

DISCIPLING MUSLIM BACKGROUND BELIEVERS

By Martin Hall

Case Study

The phone was ringing, will I answer it? I was already late getting out, and now, just as I was about to walk out of the door, the wretched phone was going to make me even later. It had been a crazy day and it wasn't even eleven. In fact it had started the night before when Mustafa and Iman had turned up just as we were about to turn in for the night. I had hoped that we would be able to talk about what Christ meant to us but they just wanted to quiz us about family life, especially "how to make children good children," to use Iman's own words. I had thought of telling her that not taking them on visits at ten thirty at night would be a good start, but then couldn't decide if that was just a cultural issue. Anyway, it was great to see Iman get so interested when I read Jesus' words, "Let the little children come to me."

Working for an American company has its benefits. It pays some of the bills and for another, more importantly, it gives us an acceptable, logical role in society; it stops so many difficult questions. Having to be at work at eight in the morning when your local visitors drop in at ten thirty for a short, two hour visit, is not

one of them. It wouldn't be so bad if Bill could sleep a bit in the afternoon, but his schedule never allows that. So this morning it was hard for him to get going, and he was a grump head. He's the real mood setter in our family so...

That's the trouble with so called tent making; when Paul made tents he didn't have two competing cultural timetables to juggle. I imagine he sat and made his tents, drank tea with the local traders [did they have tea then? imagine a time before tea!], gossiped the gospel and taught the truths of the new Christian faith to those who dropped in. What an integrated lifestyle; how I envy Paul [leaving out the 2 Cor. 11 bit!].

I was still procrastinating and the phone was still ringing. I'd have to answer it. "Sue, Praise God, I thought you were out, this is Shadia" [which meant it was Sameha]. "Ibrahiim's gone to the supermarket", which I decoded to mean he had been taken by the secret police for questioning. "I'm on my way to the doctor's now", which meant she was on her way here. I could see all my plans going out of the window and I was not going to get out of the door!

When To Disciple ?

When we were asked to write an article on discipling MBBs I had two responses. The first, *what do I know about the subject compared to some who will read the article?* The second, *what is the real difference between discipling MBBs and any other new believer?*

Answering the first question took me some time. I felt I knew much more about evangelizing Muslims than about discipling them. However, that very distinction is a misconception. When does discipling begin? The western mindset likes to compartmentalize everything, so we have programs of evange-

lism and programs for discipling. Those who successfully complete the first program are moved into the second. The programs are often good but this compartmentalized mindset will box us into frustration in the Muslim world. This truth is not new to any of us. We have studied, read, and many of us teach others in understanding world views, cultural adjustment, identification and immersion, but do we then return to the program-oriented mindset for answers in how and when to disciple MBBs?

The subject itself assumes it is believers we are discipling, when the reality is that discipling begins before we even meet the Muslim and certainly before they believe. We are observed, watched and discussed. What we say, what we do, how we react; all of this and much more is noted and will be drawn upon as the

person moves along the salvation continuum. As topics concerning money, honesty, family, sex, etc. arise we discuss them giving our Christian perspective. Of course, at this point our overriding desire is to share Christ and help them see their need of a Saviour. But reading with them Christ's teaching on these subjects is doing just that. We are introducing them to the real Christ and discipling has begun.

In the life of Jesus we see just such a pattern. To the Samaritan woman at the well [whose creed included "God is one and Moses is the prophet of God"], he proclaimed that he was the living water, the source of life and spoke to her about her marriage relationships. Would we have wanted to stop with the proclamation, leaving the marriage bit for after a conversion event?

SALVATION CONTINUUM 1

EVANGELISM

The only purpose in evangelism is salvation.
Our only job at this point is to rescue people from the "burning ship".

DISCIPLESHIP

After salvation the new believer must be taught how to live and grow in his / her new faith.

SALVATION CONTINUUM 2

EVANGELISM

DISCIPLING

Evangelism and discipleship are seen as operating in parallel with each other. Truths about Christian living taught now will both reveal Christ to the non-believer and lay a foundation to build on when they believe. Some would add that in doing this we are putting out the flames of the burning ship, or using Christ's analogy being salt in the world / slowing down its decay.

DISCIPLESHIP

Before salvation a foundation of Christian beliefs and values has been laid. Now, as a disciple of Christ, this foundation can be drawn upon, both by the Holy Spirit and by the discipler, to boost the growth of the new believer. Discipleship is an ongoing process.

What To Disciple ?

Let us move on to the second question I raised; what is the difference between discipling an MBB and any other new believer? All new believers need to be nurtured in their faith, they need to get a Biblical view of God and to appropriate that view into their own lives. They need to begin to know what it means to be "in Christ", a term Paul uses some 200 times when writing to the new believers of Turkey, Greece & Italy. To the Colossians, with their tendency to revert back to appeasing spirits & legalistic religion, not recognizing the position they had in Christ, Paul writes "you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" [Col.2:10]. Christ is all you need. To the Galatians he asks, "who has placed the evil eye upon you?" [Gal.3:1 translating the Greek literally] so that you now trust in something other than Christ.

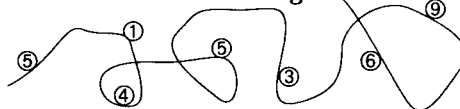
The sufficiency and supremacy of Christ was Paul's message to the new believers and so it must be ours. But that is a message which all new believers, whatever their background, need to grasp, to internalize and live out; it is not something particular to MBBs. In fact, in terms of content I do not think that there is any difference. We all share a fallen human nature even though different societies have different strengths and weaknesses. [Therefore any good discipleship manual will give us an outline for areas to cover.] The area of difference, as I see it, is in the delivery of that material.

The case study I opened this article with highlights what I consider to be the fundamental to discipling MBBs. It is so

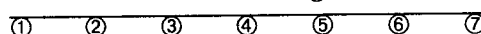
simple and basic; it is availability. Sue's success in discipling is not based on theological correctness, nor on a great system of discipleship, it is based on being available and being flexible. That availability and flexibility is costly, easy to write about but not easy to live out, especially for many of us who during the course of our day have to move back and forth between cultures with their differing demands on us.

Although I see costly availability as the key, it is obvious that in and of itself it is nothing. "Aim at nothing and you're sure to get it," as the saying goes. We need to be sure that in all our contacts with both Ms and MBBs we have an aim. If our aim is just to be available then we are aiming at nothing. It is here that our courses can help us, having a series of studies that we know well, are comfortable with and can draw upon when we find the opportunity. It is amazing how often having an aim provides the opportunity. Now the other key word, flexibility, kicks in. We must be willing to bead think, rather than linearly think, jumping around in our course as the opportunities arise and the Holy Spirit leads us.

Courses: Bead Thinking



Courses: Linear Thinking



In summary we aim for profound simplicity, availability, clear aims about what we want to communicate and flexibility in the whens and hows.