

The Why, When, Where, How and What of Evangelism (Part 1)

By Um Ithnayn

In the November conference for East Area women, I shared the following personal insights on evangelism. My examples reflect my situation as a housewife whose ministry has not yet moved beyond the evangelism phase of church planting.

Why Are We Doing This?

What is our motivation in evangelizing Arab Muslims? My answer is simply that a joy shared is a joy doubled. By His grace, we have come to know our most amazing, satisfying and all-glorious God; yet so many around us are utterly unable to truly know and enjoy Him. Proclaiming His glory in all the earth is one more way for us to savour it. It is a privilege to be used by God to open eyes to His glory and the beauty of His salvation. From the overflow of joy in our own relationship with God, we are inspired and energized to introduce others to Him, so that they can know the Lord and experience this same joy.

If mere duty and guilt keep us plodding unproductively through our ministries, we need to rediscover our joy in the Lord and our passion for His glory to be declared to the ends of the earth. This joy can colour all aspects of the missionary task, from the rewarding ones that make us feel successful to the dreaded ones that seem unbearable. May our joy and satisfaction in God and His magnificent glory be our motivation to walk out the door and 'trouble ourselves'

in ministry. When we are discouraged by the lack of spiritual hunger encountered in our ministries, may we remember that we do this for the Lord and not for our own success and glory.

When Can We Do This?

Half the battle of evangelism is finding ways to spend time with our Arab Muslim friends. We can't tell people the good news if we aren't with them. How can we better live lives of witness among Arab Muslims? As David Lundy recently commented in *Insight*, it is important that 'we are exercising due diligence in pursuing our calling.'¹ We can keep ourselves busy with so many good things that we don't realize our failure to give enough time and attention to what God has actually called us to do. Here are a few suggestions for remaining diligent in ministry.

Guarding the Schedule

How can we guard our schedules so that we major on God's specific calling on our lives? Westerners plan events far in advance but Arab culture is much more spontaneous. If we fill up our schedules with pre-planned events with Westerners, then when Fatma or Ahmed calls, we are not free. Even though the specifics of whom we will visit are not yet set, we can determine not to fill up prime visiting time with other things.

Not only can we protect our own schedule, but we can also facilitate our team-mates' ministries by planning our social gatherings, prayer partnerships and team meetings for ministry downtimes rather than prime time. We can make an effort not to supplant each other's available ministry time with other good things. For example, our team has set our weekly meetings to have time for visits afterwards.

Spontaneity

A spontaneous culture requires our spontaneity. We each tolerate chaos and last-minute changes to varying degrees. Some may find it more overwhelming than others to cancel set plans and take up an unexpected ministry opportunity. Whether or not we find it easy to be spontaneous, we discover benefit in developing suppleness for the impromptu opportunities that God presents. Although we might differ in our expression of flexibility, we want to be open to the Spirit's leading in our ministries.

Plan A, B and C

The flip side of that spontaneity often results in last-minute cancellations for our visits. Since a friend's higher allegiance to family takes priority over time with us, all plans are tentative until we are actually in each other's presence. Knowing this uncertainty, we can create multiple options for our days. Rather than sulk in frustration because our ministry plans have fallen through, we can be prepared for that possibility. If Plan A (visit Fatma) falls through, I can move on to Plan B (call

Khadija). If Khadija cancels my visit right before I am about to leave for her house, I am mentally ready for Plan C (look for Muna at her office). Even if Plan C does not work, I will not sulk because I have tried my best and can then feel free for other tasks.

Guarding the schedule, fostering spontaneity and having multiple ministry options are approaches that work for me as I strive to live a life of witness. What approaches have you used to maintain an intentional lifestyle? Prayerfully consider how to better guard your schedule, be more flexible with impromptu ministry opportunities and plan around the inevitable cancellations with friends.

Where Can We Do This?

Ministry Venues

In our part of the world, the standard evangelistic ministry takes place on visits with our friends in homes (for the women) or in coffee shops (for the men). But this can be limiting. So much effort goes into creating reasons to befriend people in order to visit them and have them visit us. Are there other appropriate ministry venues that don't require so much effort? Some tentmakers have contact with Muslims on a daily basis through their jobs. Others, however, such as housewives, don't have natural opportunities to mix with their target people group and so need alternative ways to facilitate contacts and make new friends.

Hanging out can be a ministry. For tentmakers, the office is a natural

'hang-out' location where you are known to be available. Those of us without an office can create hang-outs where we can regularly get out of the house and meet new friends. Our acquaintances know they can return at a later date and find us there again. In this way, the burden is not solely on us to think of an excuse to begin a new friendship in order to visit them at home. We can enjoy our conversation and hope that God will prompt them to come back.

In North Africa, one colleague would gather with a small group of her fellow workers in a public place and talk openly about a Christian topic, hoping to intrigue those who overheard and so invite them to join the discussion. When she moved to the Gulf, we began to meet at a women's café to practice telling each other our chronological Bible stories. By requesting help with our personal translations of these stories, we were able to start conversations with interested nationals. Other teams in our region have met in parks to sing worship songs in English and Arabic. What ministry venues work in your context?

Choosing to Mix Naturally with Muslims

Ministry comes more easily when we make life choices that allow us to mix naturally with Muslims. Most of us are living in the Arab world and we have learned to speak Arabic. We have chosen our neighbourhood because it is a good location to meet 'the right kind of people' (*ijjaar qabl iddaar* – the neighbour before the house). What

choices do you make to help you meet and befriend Arab Muslims? These choices can range from the activities you do as a family to the exercise programme you follow. Rather than exercising alone at home, choose a culturally appropriate means of exercise that will allow you to spend time with Arab Muslims. We can actively seek to accomplish our everyday activities so that we will mix naturally with them. How are others around you seeking to live a life of witness?

We want to love our friends and deepen our friendships with them. Living a life of witness feels less foreign and unnatural if we are able to bond to the local culture. If we do not bond to the culture, we merely venture out periodically into the uncomfortable other world where our Arab Muslim friends live and then retreat back to our comfort zones where we really live. In contrast, a bonded missionary feels less discomfort in getting out and being with the people. In his booklet, *Bonding and the Missionary Task*, E. Thomas Brewster states:

When his sense of belonging is established with the other foreigners, it is then predictable that the missionary will carry out his ministry by the '*foray*' method – he will live isolated from the local people, as the foreigners do, but make a few forays out into the community each week, returning always to the security and isolation of the missionary community. Without bonding he does not have a sense of feeling at home within the local cultural context. Thus, he does not pursue, as a way of life, significant

relationships in the community. When normal bonding is not established, rejection of the people, or even abuse, can occur – it is often reflected in the attitude behind statements like ‘Oh, these people! Why do they always do things *this* way?’ or ‘Somebody ought to teach them how to live’ or ‘Won’t these people *ever* learn?’²

May we go beyond a ‘mad-dash’ ministry that bristles with discomfort at unnatural interactions with ‘those foreigners’. We want to move from tolerating them to bonding so they become more of an *us* than a *them*. If we can develop a sense of bondedness, the discomfort can be transformed into a sense of normalcy in our cross-cultural interactions. Bonding requires our own vulnerability and can take place in times of crisis. Why not ask our national friends for help in a minor crisis rather than automatically turning to the expatriate or missionary community for help?

After ten years of ministry, I finally realized that I had achieved a sense of normalcy and was no longer sitting on the edge of my seat, wondering what to do next in cross-cultural situations. I pray it will not take others so long to reach that point.

Relational Proximity to Deepen Friendships

If evangelism and discipleship are best received through the bonds of friendship, how can we actively progress and deepen our friendships with Arab Muslims? Relational Proximity³ is a tool to examine relationships and brainstorm ways to deepen and enrich

friendships. It defines five dimensions of relationship:

- **Directness:** How direct is the interaction?

- Face to face: We can see facial expressions and body language.

- Phone conversation: We can hear the tone of voice.

- Email/SMS: Mere text makes it harder to ‘read between the lines’.

- **Continuity:** How much interaction is there between us and for how long?

- How often do I see the person?

- How long do I spend interacting with them? Do we have a daily five-minute chat or merely nod a greeting as we pass each other on the street?

- **Multiplexity:** Do we interact in different contexts or roles?

- Do we visit in the home, eat meals together or study together?

- Do we play games together? Have we gone on a trip together?

- **Parity:** Is there mutual respect between us?

- Do we feel a large gap in importance or power between us?

- Do we value each other’s help and advice in our separate areas of expertise?

- **Commonality:** What goals and objectives do we share?

Common purposes and values draw people together. For example, if Khadija and I both want to see our children learn a second language, this common goal means we can encourage each other in achieving it. We might arrange that our children play together so they learn each other’s language.

If I am frustrated that my friendship with Fatma is remaining shallow, I can use the above parameters to make specific plans to work on deepening our friendship. I might begin messaging her phone more frequently or make plans to do something new with her besides merely visiting in her home. I can prayerfully seek God for what common goals we might already have or whether I should help her pursue one of her goals for the sake of deepening my friendship with her.

Conclusion

Half the battle of evangelism is spending time with our Arab Muslim friends. The foundation for our evangelistic ministry is our joy in the Lord that overflows with a desire to glorify Him by pointing people to Christ and His amazing offer of salvation.

We can fill our lives with so many good things. By guarding our schedules and being aware of the culture clash between western advanced planning and eastern spontaneity, we can be diligent about fulfilling our call to minister to Arab Muslims. We want to live lives of witness in our homes and at our hang-outs. We want to truly love our friends so that as a result of our bondedness to the culture, our friendships feel comfortable rather than strained and unnatural. We can

better achieve these things when we are intentional in the way we spend time with Arab Muslims.

If half the battle of evangelism is spending time with our Arab Muslim friends, the other half is opening up spiritual conversations once we are actually with them. Part two of this article will examine our prayerful preparation for evangelism and give a simple format for creating our own personalized evangelistic ministry tools.

May the Lord *prepare the way* for His truth to penetrate the hearts of our friends and the people we meet. And may the Lord continue to *prepare us* for each opportunity He gives to be salt and light among Arab Muslims.

Notes

1. David Lundy, 'The way forward is certainly not to look back', *Insight* (internal AWM prayer circular, Vol. 41, January 2005) 1.
2. E. Thomas Brewster, *Bonding and the Missionary Task*, (Lingua House, Pasadena, 1982) 6.
3. Michael Schluter and David Lee, *The R Factor* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1993). The list and descriptions of the five dimensions of Relational Proximity were drawn from a handout entitled: 'Relational Proximity – a way to improve our Relationships', provided by the Jubilee Centre (jubilee.centre@clara.net) and based on the book.