Making Disciples 3

Session Three

Some complexities and obstacles in discipling BMBs*

1. Introduction

One of the great challenges facing us is what Harvey Conn has called, *"a new kind of apologetic for reaching Islam"* [**Missionary Myths about Islam** – Muslim World Pulse, vi, 1977]. This is not just in the area of truth. There are a host of complexities and obstacles not only in reaching people, but in discipling them. Below are some of these but first some essential qualities.

- **Some essential qualities in the discipleship relationship**
  - **Discipleship is caught and not taught.** It isn't done simply through Bible teaching sessions. It needs lots of time and group discussions to come to practical applications.
  - **Discipleship embraces all subjects** – good diet, health care, budgeting, spending money etc. Make no division between secular and spiritual. All areas are to come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
  - **Discipleship embraces all activities** – formal times (prayer and Bible study) but also sharing meals, travelling, watching a football match, helping the sick etc. In particular, discipleship includes working together ***"in the cause of the Gospel"***. (Phil. 4:3)
  - **Discipleship demands both time commitment and an open home.** (Also keep in mind personal and family survival.)
  - **Discipleship will always set high standards** – "***So that you will not sin"*** is the standard of 1 Jn. 2:1. Don't lower the standard! However, discipleship will always accept the person who falls short of that standard! Always keep relationships with correction.
  - **Discipleship will have differing cultural expressions.** In England early rising for a lengthy quiet time is a mark of spirituality. In the Arab World communal worship is valued more highly than private worship.
  - **Discipleship requires a good dose of realism and faith in God's sovereignty.** Probabilities of miscommunication are high. Often the strains of living cross-culturally are just too much. Remember 1 Thess. 2:7-12.

2. The Islamic worldview of God, of man, of Jesus, of salvation, of the Holy Spirit, of revelation and the Scriptures, of society, of angels/demons and the occult and finally of eschatology.

Carefully go through each of these with the BMB – probably following the outline below:

- **The basic Islamic assumptions** (just in outline for the first in the list – God)
  - God is absolutely other *(Tanzih)*
  - God is uniquely one *(Tawhid)*
  - God relates to the world only by His creative word
  - God is absolutely free
- **Points of conflict with the Biblical view**
  - God is unknown and unknowable.
  - God is not personal or spiritual.
  - God is not active in history. He doesn't 'come down' or enter history.
  - God isn't holy/righteous in the sense of hating sin and separating Himself from sin.

- God has no feelings or affections.
- God is not thought of as binding Himself by a covenant with man.
- God is not triune in nature.

➢ **Other relevant Islamic ideas/attitudes** (to God)

- Muslims tend to understand religious language very literally and materially.
- Faith is intellectual acceptance and action in obedience to Islamic law – a mental acceptance of the concept of God.
- It is not a moral response to a person.

➢ **Consequences of the Islamic view**

- No possibility of a personal relationship with God
- No possibility of real rationality
- No possibility of real morality – everything is relative

We could continue on through all the other topics. Islam represents a thorough-going repression of the knowledge man can have of God and His requirements of man. This repression also applies to man's guilt and his impotence to save himself. Islam also denies and/or radically re-interprets many themes of Biblical revelation. This is the repression of truth. A BMB needs these areas of repression exposed and replaced with Biblical truth. This is a long process and needs much patient Bible teaching to help him:

✓ To explain his faith to an unbeliever (1 Pet. 3:15)
✓ To be liberated by the truth himself in relationship with God

What is needed is a culture-sensitive series of books on 'Systematic Theology' that can be worked through as appropriate to need.

[see Sam Schlorff's book, **Discipleship in an Islamic Society**, AWM.]

3. Social pressures/persecution

There are many and varied forms of social pressure. Here are a few:

3.1 Divided loyalties: should BMBs be schizophrenic?

People are conditioned to act for the sake of family, kinship group and ultimately the 'Ummah'. Family ties are strong and more so for women/wives (sometimes due to fear of divorce, but more often because the involvement in the occult is stronger for women). Sometimes women BMBs find it easier to be incorporated into an 'international church' rather than a local one. Ideally a whole family turning to the Lord is the best environment for BMB women. A family house church is ideal for the incorporation of women into the fellowship.

Single fellows are often tied into their families due to economic hardships. Unemployment is between 60%-70% among the under 30s in North Africa. So not offending the family is important for food, housing, insurance and often employment.

The key to all this is to help BMBs develop a healthy identity. Part of this is developing for them meaningful worship so they become deeply involved emotionally with the realities of discipleship.

3.2 Baptism provokes persecution

Often the sign of a changed allegiance away from Islam is baptism. It is often at this point (if known) that persecution starts in earnest. Shame has been brought on the family, village etc. In Morocco, most BMBs have not been baptised because they fear the consequences – probable imprisonment. In most areas baptism occurs secretly – only in front of a few believers.

3.3 A lack of regular commitment

Most BMBs are not time-oriented. They are event-oriented. So expectations of a regular time of discipleship on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 will be a disappointment to a discipler. So learn to

buy up every opportunity to disciple. Don't allocate time beforehand with expectations of what will be accomplished.

Make meetings in groups very event-oriented. Celebrate such events as people's birthdays, anniversaries, the winning of sports matches etc. The dropout rate for attendance at meetings will be much less.

Often people don't attend meetings because there is a lack of resolution of interpersonal conflicts with other members of the group. At least in Arab culture, there is a need for a third party to act as an intermediary in such a situation. Disciplers often fail to volunteer for such a role, but judge harshly when the two parties absent themselves. Usually you will have to be that third party. Learn how to do this in a culturally appropriate manner.

3.4 The concept of sin

Someone has pointed out that the crescent is a bent line, while a cross has two straight lines that intersect – i.e. clear lines to follow. In Arab culture a key concept is *'shaater'* – the ability to get things done. This is a major way of enhancing the honour of a family. Some Arabs are treated with high honour (they have *'wasta'*) because they are masters of getting things done. This is a very big issue in discipleship because **how** things are done is immaterial. The end justifies the means. Ethics and morality are largely irrelevant. You learn how to get around of the law. Failure is the major sin. So BMBs need a major realignment of their consciences to Scripture where shaming your Heavenly Father is seen to be sin. One day we will stand before Our Father and, in the presence of a great crowd, we will have to explain ourselves and our actions. Study carefully with your disciple the Scriptures about lying and speaking the truth.

3.5 Marriage and family issues

"Family preservation is the primary objective of Islam. Children are brought up in an Islamic worldview; traditional role models are being strengthened and adhered to. The role of the father is to assure the child becomes a functioning part of the 'Ummah'. The mother's role is to retain the emotional bond." [The Islamic Academy book by Aliash Scheifer, **Motherhood in Islam**]

Discipleship is hard for the BMB because it involves a lengthy period of de-stabilisation and then re-stabilisation to a Biblical worldview.

Usually at the age of 18-21 individuality starts to express itself and it is in the age range of 18-30 that the majority of conversions take place. There is not much room for innovation and individual critical thinking. God is unchangeable. Innovation is heresy. The only appreciated change is the one from idolater to Muslim.

Mate selection is a very important issue. The family largely controls this. Marriage mostly takes place in the age range 18-30. For a BMB this is an important issue. It is either leave home/country or have little hope of a believing partner. Often the family arranges an attractive marriage to an unbeliever in order to bring them back into the fold of the 'Ummah'.

Social control is in the family. The community, via the family, will try and shame the individual back to the 'Ummah'. We need to find ways to minimize the shame of becoming a believer.

Some identified problems in the Arab World

- Lack of resources and teaching of **Biblical** models of family relationships as distinct from **western** models
- Second-generation BMBs – there is no material to prepare them to be a Biblical family. They struggle to find their identity.
- Finding a partner
- Mixed marriages
- Children under 18 coming to faith through the media
- The Biblical alternative to the 'Ummah' – the Kingdom of God

- Issues of citizenship and religion
- Inheritance issues – physical and spiritual
- Dealing with social ostracism, punishment and reward

4. Demonic involvement and Folk Islamic festivals/practices

Among the poor and uneducated, usually 70%-80% are involved with the occult/Folk Islam. Among urban dwellers who are literate the percentages are lower. But nearly all are in some way influenced by the demonic, especially in times of trouble – job loss, sickness, bad luck, etc.

Your BMB may use short phrases invoking God's protection in a difficulty in order to 'magically' repel evil spirits. Or he/she may worry about the evil eye or curses that others may have given them. They may have frightening dreams where demons appear to attack them. They may have pictures of Islamic sites to protect them from jinn or wear amulets to keep evil spirits away.

Behind a lot of this is a false concept of God – a God who doesn't intervene in their problems and doesn't care about their needs and daily concerns of living. God is just 'a spectator'. BMBs need help to understand that, as a child of God, God will protect them without any of the 'special aids' they used to use. Some BMBs understand this in an intellectual way, but in a crisis (e.g. sickness) they revert to the occult. They have low confidence that God is sufficient for all their needs and fears. So fear of the spirit world is very prevalent among BMBs. An observant discipler will see this and will realise the need to question such observed rituals and evil spirit repellents.

Many BMBs need special prayer for deliverance and renouncing these practices. They need to know the laws of God regarding these 'Folk' practices. They need to learn how the Christian armour works. They need to know the power of Jesus over all evil powers and over all physical illness. They need to know how to face temptation in this area and resist it. They also need to know that, if they fail, they can repent and be cleansed from the pollution of the occult.

Folk Islamic festivals and practices

Our BMB friend will often be asked to be involved in festivals and extended family gatherings around the various 'rites of passage'. This is an excellent time to help him think through the involvement of the occult in what is going on. This is in order to protect himself – put on his armour etc. and to think through what should be retained and what needs replacing in a Biblical community. He must then think how to replace it and with what! Care must be taken that the BMBs avoid adopting social practices that alienate them unnecessarily from their communities. This might include abandoning the head covering in a house church or the use of 'obvious' foreign religious vocabulary in praying etc. Unnecessary alteration in social behaviour at this sort of event will trigger an increased level of persecution.

5. Intellectual Obstacles: the place of apologetics and the use of the Qur'an

BMBs need to give reasons for ***"the hope that is within them"***. They get bombarded with questions, mainly from their family, and they need to know the answers.

Muslims believe in the Hadith of Muhammad's life, his way of thinking and what the interpreters say about it. The interpreters are usually three or four sheikhs. They only believe the Qur'an theoretically. For example, most of them believe that a Christian is *'kaafir'*. The Qur'an says the opposite – that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. People are taught that only Muhammad can intercede for them. The Qur'an says the opposite. (Sura 9:30) Disciplers must know the Qur'an and use it if there is a difference between what is generally believed and what the Qur'an states.

<u>Examples:</u>

- Christians have changed the Injil. The Quran says, (Sura 6:115) *"There is nothing that can change his words ….."* (also Sura 10:94).

- The prophet Muhammad is the greatest of prophets. The Qur'an says (Sura 46:9), *"I am no new thing among the messengers of Allah, nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that which is inspired in me and I am but a plain warner."*

  So according to the Quran, he is not greater than the prophets who came before him. He doesn't know what will happen to him or to his followers and he is only a warner.

So please help BMBs to give an explanation of the standard objections – especially through story form. It is important to understand Islam because BMBs constantly 'see the world' through this particular worldview. However, Islam is very broad and you will be continually learning about it. The 'real' Islam is frequently different from the 'theoretical' Islam.

Finally, prepare them for interrogations as an intellectual exercise. The authorities watch most known BMBs closely. Periodically they may be called into a security office for an 'interview'. This may result in threats, lies reported about their behaviour, coercion and pressures to return to Islam and stop associating with expatriates and other believers.

BMBs need to anticipate this, prepare for it and spiritually get ready for it. Make sure that if such a thing happens, a prayer network is immediately activated to pray for them. Prepare them not to believe everything they are told – e.g. *"Your good friend xxxxx has informed on you as he is secretly working for the government. He says you are being paid money for being a Christian."*

Prepare them for threats of physical and psychological hurt: loss of their job, torture, serious criminal charges leading to extensive time in prison, the loss of wife and children.

The aim is fear and distrust. Prepare them to ***"be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"***. Eph. 6:10-19 needs detailed working through. Help them to see that the Lord Jesus will stand with them. Their trials are precious in His sight. The Lord Jesus frequently said to His disciples, ***"Do not fear"*** and it was to new believers in 'Turkey' that Paul and Barnabas said, ***"Through many trials we must enter the Kingdom of God"***. (Acts 14: 22)

6. Cultural obstacles

Discipling BMBs is often difficult as a Westerner because of very different learning styles. Most BMBs enjoy discussing while drinking tea. They cover a wide range of topics and tell stories usually late into the night. As a Westerner discipleship is transferring knowledge as succinctly as possible. The other stuff is just interruption. I need to 'loosen up' and BMBs need to realise discipleship is very serious. The best environment is a group of BMBs (possibly with an expatriate). They should have lots of time to discuss case histories/stories of issues in which a series of dilemmas/choices arise, together with relevant Bible passages that are explored inductively.

Availability and late nights are often the key to discipling well. Another area already somewhat covered is that BMBs don't easily think linearly – i.e. logically moving from 1 to 2 to 3 etc. It isn't illogical thinking; just that it is often circular and at best helical. Study how best your BMBs learn and then be flexible. Remember non-verbal communication is very important in what you 'say'.

Before you start in a discipling relationship, share with your BMB how Moses helped develop Joshua and how Elijah helped Elisha as well as how Barnabas helped Paul. Explain that he is a disciple of Jesus and not your disciple. Helping disciples is important in Scripture. Ask if you can begin a discipling relationship that involves more intentionality than ordinary friendship and a different use of the time you plan to spend together. Explain that **you** hope to grow and learn in the relationship as well and that as a result both you and he will be able to train better disciples.

It is essential that you become good friends with growing trust. Be transparent too about your struggles. Ask for prayer and suggestions. **Don't only give – receive.** Share about all parts of your life and let mutual accountability begin. Plan to meet at least once a week, but be flexible. In terms of Bible study, you want your BMB friend to say, *"Wow, I could help others understand this part of the Bible!"* Keep the one-on-one times going, but introduce your friend into a BMB group as well.

With a new BMB, it is probably wise to advise them to 'keep their head down' and not draw attention to their new faith-allegiance. During this period focus on their **identity now** as a disciple of Jesus in their Muslim setting. Encourage them to 'speak' non-verbally – i.e. better family relations, more obedient to the head of the family, more loving to wife and children, more willing to work hard and faithfully at work, more willing to confess when they have been wrong and to ask forgiveness.

Then help them to answer the question, *"Are you still a Muslim?"* In the Arab World we avoid the word Christian *(masihiyiin)* as it adds unwanted cultural and political baggage. Usually we use an equivocal word like *'mu'miniin'* (believer) or follower of the 'Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). This word in Arabic is also used by Sufis.

Grace versus legalism is always a major problem. In Islam favour with Allah is **always earned**. There is no other way. Children are taught that Allah will probably decide their eternal destiny by a two sided scale – good deeds versus bad deeds. Muslims gain 'points' by following the five pillars faithfully. Extra points can be added by additional schemes if your 'account' *(hisab)* is low.

Because of this system, **grace** is extremely hard to understand. So repeatedly go through the Biblical references to grace and the dangers of legalism. Galatians is a great book for this.

7. Moral Challenges

Many ethical and moral challenges arise while discipling a BMB. Here are some of them:

- lying and dissimulation
- covering up due to shame
- immorality – the oppression of women – sexual harassment
- the giving and receiving of gifts – is it bribery?
- Paying money without a receipt

There is considerable difference between cultural relativity and Biblical absolutes. It is not as simple as this. Biblical values are absolute. But our understanding of them is always relative. ***"Now we see in the mirror dimly … now I know in part."*** (1 Cor. 13:12)

We need to learn what 'goodness' looks like in our 'other' culture and compare it with 'goodness' in the Bible. Finally, we need to learn how to bring peace, justice and hope to the people we serve. Often we bring hostile feelings of confusion, fear and inferiority. Often we aren't welcome and our presence is a political act – a threat to the power structures! How do we reverse this?

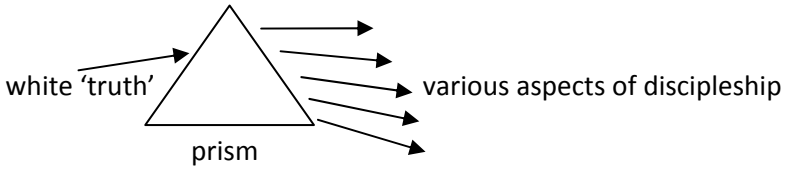
The number and variety of moral/ethical problems faced by us and the BMBs are almost limitless. It is wonderful to know that the grace and wisdom of God are also without boundaries.

A great book on this is **Strange Virtues – Ethics in a multicultural world** by Bernard T. Adeney, IVP (1995) ISBN 0 - 8308 - 1855 – 3.

8. Difficulties for expatriate workers

8.1 <u>The problems of thinking sequentially and in closed sets</u>

I tend to think discipleship should be sequential – building one truth on top of another. This is typical of Westerners (especially with a scientific training!) If we think sequentially, then we tend to act sequentially. This leads to actions that tend to optimise various segments of the curriculum and fail to see the person as a whole. Such thinking is counter-productive in the long run.



We have to learn to think and **act** holistically.

- Is discipleship carried out primarily one-on-one or is it primarily a group process?
- Is it an interactive participative process or a lecture (one-way) relationship?
- Is there accountability for changes in life as well as in knowledge?
- Is there accountability for passing on what one has learned?

Clearly, modelling is of greater importance than the content of the teaching and modelling is affected by activities very unrelated to discipleship – work and family life, how your children behave, how you do evangelism, how you pray etc. In fact, in the matter of discipleship, you cannot separate out any aspect of discipleship except artificially.

One possible way to disciple BMBs is to discuss various possible scenarios:

- A person needs a wife/husband – what of various options would be most honouring to God?
- A disciple loses his job. What should he do?

Money issues

We, as expatriates discipling BMBs, have to deal with money matters. Why? Is it because BMBs are exceptionally money-oriented and unable to trust God for their needs? Certainly not! Yet tensions over finances often lead to the downfall of a BMB.

We must avoid a 'them and us' division. It may help to divide the issue into 3 subsidiary issues:

- BMBs who have a particular financial need
- Expatriates employing believers
- BMBs who enter 'full-time' ministry
- **Urgent financial needs:** This might be due to loss of employment, urgent medical needs, providing food for the family etc. An example would be a BMB's son who needs urgent surgery and he needs to pay £100, but he doesn't have it. What does he do? He goes to his friend – you. What does 1 Jn. 3:17 say? ***"Whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"***

  But it may be dangerous to give it to him as it would prove to the community that 'he has sold his birthright' for money. Motivations between disciple and discipler are mixed up. Money, not friendship, holds them together.

  There is no simple solution to this. Not giving can kill the relationship – giving may poison it. A common solution is that the local fellowship has an emergency fund and a fellowship committee decides on priority cases. Teach the stewardship of giving and the importance of community 'insurance'.

- **Employing local believers:** expatriates may be involved in business, humanitarian projects and translation projects where there is a need for language tutors etc. Working together with a BMB provides lots of opportunities for discipleship. Who but BMBs are reliable, honest and understanding? Employment is desperately needed by BMBs. It sounds obvious, but it does have a downside.

  What happens if the BMB is a great employee, but backslides and mistreats his wife and family? Or the BMB is really growing as a disciple, but has no ability to do the job required of him? Are you going to fire him? What about other BMBs that you haven't hired?

  Many times deliberately employing BMBs doesn't work out so well. It causes tensions. Motives are mixed. It is better not to mix employment with discipleship. The expatriate can help a BMB find employment in **another** expatriate business or project and then disciple him independently.

- **Local believers in full-time ministry:** Often, the initiative comes from the individual or it may come from other expatriates – often there is unhelpful interference from outside ministries that are often not involved in discipling. There are dangers in this approach:

- ✓ Beware of hirelings!
- ✓ You are causing dependency if you give him a salary.
- ✓ It is the responsibility of the local church to support leaders.
- ✓ The amount of money used to start a church or ministry is usually the amount of money needed annually to sustain the ministry.

But the lost will not pay for their evangelisation!!

So a generalisation is:

- Don't financially support such people except after very careful consultation with other national leaders.
- Help national leaders with one-off travel expenses to courses, conferences etc.
- Provide them with Bibles to distribute etc.

Comments in conclusion

I like the idea of case histories disguised as stories. Perhaps:

- What happened?
- What are the Biblical principles to learn?

This will help the BMBs to think ahead of time so that they don't make the same mistakes again.

Medical students are largely taught with case histories and doing ward rounds. Failures (i.e. the sick) are very instructive. Teach BMBs to diagnose the root of the problem and then come up with Biblical therapies.

Study Biblical examples of one-on-one mentoring:

- Moses with Joshua
- Elijah with Elisha
- Jesus and the three
- Barnabas with Paul

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* Believer from a Muslim background