

Continuity, Discontinuity, and Islam: Guidance from a BMB Leader for Mentors of BMBs

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First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who are actively involved in discipling our community, my brothers and sisters, believers who come from a Muslim background (BMBs). As followers of Christ who opened our eyes “to turn them from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18), we belong to one body and are bound together by the love of God into a true unity through Jesus Christ, not uniformity.

Jesus, with his blood, “purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

Although there are many resources available to learn how to disciple and mentor BMBs, in this article, I will share my personal experience and provide some best practices to help BMBs find their identity in Christ the Messiah and the relationship between their Christian faith and their Islamic heritage. My life has been transformed by the power of Jesus Christ; this is what shaped me and gave me insight.

Some of my most cherished qualities and values I did not learn in church, but from my Muslim family in Northern Sudan.

My Journey with Christ

Initially, I came into the world in Northern Sudan into a large, devout Muslim family. Although I grew up in a Muslim home, some core principles, and virtues I cherish till now in my life, I did not learn in a church environment but through my Muslim family, whom I deeply love and miss so much, especially my devout Muslim grandfather, fervently committed to the Islamic belief and faith. He taught me the values of hospitality, showing respect to others, and fostering a deep sense of connection with the family. These principles remain close to my heart, and I am doing whatever it takes to pass these values on to my children. A cherished memory is of my grandfather’s generous street feasts during the month of Ramadan. He would extend an invitation to anyone on the street to join the evening meal if they were unable to reach their homes in time for the breaking of the fast. This act reflected his immense generosity and hospitality, which still motivates me to this day.

When I was only eight, my father took me to a Qur’an school without explaining why, where, or how long I would be there. At the Quran school, I cried myself to sleep every night, missing my family, my mother, and my community. I was in a small village in the middle of the desert of Northern Sudan and had no idea what would happen to me there. I thought my

father would come back soon. But days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months, and two years later, my father finally came to take me home. While at the Quran school, I had no chance to live my childhood, as it was buried in the sand of the desert.

The time at the Quran school shaped my identity. There, I learned that my existence was only meaningful within the Islamic Ummah, and that I no longer solely belonged to my immediate family but to the larger Islamic community “the Umma” and had dedicated my life to serving it. I grew up loving Islam and ready to do anything to protect and support my Islamic Ummah.

The Ummah is a term used in Islamic culture to refer to the global community of Muslims. It encompasses people of different races, nationalities, and cultures that share the same faith. The word Ummah is derived from the Arabic word “umm,” which means “mother.” In Islamic belief, the Ummah is significant in the life of any Muslim. It is considered a source of care, love, and support, much like a mother. Muslims believe that protecting, preserving, and supporting the Ummah is a crucial duty, and it is one’s responsibility to do so. With the Ummah, a person can thrive and succeed in life.

The second lesson I learned at Qur’an School was that one’s life has no value without belief in God. As a Muslim, I have never doubted the existence of God. This is why I find it much more fulfilling to talk to my Muslim friends than to try to convince the godless, self-centered people in the west who believe God must explain himself to them in order to believe in him! The notion of a sovereign God that creates the universe is not something I learned in church; I had this conviction even when I was still a Muslim. At the Qur’an School, I was taught to have reverence for God and that life loses its meaning if God is not a part of it. This shaped my life and identity.

After attending Qur’anic school, I underwent some changes, both positive and negative. My status in the family improved, and my grandfather

started to ask me to sit beside him. Despite still being a child, I began to behave more like an adult. I stopped greeting women and started adopting some fanatical beliefs. My loyalty was exclusively to the Muslim Ummah, and I started to be against anything outside of it, including Jews and Christians. I developed a strong hatred and never felt inclined towards Christianity, nor did I ever try to build any bridges with them.

One day, a Christian from Southern Sudan sat next to me at school. His name was Zakaria. I hated him because he was a Christian from Southern Sudan. I suggested to my friends, "We need to kill him because he's an infidel." For two years, we prayed daily for the elimination of Zakaria. That night—in sha'a-llah—our dreams were to be fulfilled.

We were ready: together with my friends, I sat in a tree and looked down at the path below us, which was only dimly lit by the moonlight. The light of a torch flickered in the distance, getting closer and closer. Soon it was only a few meters away from us. My heart was racing. We quickly reached for our rifles, to the barrels of which we had previously attached bayonets. Just before Zakaria walked right under our tree with his torch, I gave the signal. Together with a friend, I jumped down from the branch and landed with my jumping boots directly on Zakaria's back, who slumped to the ground from the force of our bodies.

Now the others also jumped down from the tree. One tied Zakaria's hands with a rope, another pressed his hands over his mouth. Zakaria jerked his head up. All I could see of his dark face was the white of his eyes, wide open in fear and pain. First, we took our weapon butts and struck his body. Then we turned the weapons round and stabbed his back, legs and arms with the knife blades on the barrel of the guns. Zakaria's screams became weaker and weaker until he stopped screaming altogether. I could feel his body twitching beneath me, becoming weaker and weaker. As if in a frenzy, I continued to beat and stab him.

"Come on, stop it, he's already dead!" shouted my friend Mustafa, who had been pressing his hands over Zakaria's mouth the whole time.

Only now did I stop, straighten up and nod to the others. Once again, I looked down at Zakaria, who was lying lifeless on the forest floor. We walked quickly back to our camp. Above us, the sky was already turning pink. Dawn was breaking and it was time for morning prayers: "Allahu akbar," I murmured, as a feeling of pride welled up inside me. We washed ourselves and did the morning prayer. Zakaria never came back to school. That day I thought I did something good to please Allah.

One day, my uncle, who was a devout Muslim, converted to Christianity. As a result, our family rejected him. I loved him dearly and wanted to help bring him back to Islam. I began to question who Jesus Christ really was and turned to the Qur'an for answers. As I read about Jesus in the Qur'an, I found myself falling in love with Jesus. However, this did not cause me to renounce my faith in Islam and become a Christian.

During a visit to my cousin who was critically ill in a hospital, I encountered two Egyptian Coptic Christians in the intensive care unit. They requested to pray for my cousin, which surprised me, as I wasn't aware of Christians praying or believing in God. Despite my reluctance, I allowed them to pray as I didn't want to offend them. However, I made it clear that I didn't want to see them again. In the Middle East, it's not acceptable to be impolite to guests, which is why I couldn't refuse their request.

They prayed a prayer that deeply touched me. Their words were full of love, and they spoke to God as if they had a personal relationship with Him. I was amazed that these people, who were not of my faith, could converse with God in such a way that I couldn't. As soon as they finished their prayer with an "Amen," my cousin opened his eyes after being in a coma for four weeks, and life returned to him.

This night, Jesus opened my eyes to see Him through the actions of two Christians who risked coming and praying. One of them also shared the gospel with me, the first Christian who spoke to me about Jesus. I asked Jesus to come into my life and change me if He was truly the one this person was speaking about. I surrendered my life to Christ not

because I was convinced that Christianity or Islam was right or wrong, the Bible was not corrupted, or the Trinity was real; I still had many questions and doubts at that time. Rather, I gave my life to Christ because He touched my heart.

Soon after that, I told my father, "I became a Christian." Unfortunately, my family disowned me because of my decision. Looking back, I regret the way I spoke to my father during that time. If I could go back, I would handle things differently. I realize now that I got into a conflict with my family too quickly before they had a chance to see the positive changes that had taken place in my life.

The rejection I faced from my family had a profound impact on the way I interacted with them and even thought about them. This was mainly due to one of the Christians who told me, "There is no fellowship between darkness and light." He made it clear that my family represented the darkness, and as a follower of Christ, I represented the light. I was sincere in my decision to follow Jesus, and I felt the need to sever all ties with my past. However, in hindsight, I don't believe this is what Jesus would have wanted me to do. Unfortunately, my decision to leave my family led them to disowning me.

Many years after I had to leave Sudan, I went back to Egypt for the first time after many years. While attending a conference, one evening I met a Sudanese pastor who approached me after I finished my lecture. He asked me where I came from, and as I was telling him my story, he began to cry. I asked him why he was crying, and he replied, "Do you remember me?" I was confused as I didn't think we had ever met before. He then revealed his name to be Zakaria, and the memories of the last time I saw him, on that dark night when I almost killed him, came rushing back. The moment he said his name, I could see the injuries that I had caused him. I felt an overwhelming sense of shame and wished to disappear. It was a moment that I could not handle.

I thought Zakaria would remind me of the pain I had caused him in the past. But instead, he surprised me with something that I never thought

was possible. He said, “Yassir, because you hated me so much, I have been praying for you.” With a broken arm, he took out his Bible and showed me that he had been praying for me for many years. It was then that I realized why God loved and dealt with someone like me—because of the prayer and love of a person like Zakaria. That night in Cairo, God confronted me with the truth that I hope all believers should know. We never sought Jesus; HE was the one who was always seeking us. I am grateful for the church in the Middle East, who despite rejection and persecution, are being light and salt to this world. On that night, the Lord taught me a valuable lesson: to hate those who hate you is easy and human, but to love those who hate you, you need someone whose name is Jesus Christ.

BMBs’ Identity in Christ

There are a few things you can do to help people like me, who come from a Muslim background, to grow into a healthy identity as followers of Christ within their own communities. These reflections are based on my own personal experiences, mistakes, and discipleship.

Firstly, it’s important to give new believers from Muslim backgrounds time to be shaped by God through the power of the Holy Spirit so that they can become more like Christ. I don’t know of any father who would reject their child when they become better people, exhibiting love, care, and respect. However, to be transformed into the image of Christ, this process requires time and prayer. It’s not something that can be achieved solely through a program, method, or strategy.

Secondly, once BMBs have had time to grow, help them to tell their story and walk with Jesus Christ. Teach them to find the correct vocabulary for sharing their new faith with their community. Imagine that I am a new believer who has just left my former faith. I want to be a part of you and the Christian church, and I sincerely want you to accept me. What would I do? I will start telling you terrible things about Islam to

convince you that I am genuine so that you will accept and admit me into your club. This ruptures my relationship with my community, sometimes beyond repair. Instead, you can help us find a different narrative and wording to communicate what Jesus Christ did in our lives, to give us the confidence that Jesus Christ touched our hearts and changed our lives. It would help if you also reminded us repeatedly that we are on a journey of change. Jesus is the one who works in our lives and causes us to be transformed into HIS image.

BMBs struggle with being stereotyped and not trusted by CBBs. Many Christians in the Middle East simply don't believe that a Muslim can become a follower of Christ. Moreover, some Muslims have said that they have become Christians when they have not. However, the pressure that a BMB feels to constantly prove his faith to the church can cause BMBs to break all the bridges and ties that relate to their community and societies. Instead, we need to give those new believers time to be changed by Jesus Christ.

My family's rejection was not based on a theological debate or arguments but because of the way that I miscommunicated what had happened to me. The irony is that my father and family rejected and persecuted me because they loved me and didn't want to lose me. According to them, and according to what I told them, I became an infidel and will go to hell. Because of their love for me, they wanted to prevent me from that.

In the gospel of John chapter 4, Nicodemus approached Jesus and acknowledged that the things He did could only be done by someone who came from God. Luke also described the gospel and the good news to Theophilus in Acts 1:1 as all that Jesus began "to do and to teach." We must follow His example by doing what He did and then teaching others. We should strive to reflect Christ in our lives and be the hope of glory that our community needs. This takes time, but we should remain committed to finding the right words to communicate our experiences and remain connected to our community, as Jesus began "to do and

to teach.” This is the example we need to follow: to do and follow what Jesus Christ did and then to teach. People must see the reality of Christ in us, “the hope of glory.” All these things need time. Please help us find the narrative and the wording to communicate what Jesus Christ did in our lives. Please help us to remain within our community, because our community means a lot to us and needs us.

Continuity or Discontinuity between Islam and Christianity?

Navigating a healthy identity in Christ as BMBs is just part of a more extensive journey of relating our faith in Christ to our Muslim heritage. To help BMBs grow toward maturity, we should understand Islam and how it relates to faith in Christ. Our discipleship courses should not be Islam courses—we should avoid that. However, keeping some Islamic issues in the back of our minds can help us walk with BMBs as they sort through their Muslim background in the light of Christ.

It is essential to distinguish between Islam and Muslims. Muslims are people, and we should build bridges to understand them better. Islam is more than just a religion; it has a socio-political system, a socio-educational system, a judiciary system, and even a military system. Additionally, Islam is a culture. Sometimes, it is not easy to distinguish between what is culture and what is religion. In the Middle East, some issues are expected of everybody. We might even say that CBBs in the Middle East are Christian by religion but Muslim by culture.

In the Western culture, the individual is the core, and their life is usually represented as a big circle. This circle consists of various aspects of life, such as faith, family, friends, work, and other things that make up an individual's life. However, for Muslims and BMBs, their faith or religion is the big circle that encompasses all aspects of their life. They sort everything inside this big circle of religion and faith. For instance, if a Muslim is offered food that is not permissible by Islamic law, they might

decline by saying, “I cannot eat it because I am a Muslim.” Similarly, there are specific job roles that they can or cannot perform due to their faith. Religion is not just a part of their life; it is the foundation of their life, and everything else falls under it.

In discipling relationships with Muslims who have converted to Christianity, Westerners need to understand that their Western understanding of God and theology may not be applicable. They need to learn to see the world and their faith from the perspective of the Muslim converts. It is hard to label some things as either Islam, religion, or culture, and there is no one version of Islam or type of Muslim. Discipling Sufi Muslims is different from discipling Ahmadiyya Muslims, or those from the Muslim Brotherhood, or British Muslims of Bangladeshi origin. Hence, there is no single ultimate or best system or approach for discipling all Muslim converts. However, we can learn from experiences and methods and be open to learning and contextualizing.

The Three Layers of the Islamic “Atmosphere”

For me, Islamic culture, or any culture, is like the earth’s atmosphere. An atmosphere has different layers, and Islamic culture can be divided into three: Good, Neutral and Destructive.

Layer 1: The Good (Positive)

In Islamic culture, there are several positive values, including hospitality, respect for elders, and a strong emphasis on family. As believers in Christ, individuals from a Muslim background should continue to uphold and embody these values. Additionally, expressing and demonstrating one’s faith and acknowledging its crucial role in one’s life is a valuable trait that should be retained as a disciple of Jesus.

During my time in a Qur’anic school, I learned two essential things: fellowship, also known as the Ummah, and belief in God. These two principles are critical when dealing with a Muslim-born believer. BMBs are

fundamentalists in a positive sense, meaning to have a strong affection for the family, communities, and the devotion to God they were raised with. That is why it is so painful for them to leave their homes, families, and communities.

What I missed most when I left Islam and first joined the Christian church is community, the fellowship (Ummah). The Ummah concept is in total alignment with the word of God. Biblical faith is not Western individualism—that does not help us to live together. For BMBs, the most fundamental thing that we need is a sense of belonging, a sense of identity. This could only be lived collectively for BMBs. If we turn to the Bible in the Book of Acts, they had everything in common. This church in the Book of Acts is the church of the BMBs—everything in common, accountable to each other. This I learned at the Qur'an School.

These are examples of good things from Islamic culture, things BMBs should keep when they follow Jesus.

Layer 2: The Neutral

Secondly, in every culture, there are some things which are neutral. Whether you do it or not, it does not harm you, and it does not bring any confusion: food, color, and all those things. I don't think as BMBs we need to spend much time in changing these neutral things when we follow Jesus.

Layer 3: The Destructive

The third aspect of culture is crucial and deserves more time to be fleshed out. These are those elements of Muslim culture which can be destructive. These need to be filtered through the Word of God with care and wisdom.

Revelation and the Qur'an

Some people have asserted that the Qur'an is a revelation from God. I would not say there is a revelation in the Qur'an from God. All I can say is

that God is putting his fingerprints all over and showing himself through many things, including in Islam.

Ida Glaser—who I appreciate very much—said that Islam can be related to Moses because of the law.¹ This is partly correct, because the Shari’a has a Jewish background. However, the problem with making this connection is that Shari’a is missing a major component—Allah does not make a covenant with his people. In the OT law, God makes a covenant first with his people to be with them and walk with them, and then he gave them the Law. Also, the purpose of Shari’a is different from the purpose of the OT law. The OT law’s purpose was to show human beings’ sinfulness, but in and of itself the Law would never solve their problems. But in Islam, the purpose of the Shari’a is to sanctify, and through the obedience of the law people come to God.

These differences between the Bible and the Shari’a show that these similarities are not divine revelation—only divine fingerprints at best. Not every truth is revelation, but every revelation is truth. This distinction helps me when I deal with the issues of Islam. There are some good things, and I will not spend a lot of time trying to challenge those portions of Islam, but I cannot claim they are revelation.

Ethics and Sin

One of the challenges that I see in the discipling of BMBs is the idea of sin and ethics. In the ideas we inherited from Islam, sin is not something that is defined as a personal offense against God as it is in the Bible. In Islam, you differentiate between big sins, small sins, gray sins, large sins, which allows you to excuse certain sins as insignificant. The Bible, however, is very clear about sin, and so you cannot continue in Islam’s understanding of sin.

1 Ida Glaser, *Thinking Biblically about Islam: Genesis, Transfiguration, Transformation* (Langham Global Library, 2016).

Good Works

This whole issue of good works is tricky for BMBs and needs to be addressed biblically. The New Testament teaches that God created us to do good works in Christ. But then we have salvation by grace through faith and its tension with the book of James, a very typical tension that we have as BMBs. BMBs need to have their previous understanding of works replaced by a solid theology that reconciles grace and works in a good balance.

Sometimes the normal evangelical way of talking about this does not help. When a BMB comes to church and hears, “You are saved once and forever,” this is emphasizing his previous negative picture of Christianity. Before I met Jesus, Muslims used to tell me that Christians could do anything and get away with it. And honestly, it seems like some Christians are living their faith in this way, which is a serious matter. But ultimately, BMBs need to replace their previous understanding with a biblical understanding of grace and good works.

Who is God?

One of the biggest areas of discontinuity between Islam and Christianity is who God is. The similarities in the concept of God for Christians and Muslims are like two people looking at a forest from far away, where all the trees look similar. If a Muslim looks towards God, and I look towards God—both of us from far away—we both say we are looking into a forest with trees. But the closer we get, we realize there are tall trees, small trees, yellow trees; therefore our concepts of God are different upon closer inspection.

For me, the difference is not about terminology and philology. When I read my Bible, it says in Genesis 1:1, “*Fil badi khalaaq **Allah** issamawat wa al-ard.*” (“*In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the Earth.*”) As an Arabic speaker, I continue to use the word “Allah.” As a Christian, however, I need to fill the concept of God with new content, because

now I have “entered the forest,” so to speak. I not only say, “praise be to Allah”—which I said as a Muslim and continue to say—but I bring it further: “Praise be to Allah, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us in his mercy” (1 Pet. 1:3). I fill the word Allah with adjectives and realities of the Trinity from 1 Peter 1.

Another discontinuity is in our relationship to God. At the Qur’anic school, I learned to fear God. God was never a positive person to whom I would run to or relate to. What I needed to understand is that I am a child of God, and he is my father. I am no longer a slave, and I should not behave like it. We need continuity in that area.

Likewise, I’ve taken the concepts of God’s mercy and grace and redefined them in my new understanding of him. In Islam, *rahmat Allah* (God’s mercy) means that God is merciful and therefore gives me health, or something else that I desire. But as a follower of Christ, I have come to know that *rahmat Allah* is in the relationship with him, when he gives us second birth to believe in Jesus, to be born again. We are passive, not active. You and I don’t do anything for it. We are born through it.

God’s grace (*na’mah*) is also misconstrued in Islam. In Arabic, we call food, *na’mah*, which is why you should not throw it on the street. But *na’mah*, in the biblical sense, is the receiving of what we cannot deserve, do not deserve, and cannot earn, period. This is a redefinition of grace.

In my relationship with God, I had to discover, first, that God is my father. In Islam, I never could call Allah father. Secondly, God makes an unconditional covenant with me out of his divine initiative, as he did with Abraham, Noah, and in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. This is going to replace Islamic predestination and many other Islamic ideas. So, if I could summarize the difference between the concept of Allah in Islam and in the Bible (even if we use the same word), the fundamental difference is the relationship. All these aspects without a relationship are nothing. All the attributes of God, if we don’t tie them to our relationship, don’t make any sense.

We need to fill our understanding of Allah with this biblical content, without picking a fight that Muslims believe in a different God than we do. The more we define it and fill it with biblical truth, the more people will realize it. We don't always have to say what we are against, but we always say what we are for. Make it positive.

And through that, God will form Muslims and us as BMBs. As I said in the beginning, when I became a follower of Christ, I had no idea if the Bible was really the truth. I had many questions. I had never read it. The whole issue of the Trinity, Christian morals, and other doctrinal concepts was not something I was convinced of cognitively. It was a journey, and this journey could be long or short, but it's a journey. That's why all these terminologies need to be filled again for BMBs.

Superiority

There is another area of discontinuity with our Muslim background, an idol that needs to be addressed for BMBs, and that is superiority. When I was a Muslim, they used to tell us, "*kuntum khayra ummatin ukh'rijat lilnnāsi*" ("you are the best people raised for mankind", Surat Al-Imran 3:110). We feel superior. The Qur'an tells us that we are the best Ummah. Mark Durie addresses this aspect of superiority in his book, *Liberty to the Captives*. It is a very important aspect, a big idol that needs to be replaced. As BMBs, we have many problems because of this superiority, which is why our churches are dividing. Anyone working among Arabic-speaking BMBs or Farsi-speaking BMBs knows what I'm talking about. This is something we brought with us from our Muslim background that needs to be replaced through the holiness of Christ. Without Christ, we are nobody; we are superior to nobody. We need to understand that every man and every woman is created in the image of God.

Women

The last idol I share that needs to be corrected is the whole understanding about women. As a child, I was taught that women have a lack of understanding and faith. A woman can never be a believer or a

person of faith like a man. Then you come to the Bible, and right at the beginning, God says, “He created man and woman in His image.” One of the most pressing issues whenever I am with BMBs is the gender issue—it’s a big issue of concern. Recently, I was with a large group of Iranian BMBs to speak about this issue, and one of the brothers stood and said, “Do you mean that my wife is equal like me?” I said, “Well, exactly, I mean that. She is even better than you.” Then there was some discussion there. These are part of the issues we cannot tolerate and need total discontinuity with our Muslim background.

Let me conclude with this. When you tell someone like me to continue with some things in my Muslim background and to discontinue other things, the way that you reason it with me is very important. I’ll give you an example. You can come and say to me, “You need to read your Bible.” Why? “Because you need to have a quiet time, so that you will grow spiritually, etc.” Then I will try. The day that I fail to do my quiet time, I feel guilty because I did not keep my commitment or word. But there is another way that you can help me in a better way. You should tell me, “Read your Bible, because Jesus read the Bible.” You should tell me, “Pray, because Jesus prayed.” Even if I’m not in a good mood or don’t feel like doing it, I will pray because of the *sunna* of Jesus—he prayed. When I cannot love people, I must stick to the *sunna* of Jesus. It’s not an option.

Sometimes we present aspects of Christianity like, “You really could do it. You don’t have to.” No, we *must*. Jesus prayed. And if I follow him, I need to pray. You can call this legalistic or whatever name you like. But this path will help someone like me, and other BMBs, much better than coming in with the Western idea of democracy—“if you feel like it.” Say to me, “Jesus did it, and it is written in the Bible,” and this should be the way you present it. If you say to me, “Tell the truth, because Jesus is the truth. Love your enemies, because Jesus did that,” this will be a totally different motivation for me to follow things, than if you say to me, “As English and Europeans, our yes is yes, and our no is no.” I don’t want to be English or European. I want to follow Jesus.

I believe through the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we can redeem many terminologies. Of course, Islam obtained many truthful ideas—whether intentionally or unintentionally. I don't want to call them biblical ideas, but they are ideas that have a biblical touch.

If you think about the five pillars of Islam, including the Shahada, they are very important for me as a Christian. I could redeem that. When you disciple a BMB like me, and you teach me how to respond when somebody asks what I believe, I should not start with my testimony. I should start with the Apostles' Creed. This is my Shahada. I just recite that. That way we redeem the concept of the Shahada.

We need to redeem the concept of prayer. In Islam, salat refers only to the five daily prayers prayed towards Mecca. You need to redeem that, to ask, "What does that mean?" and to tell me what it means to fill it biblically. I believe there is a lot of room for that.

We can redeem the concept of "abd" (slave). In the Old Testament, the abd (slave) comes to his master and says, "I would like to live with you freely." I tell BMBs, "I am *Abdullah* (slave of God), and I came to God, and I said to him, 'I have the freedom, but I don't want it. Guide me, direct me.'" With Islamic terminologies, Christians should not spend time trying to "civilize" us and say, "As a Christian, don't use this word. You need to speak this way. Don't say 'Allah,' say 'Rab.' Don't say, 'Salaam alaykum,' say 'salam lakum.'" In all these Christian things, Christians would like for us to be conformed to a club or their idea of Christianity. We should avoid that. Worship is about bringing all aspects of our lives to God. Whole-life discipleship of BMBs is very important.

We should not buy into the idea of insider or outsider either, Muslim communities, or non-Muslim. No, not theologically, just biblically. We always should be insiders, culturally. Otherwise, we will not help. Theologically, we cannot be insiders in many things pertaining to Islam or the Qur'an. There is also a difference between an insider applying the Islamic terminology "as is" and an insider who seeks to redeem an aspect

of it. I'm not saying that Islam has everything we need, but there is a large portion of things we could talk about and redeem and fill with a new aspect of things.

It's always good to share helpful things that could assist us in discipleship. But the minute we turn everything to an ideology, to a concept, we will get stuck. That's why I think working with Muslims, sharing the gospel with them, needs time. If you don't have time, don't even try it. Evangelicals preach three points, a summary, and a main point. I don't know where they get this from. We BMBs think in a picture. I need you to draw a picture with dimensions for me. This is why we are culturally very close to the Coptic Church and to the Oriental churches, because you see, even in the liturgy, there is time.

The person who led me to Christ started with the things that I believe in—in God and the things we had in common. First, I had to know that he was believing in God, so that he would be qualified in my eyes as someone worth listening to. As a Muslim, I used to believe we are the best Ummah, we have the best religion, so you really need to give me something better than what I know. And this is exactly what that Christian brother did. He started on common ground, speaking about the way to God and put the miracle that happened into perspective for me—the healing of my relative. I don't think we can make a method out of all this. But we should always start with where people are and not where we are. Secondly, we should always start with what they know, not what we know, and then guide them from there.

People sometimes ask questions about Muhammad. Please don't allow us BMBs to communicate in a way that our Muslim friends will hate us because we are nasty about Muhammad. I don't support any kind of polemic against Muhammad—polemic does not get us anywhere. Once, I was asked at the airport in an Islamic country if I believe that Muhammad is a Prophet and if I convert Muslims to Christianity. For the first question I told them, "I say that Muhammad is a prophet because my Muslim friends say so. I respect Muhammad as a prophet because he matters

to my friends.” And because I deeply love and value my Muslim friends, I’m not going to be polemical against Muhammad, but I am a follower of Christ.” So instead of speaking more about Muhammad, I need to speak more about what I believe in and speak about it in a positive sense. We should always avoid trying to teach Muslims Islam. This is not our job, and we should not try to educate a Muslim about Muhammad. We need to listen to what *they* say about Muhammad. We can say, “Tell me, what do you think about it?” And always answer questions by asking a question. Never give a straightforward answer for that.

Closing Remarks

I want to encourage you, no matter where you are in your journey. Working with Muslims can be difficult, and working with Muslim-Back-ground Believers (BMBs) can be even more challenging. However, I assure you that your efforts are not in vain. Your prayers are not in vain, and the difficulties you face in learning the language and culture are not in vain. I can say with 100% certainty that in heaven, we will sit with our BMB brothers and sisters and rejoice that the Lord used our weaknesses to glorify Himself. So please, don’t give up. We need you. Our people need you. The Muslim world needs you. Please keep praying. In the month of Ramadan, I pray every morning for my mother because I know she is fasting and seeking God. And the Lord promises that those who seek Him will find Him. It’s important to distinguish between Islam as a theology and Muslims as people. Muslims are our family, friends, and neighbors; Christ deeply loves them. He shed His blood for them. I don’t know your story, but I thank you for trying to understand us as BMBs and engage with our people. Your work will impact the lives of those around you and those whom the Lord has entrusted to you. So please, never give up. Keep pushing forward, and know your labor is of great value.

Questions for Conversation

1. To what extent does Bishop Yassir's story help you better understand the experience and needs of the Muslims and Muslim-background believers that you know?
2. What do you think about Bishop Yassir's claims that the Ummah and other Islamic concepts can be redeemed in Christ? In your context, how would you guide new believers to wisely discern the good, neutral, and harmful elements in their cultural and religious environment?
3. What strikes you most from Bishop Yassir's counsel for discipling new BMBs? How does it compare to other advice you have received? What ideas and questions does it stimulate for you in your context?

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