

Mentoring Cross-Culturally

by John Haines

The question I want to pose at this point is a vital one. How does this 'one-anothering' work itself out in a cross-cultural context? Particularly, what do we, as westerners, need to keep in mind as we encourage Muslim-background believers? What do they have to keep in mind as they, in turn, encourage us?

1. Your Arab friend is counting on you. This thing of relationships is 'old hat' to them. They grew up in interdependent families, something which many of the rest of us know little or nothing about it. When you befriend your Arab neighbour, you are taking on a task much bigger than you imagine. Unlike our shallow American model of transitory relationships that last for a period of time, they expect the relationship to last and develop over time.

2. Your friend is, in fact, uniquely yours. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. Still, I have seen that the tie between East and West, when set, is hard to break, at least from the eastern end. At times, even when the older Christian is wrong, the young one can cling to him or her. Loyalty is a great trait. Let us be aware that it may also blind you or your friends from taking a distance or giving a word of rebuke, when needed.

3. This investment is a costly one. Nothing is free these days, it seems. Friendship certainly is not. Are we willing to stick with our friend,

through rain and sunshine? Can we bear the pressure of personal scrutiny or dependence, even when that comes at an inconvenience to us? In giving to others, we lose some of our time and independence, only to gain it again.

4. Mentoring also means moving on. Here we come to the most difficult aspect of coming alongside another. We all know of the damage done by overly exclusive friendships. It may be that our friendship with one will mean that another with whom we are not as close will be driven away.

Not long ago, I had the delight of a meal with three North African men and their wives. We all knew this time together was a last farewell. All went well until the end, when I embraced the man I had known the longest. Then, in tears, I said, 'and you, too!' Tears come as I write.

Yet, if we had not moved from his city years ago (when other tears were shed), he would not have moved further with others who could help him in areas we could not. He went on to form a close friendship with another man present at the meal. That relationship lasted through hard times, when one slowed down in his walk with the Lord for a period of time.

5. Don't despise your seemingly limited results. The other day a Christian lady said rather glibly, though sincerely: 'Have you seen a lot of converts?' I paused and then

answered, 'No.' After a pause, and some shock on her part, I believe, I told her the wonderful things God is doing in France and North Africa today. Look at a graph of existing Muslim-background believers and note the contrast with what you saw twenty years ago! Today, this group is exercising its unique influence in its own circles and in local churches and is showing growth at an upward angle of possibly seventy-five degrees. Admittedly, such numbers would not likely make the headlines, even of Christian magazines.

Why is this? The Holy Spirit enables you to develop a close relationship with a younger believer. While you see that person's progress, you have difficulty seeing the wider view. However, is this not how our Lord Jesus Christ and, after him, the apostles, transformed the world? Our work—Christ's work—progresses through one person at a time. Our close-up view of our relation with one person over a period of time may blind us to its importance.

We forget the impact of the interrelation of one believer with others. We noticed this in the *Oasis Groups* in

France. This interlocking aspect of training brings great joy to them as well as to us. The growth then deepens in them and through them to friends and churches. Often it will spill over to their country of origin, as does the work of *ACEB* amongst the Kabyles of Algeria.

This One Thing I Do

What is the greatest thing in the world? Simply taking time with people. Often we focus our prayers on a few, especially those going through great struggles. We ask God, 'Where should I go in my friendships? Is it time to move on or should I stay alongside? Is it time to take away the crutch that I may have become to him or her?'

When you remember the experiences of life, I believe you, like me, are warmed by the memory of a man or woman, older in the Lord, who was willing to spend time with you. They gave you advice; they showed compassion. Even when they were not trying to be a blessing, their commitment to the Lord prompted you to say, 'No, I won't give up; just think of what my friend did for me!'