deals with what we believe about God, man, knowledge, reality, and ethics. When Derek asks his readers to accept a deliverance-type of spiritual warfare, he is also asking them to import a complex web of theological commitments which are packed into that system, but which he does not acknowledge up front. I do not believe he has bad intentions, yet it is still important to consider the iceberg-sized web of beliefs that sits behind the practice of casting out demons. If a worldview is a web instead of blocks, then changes in theology (even if they are subtle) must have occurred. Since theological changes are left unstated, Derek offers a

deliverance model of spiritual warfare without disclosing the vast iceberg of theology sitting underneath it.

Changing our theology is a good thing when we are holding our beliefs up to the light of Scripture. Let us always be submitting our whole selves to God while allowing the Word to show us our errors and move us towards further devotion to Christ (Heb. 4:12). I want us to move out of Western syncretism as much as Derek does, but the shifting itself is not the problem. The issue is being aware of what theological commitments we are shifting into. This is not philosophical meandering; this is how worldview shifts work. Pulling on the end of the “reality” side of the web gets us started as we realize that our world is a spiritual battle (Derek’s section two). We must pull on this end to leave Western syncretism, but what reverberations go out into the other four ends? We need to bring the conversation down to the theological ocean floor before applying section six of Derek’s article.

Locating Deliverance Spiritual Warfare in Its Larger Context: One Option Among Many

Our second stop shines the flashlight on four different ways modern Christians view spiritual warfare. Readers should be aware that a range of views concerning spiritual warfare are within the bounds of orthodoxy. Beilby and Eddy edited a volume titled *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views* wherein four different perspectives on spiritual warfare are presented and discussed (Belby, Eddy, and Wink 2012). The first system, the world systems model of spiritual warfare, argues that principalities and powers are embedded within oppressive systems in society. Practicing spiritual warfare looks like nonviolent resistance as the church names, unmasks, and engages systemic evil. The second system, the classic model, views spiritual warfare as primarily about fighting temptation and sin. Beilby and Eddy write, “In the classic model, with its focus on the ‘weapons’ of repentance, truth, prayer, obedience, worship, and study of the Scriptures, spiritual warfare and Christian growth/discipleship

are seen as virtually one and the same” (2012, 34). The final two views, ground-level and strategic-level warfare, are versions of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare. These systems emphasize directly addressing demonic agents and represent a wide variety of theories about casting out demons.

I anticipate some frustrated readers at this point for my refusal to give a full theological diagnosis of the deliverance model. That is beyond the scope of this response. But I hope we can walk away with a fuller picture of the complex dynamics surrounding conversations about worldview, syncretism, and casting out demons. I want readers to see that a variety of theologies about spiritual warfare are well-developed and accessible in books such as this. They are *theologies* because a specific practice is always rooted in what is under the surface. Each of the four views about spiritual warfare is a live option for Christians to engage with. We would do well to carefully reflect upon the theology underneath each system and weigh each perspective against Scripture as we decide what spiritual warfare looks like in our respective ministry contexts. Recognizing that Derek’s route is only one way up among multiple options is a key part of our scuba diving journey.

Pulling on the Web: An Example of How Belief Affects Practice

The third stop is an application of how the bottom of the iceberg is connected to spiritual warfare systems. If practice (method) is always tethered to belief (theology), then what baseline theological beliefs might lead someone to arrive at a position of normalizing the practice of casting out demons?

Let me turn our attention to one issue by way of example. Each of us has the tendency to create a functional “canon within the canon,” elevating certain biblical passages as “more inspired” than others. We may trade our cultural Western lenses for ones with a better prescription,

but we may still overemphasize and underemphasize certain portions of Scripture. Some, for example, might elevate a passage such as Luke 10 and give it greater emphasis than other texts. In my estimation, some who advocate deliverance models give inordinate airtime to the theme of spiritual war and allow it to overly determine their view of the world and the Christian life. Reality can become primarily about a celestial war zone in which we participate, and that war zone is filled with demons. The name “spiritual warfare” itself even promotes this framework for thinking about the Christian life.

Does the Bible teach that spiritual war is the primary way we should understand the world? I will leave that for readers to ponder, but I would suggest that Scripture foregrounds other themes to frame the Christian life. The entire book of Hebrews, for example, locates the Christian life in the context of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. We are meant to envision a long journey such as described in the book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In another example, 1 Peter speaks of the Christian life in terms of exile. We are to think of life in the context of suffering faithfully as sojourners in a foreign land. Neither of these visions of our spiritual reality (wilderness and exile) compete with the celestial war vision of the Christian life, but it is worth pausing to reflect on the different ways the Bible describes our reality. Is the daily Christian experience a celestial war, wilderness wandering, or exile? The answer is “yes!” I do not deny the reality of spiritual warfare, nor do I want to minimize it. But I do want to advise against allowing spiritual warfare to become the dominant theme we see in Scripture.

Evicting demons deserves attention, but I would argue it is a background issue in the Gospels and the entirety of the Bible.¹ If we see reality as mainly a celestial war, we will be pressured to make our practice reflect that reality. By highlighting the Bible’s vision of life as wilderness wandering and exile, I am shining the light around to illumine

1 Peter Bolt makes this point in the first chapter of *Living with the Underworld* (2007). He uses the terms “center” to refer to the main emphases of Scripture and “periphery” to refer to issues kept on the margins (demons).

a fuller picture of how the Bible describes the Christian life. We do not want to pass over the reality that our war is against spiritual authorities and powers (Eph. 6:12), but we also do not want to make it the primary thing we see. I am suggesting that since missionary practice reflects our theology, casting out demons might get overplayed if we view the Bible as being primarily about celestial warfare.

What sorts of missionary practices arise from the Christian life as wandering and exile, in addition to a war? Thankfully, Hebrews and 1 Peter are full of practical ways to love God and each other in light of these realities. These letters go to great length to detail Christian living in a hostile world, providing tools such as repentance, prayer, and witnessing by suffering faithfully.

Casting out demons is a tool to carry in the Christian tool bag, but perhaps it should not be our first impulse to wield it. For the sake of loving others, we do not want to apply the demon-casting tool when other spiritual remedies may be required. Now, in some situations it may be clear that demonic forces are present, and in these situations Derek's road map (part 6 of his article) is a helpful tool. But since casting out demons does not get center stage in the advance of the gospel in the New Testament, I am hesitant to read demon possession into the situation before me unless it is abundantly clear (i.e., the demon speaks, foams, or convulses, etc.). Since our perception of the situation before us is shaped by our view of ultimate reality, we all need God's help to see the totality of how Scripture portrays the world and our journey in it.

Listening to the Non-Secular Past: Let the Ancient Saints Speak

The final stop is about heeding the exhortation of Hebrews 11–12—we are aided by the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. In historical theology, we hear the voice of the church before secularism was ever a live option. Listening to those who have gone before us gets us out of

our interpretive echo chamber while simultaneously rejecting the notion that we are radically autonomous individuals who can skip two-thousand years of the gracious gift of God's church. Through the patristics, medievals, and reformers, we see a range of non-secularized Christian traditions. They are engaged in spiritual warfare in varied ways, many of which are quite different from the deliverance model.

The first ten books of Augustine's *City of God* spend considerable time polemically engaging the demons of Rome and describing how they are tearing Roman society apart. Augustine speaks in clear terms about how demon worship leads to war and upheaval. His approach is to combat the gods of Rome head-on by exposing their evil and proving the supremacy of Christ. Going back even further, the martyrdom account of Perpetua and Felicity (203 A.D.) provides graphic insight into the prayers and spirituality of early Christians facing certain death. Their fight against celestial and terrestrial authorities is easily within the bounds of what we now call "spiritual warfare." These dear sisters commit themselves to God and devote themselves to prayer. In these two historical Christian texts, we observe approaches to spiritual warfare which did not emphasize deliverance from demons by rather focused on other crucial ways that Christians engage in spiritual battle with the enemy.

Conclusion

As our scuba diving tour comes to an end, I do not expect us all to come up for air in the same place. I want us to see that we can be compassion-driven, Great-Commission focused, and Holy-Spirit led without arriving at the same conclusion as Derek. To lay my cards on the table, while we agree on much, Derek and I do not agree on spiritual warfare methodology. I personally have embraced variations of the classical and deliverance models over the years, and as I grow and continue to hold my convictions up against the Word of God, my practices change. Sometimes the differences are slight and other times they are not, but we must do the heavy lifting of reflecting upon what any practice is

asking of us. We must inquire, “What unspoken theological commitments are embedded in the complex web underneath this practice?” My hope and prayer is that as practitioners we grow in becoming theologically reflective. Let us have the patience and concentration to explore the complex web of theology and how it relates to missionary practices for the glory of God and the good of his church.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think of David M.’s response to “Evicting the Enemy: Rediscovering Spiritual Warfare in Church Planting”? What are the main concerns of his response article, and what is your evaluation of his assessment?
- How central should spiritual warfare be to our understanding of discipleship and church planting? What is the relative importance of “evicting” demons in the New Testament, and what should be its relative importance in your ministry?
- What has been your own personal journey with the different views on spiritual warfare? How does spiritual warfare manifest itself in your context?
- What role should Scripture, worldview, and personal experience each play in shaping our views of spiritual warfare? How does this play out for both Derek P. and David M.? How does it play out for you?

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Reaching UPGs in the United States through Church–Missionary Partnerships: A Proposal

By Mike Urton

Rev. Mike Urton is the Director of Immigrant Mission for the EFCA. He holds a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) and has served among the Muslim and Muslim-back-ground-believer population of Chicago for nineteen years. He is the co-author of [Journey to Jesus: Building Christ-centered Friendships with Muslims](#) (2014, Tyndale Publishing). He also manages and creates content for the [EFCA All People YouTube channel](#) which seeks to equip Christians to understand and reach the broad range of diverse people, circumstances, and faiths that make up the globalized world in which we live.



According to the Joshua Project, there are a total of 521 different people groups living in the United States. Ninety-seven of these groups are from the least-reached areas of the world (Joshua Project 2021). This certainly seems to be a modern-day example of Paul's teaching in Acts 17:26–27, "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

Where I live in the western suburbs of Chicago, one of the main thoroughfares is lined with restaurants and stores offering traditional cuisine and clothing from India, Pakistan, various parts of the Middle East, and China. One Muslim website maps out twenty-nine different mosques in my county (Salatomatic 2021), which does not even begin to consider the Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh temples that also call this part of Illinois "home."

In light of Acts 17, this proliferation of unreached people groups

(UPGs) in the United States is clearly by God's design.¹ The local church in America has an amazing opportunity to reach the "ends of the earth" by reaching out to their UPG neighbors. While this is a fascinating opportunity, American Christians must be equipped to take advantage of it. Training seminars may be part of the equation, but these alone will not be enough to engage UPGs in every locale across the country. This article outlines a basic strategy for reaching UPGs in the United States through the local church and gives an example of how the Evangelical Free Church of America's (EFCA) Immigrant Mission (IM) is hoping to implement it. This strategy involves deploying missionaries who have returned from overseas into local churches to launch and maintain an outreach to a UPG in the community.

The Role of Experienced Missionaries in Reaching UPGs

Recently, a study was conducted focusing on seven evangelical churches in the Chicago area that formed relationships with Muslims in their community (Urton 2021). These churches ranged in the duration of their engagement with Muslims from three months to twelve years. They employed multiple approaches when reaching out to their Muslims neighbors, including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, inter-faith dialogues, Bible studies, picnics, holiday dinners, as well as standing in solidarity with Muslims during times of tragedy such as the New Zealand Mosque massacre. These ministries resulted in deeper relationships between Muslims and Christians, joint efforts in community service, Muslims growing in their curiosity and openness to Christ, Christians being equipped to effectively engage Muslims and, in some cases, Muslims becoming followers of Jesus.

1 Some missiologists have noted that peoples designated as "unreached people groups" are not static, but ones that can change when they migrate to different cities or countries. For more on this phenomenon see "Testing Models, Shifting Paradigms: Re-imaging and Re-envisioning People Groups" by Leonard N. Bartlotti in *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 37:3-4 (Fall/Winter 2020): 133-140. Yet, for our current purposes the UPGs listed by the Joshua Project will suffice.

One finding in this study was that five of the nine leaders who launched and sustained these ministries were former overseas missionaries who served among Muslims, one worked for a humanitarian organization in a Muslim country, and another was a first-generation immigrant. Also, eight out of the twelve volunteers interviewed had previous cross-cultural ministry experience both overseas and stateside (Urton 2021, 193).

Fruitful Practice Research had a similar finding in their study, “Fruitful Practices in Ministry to the North American Muslim Diaspora: A Mixed-Methods Study” (Kronk et al. 2017). Researchers interviewed eighteen former Muslims who became Christians while living in North America. The study suggests that the top two reasons for Muslims coming to Christ were an experience with a local evangelical church and a relationship with a Christian friend. Furthermore, three-quarters of the 173 participants in this study who work with converts from Islam did so in “the context of a ‘western,’ non-Muslim-background-convert church” (2017, 9). As most of the participants in this study had some form of long-term or short-term overseas experience, the authors concluded the following:

It would be beneficial for local churches and ministries to engage the services of those who have served in long-term, overseas Muslim-majority contexts. The accumulated set of skills, resources, and approaches gleaned in these contexts makes a difference in more fruitfulness—even in North American non-Muslim-majority contexts. This could be either as workers, or possibly as consultants, who help coach and upgrade the skills of those who lack extensive ministry experience with Muslims. (2017, 13)

In other words, workers returning to their homeland in North America represent a powerful human resource for reaching Muslim immigrants, if we think and act strategically.

The Strategy: A Church–Missionary Partnership for Reaching UPGs

These findings have important implications for mission leaders and field workers as they consider ways to reach the least reached that have come to the United States and Canada. At times, missionaries leave their field for various reasons, by choice or compulsion, due to security, health, family, or other factors. Returning missionaries can still play a role in reaching the unreached, and mission leaders can be proactive in how they redeploy field workers who are leaving an overseas assignment and returning to their home context. In conjunction with local church partners, they can consider developing a list of churches interested in reaching UPGs that have relocated within reasonable distance from the church and her members. The missionaries could then become part of this local congregation, gather a team of interested individuals, and launch a ministry to a specific people group. This may prove especially effective for denominational missions who have a more direct connection with churches in their denomination.

If an organization is not directly associated with a denomination, they could focus on the relationships that returned missionaries already have. In this scenario, the missionaries can contact their supporting churches to see if they have an interest in reaching a UPG in their community. Through these churches, missionaries can build a network of human and financial resources for outreach.

Another group to consider for this type of church–missionary partnership is semi-retired or retired missionaries. In some cases, retired missionaries are looking to utilize the training and experience they have built up over years of ministry in service to a local church. Launching and leading a ministry to a UPG in their area through a congregation is one way for them to employ these gifts. In some cases, a retired missionary might not be able to commit to *leading* such an effort; however, they could still function as a consultant or coach to those who are actually doing the work.

In any of these cases, these returned missionaries already have the training, experience, language, and love for the UPGs that they worked with overseas. These qualities can be of great assistance when trying to establish a new work among UPGs through a local church.

Implementing the Strategy: The EFCA's Plan of Action

An example of this church-missionary partnership for engaging local UPGs is a strategy of an American denomination seeking to mobilize its churches to reach the UPGs around them. The Immigrant Mission thrust of the EFCA denomination has recently started implementing a strategy which combines several of the elements discussed above and has three main goals.

The first goal is to identify and recruit missionaries within the EFCA organization who have returned from an overseas assignment and are staying in the United States. Since these missionaries already have a relationship with their home church or another sending church, we encourage them to meet with the pastor and/or church leadership to discuss if the church is open to launching a ministry to a UPG in their community. If so, then we encourage them to plant themselves in this fellowship.

Approaching the leadership is an important first step not only to find out if the church is open to this idea, but also because the support of the leadership is key to the effectiveness and longevity of the ministry. This is highlighted by the comment of one participant in the Chicago study, reflecting on her senior pastor's remarks after a Christian-Muslim Thanksgiving dinner and its impact on the congregation, "on several occasions [the senior pastor] got up and just said how wonderful that was because he came to the dinner. ... So, it's really coming from him. If he says it, it's gold" (Urton 2021, 123). This comment highlights the value of getting the support and buy-in of church leadership for these ministry initiatives.

The second goal can be broken down into two parts. The first involves EFCA Immigrant Mission assisting these missionaries in developing a strategy to inform the congregation(s) about locally present UPGs. Some, but not all, North American sending organizations are developing these kinds of structures. The second is to help the worker mobilize those who express a desire to engage the UPG. This is where identifying those in the congregation with cross-cultural ministry experience will be helpful, as we saw above. This could include conversations with church leadership, announcements at Sunday services, a 'blurb' in a congregational newsletter, social media posts, and including the local UPGs in the church's prayer efforts. Through these means, a list of interested people can be generated and an invitation to an introductory meeting can be extended where the missionary can cast a vision for engaging the local UPG.

Another part of this goal is identifying the particular UPG to be engaged in the community. This can be done through using tools like the Joshua Project's interactive map which locates UPGs around the country. For Muslim people groups, there are websites to help: [Zabihah](#) locates Muslim owned restaurants and other businesses, and [Salatomic](#) lists mosques and prayer spaces. For Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhist UPGs, a simple Google search of temples, restaurants, and businesses in a given location can prove helpful. After doing this research, a plan can be developed for making contact through attending an event at a mosque, visiting a restaurant, or other events that are open to the community at large. After contact is made, the newly developing missions team can determine needs in this community, if any, and develop an appropriate strategy for engaging this UPG.

Finally, accountability, support, and resources for these missionaries will be provided by EFCA Immigrant Mission to create an environment where they can be effective. This should be similar to the oversight most missionaries were accustomed to on the foreign field. It would probably include monthly prayer meetings, periodic check-in times, and suggestions about resources and training from time to time.

Implementing a strategy like this will have benefits for both the returning missionaries and local churches. The missionaries are afforded another opportunity to utilize their giftings, training, and passion for reaching an immigrant UPG. The local church, in following the lead of the missionary, becomes engaged in reaching a UPG in their community, thus becoming effective cross-cultural missionaries themselves.

Conclusion

Engaging unreached people groups is no longer just an overseas activity for restricted-access countries. God, in his providence, has opened the opportunity for North American churches to reach UPGs in their local community. Missionaries who have returned from an overseas assignment and those with cross-cultural ministry experience clearly have a significant role to play in helping local churches get involved in this endeavor. It is my hope that the proposed strategy detailed above can assist in encouraging effective church-missionary partnerships that will reach out and minister to UPGs. There are probably other creative ways for returned missionaries to engage UPGs that have an immigrant presence in North America. The key is in realizing what a rich and unique human resource these workers are as we work to see people from all nations standing around the throne of God saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10).

Discussion Questions

- What are the benefits and challenges of working through the local church in reaching unreached peoples in the diaspora? Why does the author propose pursuing such a partnership? Do you agree with his proposal?
- What is the theological and missional significance of "diaspora" in Scripture and in the mission of God today?

- The author writes from the perspective of an American church denomination engaging in local outreach to unreached peoples. How should international mission organizations understand and relate to local missional efforts of national churches?
- Compare and contrast discipleship efforts in the diaspora and discipleship efforts among the same people group in their country of origin. What is similar, and what is dissimilar, between church-planting efforts in these different contexts? What are the unique opportunities and challenges in each?

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Book Reviews



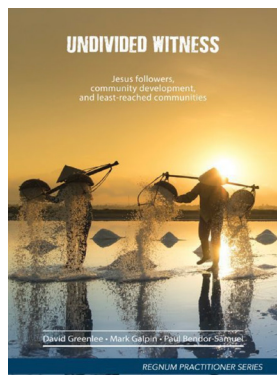
Undivided Witness: Followers of Jesus, Community Development, and Least-Reached Communities

Edited by David Greenlee, Mark Galpin,
and Paul Bendor-Samuel.

Regnum Books, 2020. 168 pages.

Reviewed by V. Phillips

V. Phillips is an American who has served long term with AWM/Pioneers in North Africa for over twenty-five years as a health and development consultant. She recently finished her doctoral studies at Biola in Intercultural Education. She continues to serve in ministries to Muslim women in teaching, mentoring, and in a variety of resource roles.



The “Community Development Least Reached” (CDLR) Space

Christian mission strategy acknowledges the 10–40 window and areas of the world where church-planting efforts are still needed if we are to fulfill the gospel mandate to take the good news of Jesus to the “uttermost parts” of the earth. When I made my first steps to follow God’s call to the unreached, I recognized that my degree in public health and lack of formal Bible training made my skills, and heart, a good fit for ministry to the poor and disadvantaged living within the 10–40 window.

Over thirty years later, I am still aware of that fit for myself but have often wondered at the implications of “divided” witness between those who see the proclamation of the gospel as separate, or of higher priority, from any ministry that meets physical, mental, or emotional needs.

For me, the combination of the two seems seamless and natural. I love to serve the Lord and share my faith. Often, I read examples in Jesus’ ministry of times he spoke first to physical needs and other situations when he initiated with the spiritual. This reality impressed on me an awareness that people have needs in all areas of life. My desire is to be his hands and feet as well as his voice in bringing a transforming message of love, hope, and salvation.

I am especially aware of how a more holistic focus in ministry has helped me to reach isolated rural areas of my adopted North African home, taking the truth of Christ to those who need to hear the gospel. Talking about health with a woman with a sick child allows me the opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ, speak truth into her life, and offer hope as I pray with her—helping her understand that God sees and hears her heart. The book *Undivided Witness* includes a subtitle that specifically addresses those three topics that are of great interest in my ministry: community development, least reached communities, and church planting goals to raise up groups of committed Jesus followers.

An Unexplored Space

The editors and contributing writers of *Undivided Witness* are long-term field workers with Operation Mobilization (OM), a sister organization to mine with great experience in the field of meeting physical and spiritual needs. They carefully organized and shared their combined knowledge on an existing missiological gap of the unexplored overlap between the three areas specified in the subtitle: community relief and development, the least reached, and emerging and multiplying Vibrant Communities of Jesus Followers (VCJF). As “pioneer” field workers

ourselves with values that reflect a commitment to reach hard places and see church-planting movements happen, we need to be willing to listen and consider the challenges of this unexplored space.

The editors introduce ten principles to relate the overlapping area created by the unexplored space of these three themes. Their goal in developing and defining these principles is to “stimulate more reflection and discussion” on the “strategic role community development can play in ... Kingdom objectives” among the least reached. Additionally, for practitioners in community development already, their hope is to encourage them to be “more effective and transformative in building God’s Kingdom” (12).

Each chapter looks at one principle within the context of a case study presented by a contributor with long-term experience who addresses the selected theme. This style of presentation gives us the chance to hear how different voices discern the common features that define the unexplored gap. Because of the multinational flavor of OM, a few of the writers come from non-Western countries, providing significant insight into the value of holistic ministry from their worldviews.

The chapter titles and ten principles of CDLR are:

1. Understanding the Kingdom of God is fundamental
2. Understanding how people enter the Kingdom of God shapes how we do ministry
3. The gospel impacts the whole person and people’s whole contexts
4. A broad vision of glorifying Christ
5. Prayer, spiritual warfare, and change
6. Caring for creation as worship, witness, and obedience
7. A vision for renewal and vibrant communities of Jesus followers
8. Community development workers are committed to professional excellence
9. Shared principles of excellence

10. The least reached are so for a reason

Three short reflective essays are included as examples of linking various themes, covering relevant topics entitled:

- Reflection on ethical evangelism: integrity, truth, timing, and grace
- Reflection on corruption, community development, and the least reached
- Reflection on serving the least reached through community development (a personal example in Asia)

Having different writers present their learning experiences and observations keeps the book from becoming a “how to” manual on community development, looking instead to the principles as guidelines. Including a variety of voices strengthens the book’s arguments, allowing us to see how men and women from and in different parts of the world experience the value of their work to creating VCJF in least-reached places. The contributors and editors recognize there are tensions within evangelical Christian approaches to reaching the lost. Their hope in introducing the ten principles is to provide a guide for ministries to the poor and needy in least-reached areas, acknowledging the role of community development in creating movements of VCJF.

Divided or Undivided Witness?

The editors and writers of the book remind us that the proclamation of the gospel does not need to be seen as a separate task to the Kingdom mission of “reconciliation and renewal of the whole of creation” (163). Chapter three makes the valuable point that rather than separate worldviews and approaches, we should see how these two instead “complement each other” (44).

We have all been taught the “now and not yet” reality of scriptural truth. Caring for communities and seeing them become VCJF is part of the transformation that comes through the power of the gospel

message. I found the chapters on understanding the Kingdom of God as a theological challenge for Christians to be aware of the needs of the poor and marginalized, and how a balanced or integrated (incarnational) approach to serving the marginalized recognizes it is the work of the Spirit to change individuals and communities. Change that begins in individual lives seemingly prevents the danger of creating a rice Christian mentality, as new believers look to each other and work together to see their families and communities transformed.

Many evangelicals may struggle with the chapters addressing issues of justice and environmental responsibility. Certainly in the USA, where Christians are hesitant to take on any label that falls within an ecumenically defined group, these chapters simply remind us that care for the environment is good stewardship of God's creation and that many people live in situations that cannot be changed when justice is not addressed. I was grateful for how these subjects were presented as part of the overall picture of holistic development purposes. In general, I found the mix of contributions with both practical and theological points of view to be helpful in reflecting on my own attitudes and practices. While I have always considered people to be more important than projects, chapter four reminded me "we run the danger of making people our project goals, represented by the number of people we assist or hope to assist," making people mere "statistics" (63).

Evangelicals who see a distinct division between spiritual and physical ministries may not be persuaded to change their positions by the book's approach but hopefully will increase their sensitivity to holistic projects involving both. For those already actively involved in holistic and transformational ministries, there is much to encourage and motivate them in their desires to glorify Christ through the work of their hands and the witness of their mouths. For any who are open and questioning the place of community development in personal or team goals, the ten principles of the book provide an excellent starting place for discussing and/or evaluating what they want to see happen in the communities they long to

see reached with the good news of Christ.

When Helping Does Not Necessarily Hurt

Our friends with OM have provided an excellent resource for field workers looking for best practices to integrate into their ministries to the least reached. Specifying the reality that the least reached are the least reached because of the needs they face is one all mission agencies committed to church-planting movements, or VCJF, in every people group need to hear. The value of community development done for the glory of God and his Kingdom has the power to transform hearts, minds, and worldviews as it changes people and their communities.

I came away with a personal conviction of my openness to risk, my perspective on sharing with those who are suffering, and my need to have a posture ready to humbly ask, rather than feel I have all the answers to give to others in need (166). I am grateful for the ways these truths were expressed not only as relevant to community development workers, but for all who serve the Lord.

The Rise and Fall of Movements: A Roadmap for Leaders

By Steve Addison.

100Movements Publishing, 2019. 177 pages.

Reviewed by William Jackson

William Jackson (pseudonym) has been engaged in church planting among Muslims in South Asia since 2012. He and his family live in a restrictive access country. William taught English to college-age students and is now pursuing another creative access business. William is passionate about evangelism, church formation, vision, strategy, and the development of people around him.



In many missions agencies, it is common for “movement(s)” to be stated in the vision, mission, or core values. However, the word “movement” can seem removed from our seemingly small sphere of influence. Thankfully, Steve Addison sheds light on this concept, discusses how to play a role in catalyzing one, and advises how to avoid decay and death within churches or organizations.

Addison writes with a wealth of experience as a church planter—he and his wife began planting a church in Melbourne, Australia, three decades ago (12). However, he realized his focus was too small and egotistical, as God taught him that movements are on God’s heart—the desire to expand disciples of Jesus and churches everywhere (12). His family has planted churches in the inner city, currently trains church

planters, and advises denominations on church planting strategies (12). Addison is a part of NoPlaceLeft, an international coalition of people seeking to multiply churches globally (128).

Addison defines a movement as a group of people committed to a common cause (17). History records the rise and fall of many movements. Some areas where Christianity once flourished are now home to various unreached people groups, which Addison would say occurred because those movements decayed.

Addison uses examples from Christian history to detail the phases of movements in order to give practical tools for today's church planter (cross-cultural or national). Throughout the book he utilizes Ichak Adizes' material on organizational lifecycles with application to church planting, which enables an assessment of their group's lifecycle (Adizes 1979).¹ Addison's book aids those serious about church planting within a movement to seek Word-centered, Spirit-led churches that reproduce new disciples and church leaders.

Addison describes seven characteristics of multiplying movements. The first three relate to "identity" at the heart of movements. (1) **Word**—we must place ourselves under the Bible's authority and obey it (31). (2) **Spirit**—Spirit-filled believers bear witness to Jesus, appoint church leaders, and are guided by the Spirit in decisions (34). (3) **Mission**—Christianity is a missionary movement, focused on glorifying God (35), with gospel preaching and disciple making being the most important application of missions (39).

The final four relate to "strategy" of movements. (4) **Pioneering Leaders**—church planting should focus on those gifted with an apostolic orientation and apostolic teams, which launch into unreached fields (41). (5) **Contagious Relationships**—pre-existing social networks allow for

1 Adizes primarily wrote for business, and his seminal article on Organizational Passages serves those interested in this topic well.

rapid growth in movements (42). (6) **Rapid Mobilization**—Jesus bypassed religious professionals to build the church, a pattern which continued in Acts. Every disciple is responsible to make disciples (43). (7) **Adaptive Methods**—approaches should vary with contexts and be simple, reproducible, sustainable, and scalable (43).

In the remaining chapters, Addison discusses movement lifecycles and common dangers leading to decline and decay in churches and organizations.

1. *Birth*. A founder or visionary will “wrestle with God” and find their identity in Him (50), “fuel discontentment,” and refuse to accept the world as it is (51, 53). As people follow and a team gathers, action begins as they “dare to dream” and “commit to action” (53-54). Dangers in this stage include founders losing heart of seeing a movement begin. Founders should make sure they have accurately heard from God, since discouragement, conflict, and the enemy will seek to derail their forward progress.
2. *Growth*. As work begins, the founder stays deeply connected and focuses on strategy and methods, with appropriate tension between systems and flexibility. Systems reduce flexibility, while flexibility without structure results in chaos and fragmentation (63). A danger to avoid is being either too flexible or too rigid in structure. As the movement grows, the founder needs to slowly release and avoid the “Founder’s Trap,” where they retain control to the detriment of the organization (67). If the founder desires to control everything, the movement will suffocate and not move beyond them.
3. *Prime*. All movements want to achieve this phase and remain in it as long as possible, in which the movement is not static, but dynamic, as it listens to and follows the Word, Spirit and Mission (70). These movements know why they exist, where they are going, and how to get there (69).
4. *Maturity*. When a movement chooses security over identity, and

desires formality, order and predictability more than getting results, it leads to this stage (74). An example given is the Quakers, whose growth in influence and wealth ironically led their movement to decline (77). At this life stage, movements can begin to split towards being more progressive (socially acceptable) or traditional (guarding the past), either of which can cripple forward movement (79). Relevant dangers include pride—believing you have achieved success because of who you are.

5. *Decline*. Movements begin to decline when they live off the legacy of the past and assume they will continue forever (90). Power and control are centralized, and leaders are rewarded for serving the organization rather than the cause (91). A possible gain is the rise of new movements in response to decline (94). A danger to avoid is placing the institution ahead of the mission, which makes decline imminent (or indicates it is already occurring).
6. *Decay*. Movements decay when they experience complete breakdown and collapse, or when they drift from and eventually deny basic gospel tenets. An example of this is the Student Christian Movement from the early twentieth century, which later became so progressive that today they hold no doctrinal basis and its membership is open to people of all faiths (104–05).
7. *Rebirth*. A journey from death to life where a movement returns to the Word, Spirit and the Mission through the crucible of learning from and responding to divine rebuke and training (114; Heb. 12:11). Movements that reject institution-building and abide in Christ will be able to turn around a declining and decaying movement towards rebirth.

Evaluation

This book has many strengths to guide a church planting team to discern its current lifecycle and possible pitfalls. Addison's main goal is noble: to help guide movements towards greater fruitfulness by being

grounded in the Word, Spirit and Mission. I appreciate that he longs for movements to have leaders that spend significant time with God and are guided by Him instead of their own egos.

Another strength of the book is the inspiring movement terminology. The majority of church planters want to be a part of something beyond themselves that glorifies God. Addison's passionate reminders to see churches extend beyond themselves as they reproduce is contagious and exemplary. This book gives language to that concept and practical steps towards this goal.

Another strength is the discussion on the necessity of altering church metrics. Addison wants church planters to avoid the danger of just making sure attendance is up and the offering plate full. Church is defined by more than numerical figures; it must be centered in fulfilling the Great Commission. I found the adaptation of Adizes' organizational lifecycles to be helpful to church planters who are seeking, with God's help, to build something beyond themselves. Avoiding common organizational pitfalls is something all church planters should seek.

One final strength is the way Addison notes "apostolic gifting" as often unappreciated in churches (Eph. 4:11-13). It is unfortunate we don't recognize those who are pioneers and visionaries within many existing churches, primarily because most churches don't know what to do with those with an apostolic orientation (121). Addison encourages the use of this gift and recognizes that movements will rise and fall with these people.

There are also several weaknesses to address. Movement language, while inspiring to some, can also have the effect of making others feel overwhelmed and skeptical. For those of us working as cross-cultural church planters who deal with various stressors, it can sometimes feel our work is incapable of becoming a movement. Perhaps a movement will happen in the future, but God wants us to be content with being faithful with the people He has given to us. Movement and rapid reproduction terminology can make some feel they are not doing ministry correctly if

they are not seeing results, which can lead them to try ever harder and harder. I assume Addison doesn't want people to feel this way, but it is one possible impact of movement terminology.

Another potential weakness is that Addison's case study and appendices create confusion regarding his views on strategy. In an earlier point (Adaptive Methods), Addison demonstrates willingness for a variety of strategies within church planting. However, in the case study he says that, within NoPlaceLeft (NPL), different strategies are not possible (142). That statement lingers on the page and intrigues me. Why is it not possible? I think his argument would be strengthened if he provided examples from different church planting strategies. At times it feels that he promotes one at the expense of others. The "one size fits all" approach seems potentially unhelpful. One should consider other missiological positions on church planting and ask the Spirit for guidance in their particular context (Esler 2013, 72).

A final weakness (particularly applicable to contemporary Western Christianity) is Addison's use of the contested term "progressive," which he discusses in depth in the decay lifecycle of a movement (104-108). The word "progressive" as it relates to Christianity means different things to different people. In today's supercharged political world, this term must have healthy balance and contextual definition, since it can sometimes be weaponized in unhealthy, destructive ways.

Relevance for the Practitioner

I benefitted from the way this book built upon Adizes' classic material on organizational lifecycles. I believe a church planting team or denomination that is serious about church planting should work through both this book and Ichak Adizes' material. Established local churches would benefit by remembering the kingdom of God is much bigger than their church and that they have a role in reproducing themselves. Church-planting teams in areas where there is no established church

should figure out ways to avoid the Founder's Trap and plan for reproduction from the beginning of their ministry.

During our team's eighth year of ministry, I read Adizes' material for the first time and saw that our church planting team had been through many of the phases he described. We were currently retreating from one phase to another. It was helpful to have a new vocabulary to describe our team's lifecycle as well as warnings to keep us away from the stated dangers. There were several ways that I, as team leader, had failed to avoid the Founder's Trap. As a younger leader, I wrongly assumed I needed to have the answers to every issue of our team. After some team conflict and personal development, I saw it was acceptable and godly to lean upon my teammates and the Spirit for change. According to Adizes and Addison, I needed to release control and let the movement run with or without me.

Church leaders and planters are strongly recommended to consider Addison's seven characteristics of multiplying movements in their context. There are some great practical concepts and discussions that teams can have, and our team has wrestled with many, such as being Word-centered and compassionate to fellow church members. Addison helpfully reminds us of the need to preach the gospel regularly, disciple believers, and affirm apostolic leaders as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission. Teams seriously interested in church planting should prayerfully bring this material before God and ask Him if they ought to change anything so that they can be swept into the broader, more robust movement of the kingdom of God.

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Acknowledgments

Also from Steve Addison

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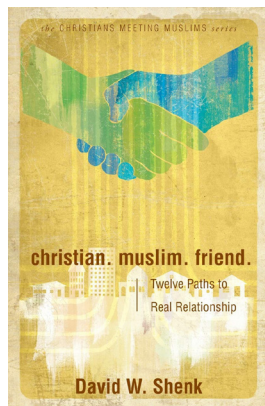
Christian. Muslim. Friend. Twelve Paths to Real Relationship

By David W. Shenk.

Herald Press, 2014. 187 pages.

Reviewed by M. James

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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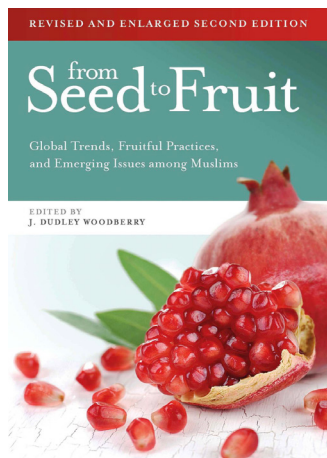
From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims

Edited by J. Dudley Woodberry.

2nd ed. William Carey Library,
2011. 432 pages.

Reviewed by Drew I.

Drew I. is an American who has served in Northern Africa for seven years in various roles: as translator, entrepreneur, and teacher. He and his wife co-lead a team and co-shepherd a growing family. He holds an MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.



How do we become fruitful in ministry among Muslims? This is the question that drives *From Seed to Fruit*, a book which has significantly influenced ministry strategy among Muslims in the last decade. Edited by Dudley Woodberry with contributions from dozens of authors, the book is built on the large-scale collaboration of mission agencies and mission practitioners.

Beginning in 2003, a survey was distributed to mission agencies, seeking to elicit fruitful practices in ministry among Muslims from practitioners. The fruitful practices identified by the survey were then evaluated and discussed by many of those practitioners in a consultation in 2007. The participants, a majority of whom were Americans, completed

another survey and participated in recorded interviews and group discussions. Afterwards, a number of authors contributed chapters—based on the surveys and discussions—to the first edition of the book, which appeared in 2008. It discussed emerging trends in ministry among Muslims, identified fruitful practices from survey data, and provided multiple chapters of discussion of those trends and practices.

In the years following, the data from the survey taken at the consultation was studied in-depth, leading to the second (2011) edition with additional chapters based on further analysis and reflection on the data. The consultation also led to follow up works such as *Where There Was No Church: Postcards from Followers of Jesus in the Muslim World* (Martin et al. 2010), *Where There Is Now a Church: Dispatches from Christian Workers in the Muslim World* (Neelson 2015), and *Fruit to Harvest* (Daniels et al. 2019).

The thesis of *Seed to Fruit* could be stated like this: effective practitioners (measured by churches planted) engage in a set of “fruitful practices” which are more likely to result in effective ministry among Muslims. The assumption is that these fruitful practices can be identified through studying effective practitioners and what they do. While the book reminds the reader that copying these practices does not guarantee success, the authors argue that these fruitful practices should be adopted because they increase the likelihood of fruitful ministry. Secondly, the book identifies emerging trends in ministry among Muslims, arguing that practitioners should be aware of these trends and allow them to inform their ministry.

While a book containing chapters by over thirty authors will unavoidably contain a variety of styles and points of emphasis, the authors are united in a desire to impart wisdom that leads to effective ministry. In chapter eight, for example, Don Allen introduces the section on fruitful practices with a story. Allen invites the reader to imagine a desperate worker who approaches a wise, fruitful worker about his ministry. “Tell me the secret,” he begs, trying to keep the despair from his voice. “What

is happening here?" (chap. 8, "Conclusion"). This imagined story sets the stage for the discussion of fruitful practices and governs how they are intended to be applied. The authors are united in this goal: to reveal the practices and gathered wisdom of effective practitioners so that other workers can become more effective.

The book certainly accomplishes its goal of sharing practices and wisdom. Here are thirty-one chapters (and a lengthy appendix) from experienced, respected practitioners writing on the topics regarded as most important for fruitful ministry among Muslims. The authors vary widely in style, emphasis, and topic, so readers may be best served choosing chapters based on their interests and needs. There is much to commend. For this reader, chapter 19, "Expatriates Empowering Indigenous Leaders," provoked a stimulating team conversation on our team's role in a local house church in our city, and chapter thirty, "Recapturing the Role of Suffering," was a stirring call to discipleship and communion with Jesus in the midst of trials.

Part two, which introduces the fruitful practices, is where *many* readers will want to begin. However, I found the presentation of the fruitful practices to be somewhat confusing. First, there were many fruitful practices listed. Chapters eight through thirteen summarize fifty-four fruitful practices. Chapter fourteen then restates the fruitful practices using different categories but totals sixty-eight fruitful practices. There was quite a bit of redundancy in this chapter, and for some of the additional practices listed in the chapter, no survey data was given to justify their inclusion. Readers may find such lists overwhelming, the overlapping lists confusing, and the underlying methodology unclear.

It seems that methodology is one reason why so many fruitful practices were listed. According to chapter eight, the fruitful practices elicited in the pre-consultation survey formed the basis of a second survey taken at the consultation. In it, practitioners—invited to the consultation because they were considered effective—marked the practices given in the survey by 1) whether they engaged in the practice, and 2)

how important they thought it to be. It seems that this data then formed the basis of the lists in chapters eight through thirteen.

It is important to note that these chapters did not compare the practices of those who are more effective to those less effective, but only whether it was practiced and thought to be important. This methodology resulted in long lists of good works that effective workers deemed important. But crucially, the results in this section give no evidence that each of these practices are *actually* related to effectiveness (as measured by churches planted). For example, “Beginning discipleship before conversion” was considered important by 55% of respondents and practiced by 76% (chap. 10, “Belonging Before Believing”). It is notable that such a high percentage of effective workers at this consultation engaged in this practice. But we don’t have evidence that it directly leads to fruitfulness in terms of churches planted. These lists, then, are probably best used as diagnostic checklists and idea generators to get conversations started on a team. A handy assessment tool in the appendix is designed to guide a team through just such a process.

The post-consultation analysis of the surveys, on the other hand, yielded sharper results on what does correlate with greater effectiveness. At the consultation, the participants were asked how many churches they had planted (0, 1, or multiple), and about their progress toward a church-planting movement. This created comparison points between more or less effective workers and allowed researchers to isolate which practices were actually related to effectiveness. Comparisons in this area were then correlated to the fruitful practices engaged in by each worker. In short, this analysis isolated the practices that more effective practitioners do and the less effective workers do not do. Remarkably, only three practices were significantly correlated with effectiveness in church planting: more effective practitioners worked in the local language rather than trade languages, had at least one team member with high language skills in that local language, and incorporated the learning preference of their people group (literate vs. oral) into their team strategy (appendix, “Modeling the Relationship”).

These insights are outstanding—worthy fruit of years of labor. It provides especially strong support for the value of learning local languages to a high level. As a result, this study has contributed to increased commitments to learn local languages and use oral methods. In our region, for example, the long-standing practice of spending time in Europe learning the trade language prior to moving to the ministry site is on the decline, and there has been a marked increase in oral-learner-focused ministry tools. These three practices, and the data supporting them, are explained in chapter twenty-three.

Yet there remain some limits to the data. In the appendix, the authors noted that:

one of the difficulties in a multi-agency research program is that there are different definitions of basic terms. Are the terms church, community, and fellowship synonymous? Our definitions of terms like church impact our answers to questions like “How many churches have you planted? (appen., “Modeling the Relationship”)

Similarly, the survey given at the consultation asked if the practitioner was “seeing signs of a CPM” (appen., “Modeling the Relationship”). But the signs were not defined, so it was up to each individual practitioner what the signs of a CPM were.

Subsequent analysis of that data correlated practitioners “seeing signs of a CPM” with practices termed “transformational” methodology. Based on this connection, “transformational methodology” was understood to be related to greater progress toward a CPM, so two additional chapters were devoted to the topic in the second edition. And yet one wonders: because signs of a CPM weren’t defined, does this data really show us that a transformational methodology is related to progress in CPMs?

All this talk of data proves a unique strength of the book. But strengths often have a “shadow side.” In this book, every practice was

judged on the basis of “fruitfulness,” by the question, “does it work?” Answers came from data and intensive analysis. But this pragmatism sometimes led to questionable conclusions in areas of ecclesiology and contextualization. The authors stated that the “transformational model” was shown to be more effective than an “attractational model,” quoting a consultation participant as follows: “Bringing strangers together and calling them a community is not comprehensible in most contexts” (chap. 15, “Transforming Bonds of Trust”). There is surely wisdom in making disciples along relational lines. But if we eschew forming churches made up of former strangers, we risk a sub-biblical ecclesiology. Large chunks of the New Testament were written to encourage Christians who don’t naturally trust each other to keep being church together (see Ephesians 2-4 and Romans). Perhaps the incomprehensibility of strangers becoming a loving community points to the reality of the gospel.

The focus on effectiveness also pervaded discussions of contextualization. One interview is summarized thusly:

The key lesson we can draw from this interview and several like it is that when the message is contextualized at the level of identity and worldview and is therefore portrayed as something that will strengthen the social network rather than tear it down, it is more likely to be embraced. (chap. 24, “Contextualization as a Key to Transforming”)

But we should be careful about equating effectiveness in contextualization with whether the message is embraced. On an oral Bible storying project in northwest Africa, my teammates and I tended to choose stories for translation that we thought would be most well-received. Noticing this, our translation consultant urged us to include stories that conveyed both the glory and the scandal of the biblical narrative. The experience taught us that effective contextualization takes place when the gospel is accurately understood, and then considered, on the basis of that right understanding.

So how does this book help us as practitioners? I see two ways. First, the standout findings of this study should give all of us—not only those working among Muslims—even more motivation to deeply learn the local language of our focus people and tailor our strategy to their preferred learning and communication style. Are they oral learners? What is the place of various written communication? What's digital media best used for? How are arguments won? What is more persuasive: passionate beliefs or cold, hard facts? What is most compelling: logic, appeal to tradition, a proverb, a text?

Second, a note of caution in pursuing effectiveness: we should also avoid the danger of being ruled by effectiveness. Of course, it is right to deeply desire to bear fruit and bring glory to the one who saved us! But if effectiveness is allowed to be a ruling question, we might lose track of faithfulness. Faithfulness may lead us to do things that seem less effective at the moment. But we can trust that faithfulness will bear fruit in the long run, even if we don't see it ourselves.

In sum, this book is recommended as a tool for those seeking to more effectively plant churches among Muslims. The standout chapters are those that summarize the key findings of the research: chapters eight to thirteen, fifteen, and twenty-three. Of the remaining chapters, practitioners among Muslims are encouraged to pick and choose topics most relevant to their ministries. While I do not recommend every chapter, and the contemporary relevance of some chapters is waning, a book like this is a storehouse of thoughtful reflection on real-life fruitful practices in ministry among Muslims.

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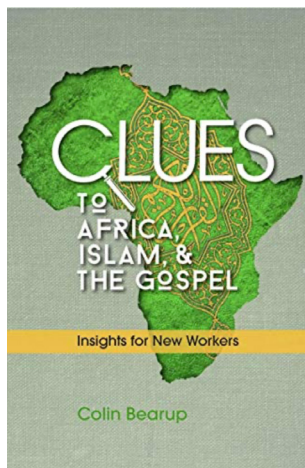
Clues to Africa, Islam, & the Gospel – Insights for New Workers

By Colin Bearup.

William Carey Publishing, 2020. 110 pages.

Reviewed by Walter Eric

Walter Eric (pseudonym) has been active in facilitating and training believers in outreach. He has been serving with Life Challenge since 1981 in South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana with ministry trips to many other countries across Africa and Asia. Besides personal coaching, Walter develops evangelistic and training resource materials in several languages in both print and film format.



“OBSERVE, CONNECT, & THRIVE IN AFRICA!” lines the back cover of this book, a prayerful appeal to new workers and an apt description of the book itself. Its author, Colin Bearup, writes from his experience as one who served for thirty years in Chad and is currently WEC’s Africa Area Training Consultant.

Anyone looking for simple answers or a formula for success in sharing the gospel and engaging with African Muslims will be disappointed. Bearup, faithful to the title, simply gives “clues” to inspire workers to reflect, discuss and plan tasks based on each chapter. The reader will certainly not be bored as the book is rich with fascinating personal experiences, provocative missiological thinking, and strategic insights.

Bearup invites his readers to explore ministry in the context of the African Islamic worldview by touching on a multitude of topics. He discusses the importance of asking the right questions, describes traditional African life, and compares the four major Islamic blocks in Sub-Saharan Africa. He explains the African incarnation of Islam, folk Islam vs. “real Islam,” and cultural concepts such as individualism/collectivism and high/low-context cultures. Other topics include guilt-shame-fear and the gospel, the importance of “patronage” in African culture, and how western theology can “make sense” in the African mindset. Bearup compares gospel presentations with programmed approaches, and he provides reflections on church planting.

To pack all this into less than 80 pages (excluding Discussion and Resource sections) demands both brevity from the writer and a willingness on the part of the readers to dig deeper on their own—and it is surely worth it. The presence of narratives – they often take readers into the topic in interesting and at times surprising turns – makes the book great reading. Missiological quotes and sharp critique provoke readers to reconsider approaches like chronological storytelling or discipleship programs such as DMM and that of the Navigators, though without going into great detail, leaving it less than clear which aspects of these approaches he finds less suitable for the African context.

I highlighted a number of common-sense truths and great insights from the book:

- “To understand people, we need to have some idea where they are coming from” (2)—simple and clear, but easily forgotten. It still hurts me when I remember what happened during a conference that involved ministry leaders from across East and West Africa. My Ugandan friend wanted to contribute to the discussion. He proceeded to rise from his seat, bowed respectfully to all participants in the hall, and only after another short pause did he begin to address all in a dignified manner. Unfortunately, by then the Nigerian chairman had lost patience with him and blurted out:

"If you have nothing to say, sit down!" To make it even worse, my Ugandan friend was clearly older than the chairman.

- "The core beliefs and practices [of Islam] are like the skeleton of a human body. On the street you never meet skeletons; you meet living, breathing people" (5). Wow! I never looked at it quite that way. Have I been too quick to debate apologetic issues rather than show interest in the life and needs of the one with whom I'm speaking?
- "As a general rule, African Muslims are resistant to the gospel without being hostile to Christians" (32). I agree and rejoice over this invitation for Christian-Muslim interaction. I remember reading Charles Marsh's advice: "You can say anything to a Muslim as long as you say it with a smile" (1978, 11).
- "Africans tend to be pragmatic rather than dogmatic" (39). Perhaps as westerners we have been brought up within theological/denominational fences, and often without noticing, we have packed this in our suitcases when we left our home countries.
- In the African context, "any person who seeks to be autonomous is morally suspect" (78). Really? Check that out and see if it sticks. As an urban missionary, I would tend to limit this to the rural context only.
- "The style of discipling used by Jesus (as in the Gospels) is a variety of patronage" (80). If you are a westerner, perhaps you would like to explore this important concept further.

Evaluation

It is not difficult to see the strengths of such a book. If you are a newcomer to missions in Africa, it sets your focus on matters of African worldview and cultural patterns, which are significant, yet not easily perceived in the midst of orientation and settling in. However, it may be preferable to simply observe Africa and connect with Africans before digging into a book with this broad spectrum of issues. Or you might give

it a fast read, note the major points and return after a year or two on the field to revisit these topics in discussion with other missionaries.

I arrived in Africa forty years ago almost to the day, and I still found the book quite fascinating—and at times sobering—reading. I echo Bearup's introductory comment: "I wish someone had told me how to interpret what was happening. I wish there had been a book to explain it all ahead of time" (1). In contrast to Bearup's setting in Chad, mine was in urban settings (Cape Town, Nairobi and Accra, with the exception of many trips teaching seminars in upcountry regions throughout Southern, East and West Africa, as well as SE Asia). All of Africa is not the same, and our urban settings have developed a much stronger mix of western and African worldviews. As such, not all "clues" given in the book fit perfectly in every African context.

Perhaps one would wish some African missionary, or even a missi-ological mind like Dr. Azumah (referenced in the resource section), to reflect and design a similar workbook for the growing number of African missionaries who are giving such an invaluable contribution to "finishing the task" in recent decades.

The book is certainly highly relevant for today's practitioners in reaching the least reached, especially for those serving in sub-Saharan Africa. Bearup is to be commended for resisting the temptation of adding yet another "method" to the "Camel—Storytelling—DMM—Seven Muslim—Christian Principles—C2C Presentations" (and others promoted from time to time) lineup.

Additional missiological reflections and critique by Colin Bearup is available at his website: www.sahelchurchplanter.wordpress.com.

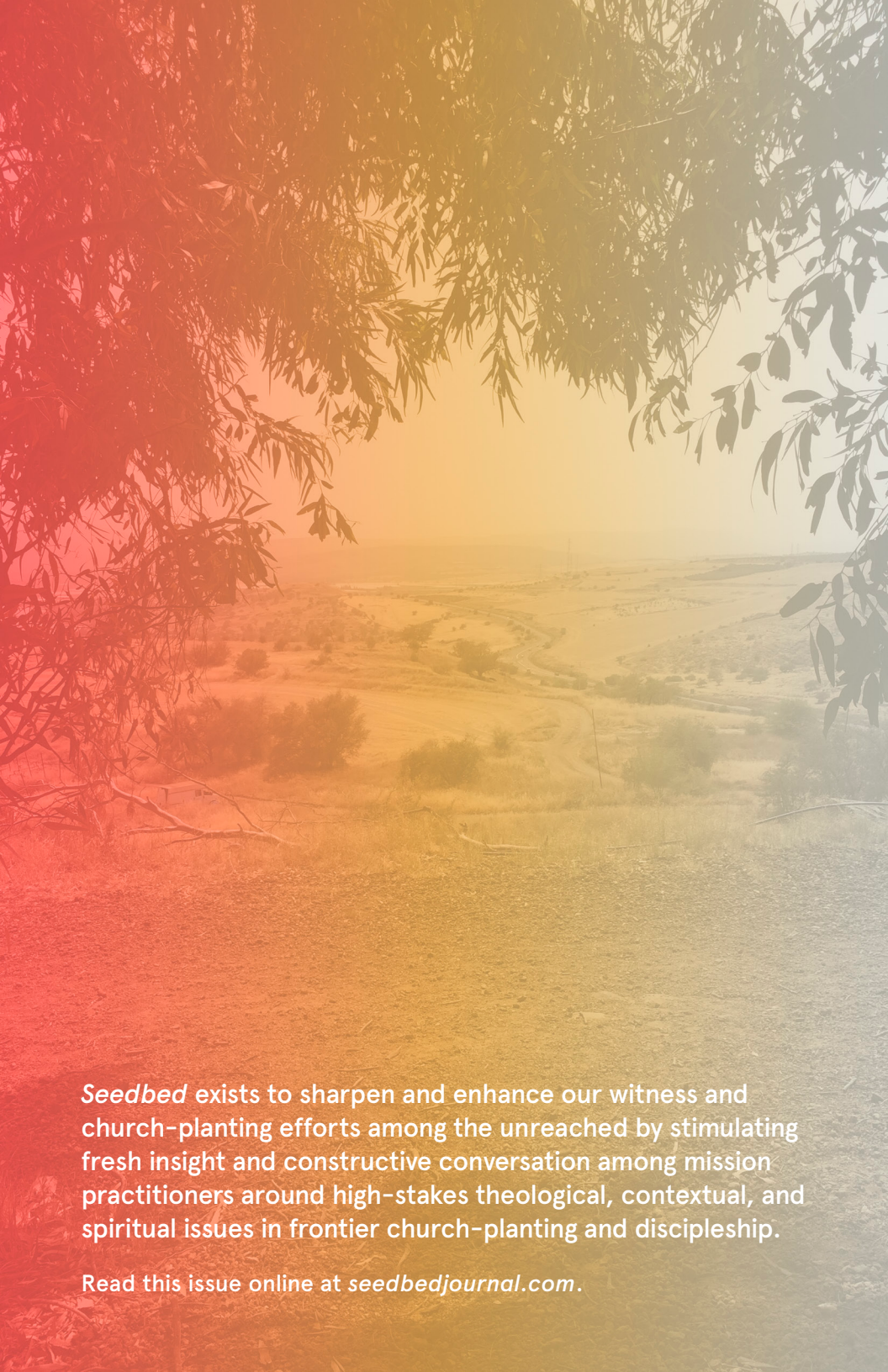
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Seedbed exists to sharpen and enhance our witness and church-planting efforts among the unreached by stimulating fresh insight and constructive conversation among mission practitioners around high-stakes theological, contextual, and spiritual issues in frontier church-planting and discipleship.

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