Some of the Principles Guiding a Worker in the Muslim World

Acts 9: 41-42. The context is the raising of the dead woman, Tabitha, to life.

"He (Peter) ***took her*** (Tabitha)***. He said, 'Tabitha, get up'. She opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa and many people believed in the Lord."***

A team of workers should have the following 3 characteristics:

1. Actions that are all based on the Bible
2. It is vitally alive.
3. It has an effective outreach.

These should characterise each individual team member and the whole team in which the Lord Jesus has placed them. If any one of these is lacking, then, as a team, there must be some deep heart searching.

Let us look at the context of these verses. What you find is continual growth. It really reads as a "progress report".

- Acts 1:1-6:7 The focus of this part is the growth of the church in Jerusalem and the surrounding area.
- Acts 6:8-9:31 Now the church has grown not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judea and Samaria.
- Acts 9:32-12:24 The church has moved out of "Israel" as far as Antioch (13:1). Today Antioch is in north-west Syria.
- Acts 13:1-16:5 Paul and his small team have moved into what we now call Turkey – then Asia Minor.
- Acts 16:6-19:20 The Gospel has reached into Europe.
- Acts 19:21-28:31 Paul is boldly preaching in Rome and teaching as many people as possible about the Lord Jesus Christ. Rome was the capital of the then known world.

So the Book of Acts is a series of "progress reports" detailing the movement that began in Jerusalem and swept across the eastern Mediterranean basin to Rome. Some have suggested that Paul may have gone to Spain after he was set free in Rome – see Rom. 15:24-28.

Back to Acts 6:7, ***"So the word of God spread. The number of the disciples increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."***

Acts 9:31, ***"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."***

The church had peace and was built up. They were walking in the fear of the Lord and the church was multiplying through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 12:24, ***"But the word of God continued to increase and spread."***

Acts 16:5, ***"So the churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers."***

Acts 19:20, ***"In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."***

Acts 28:30-31, ***"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus."***

All this was in the heart of the Roman Empire – openly and unhindered. Remember the background. All this was in the face of opposition. The opposition came both from 'within' – i.e. from other 'believers' of sorts – and from without. The background is continual spiritual warfare. This is exactly the same as we find in seeking to bring the Gospel to Muslims today. But in spite of this, the word of God went forward.

So in Acts 4 there was opposition from the priests. In Acts 5 Satan attacks from within – the false devotion of Ananias and Sapphira – resulting in a split within the church. At the end of Acts 5 there is persecution (v. 17-42). This was followed soon after by Stephen being seized, tried before the Sanhedrin and finally stoned to death (v. 57-60).

If you trace this throughout the Book of Acts you will find a repeated pattern. The opposition came first from the outsiders and then from within. But in spite of this, the progress of the spread of the Gospel went forward.

How did it go forward? The church was built up spiritually so the church multiplied – the church as a body. So the church was built up from within and as the church was strengthened and bonded together in love they were able to reach out to others in effective evangelism.

So if the church is to have an outreach, it must have strong spiritual foundations. There must be a deep work in the heart of each member of the church. The converse is also true. A church needs to have an effective outreach to be truly spiritual. So we need to keep on learning and keep on studying. If we don't do this we become stagnant. We might know a lot, but we don't put it into practice!

See Acts 9:31, ***"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."***

What had changed? The conversion of Paul! (Acts 9:1-19). Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle. Please notice 3 factors – 3 human instruments used by God in the conversion of Paul.

- the prayers of Stephen (7:54-8:1)
- the obedience of Ananias (9:1-19)
- the friendship/brotherliness of Barnabas

Let's look at **the prayers of Stephen**, ***"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this against them'. When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death."***

Paul couldn't forget that Stephen had been stoned to death and he was the one who had urged them on. Stephen had prayed that he would be forgiven and that this terrible sin would not be held against him. This was the first step in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

As you look at the last 70 years of work in the Muslim World you can see that we have been confronted by some outstanding enemies – Muslims who have really persecuted the believers. As we pray, we need to pray for leaders – for outstanding Muslims who are convinced and bigoted in their views. We need to be praying for people like that just as Stephen prayed for Saul of Tarsus.

Notice that in Acts 1:14 the disciples, ***"All joined together constantly in prayer"***. This constant prayer must be a characteristic of our teams.

There was a second factor and that was **the obedience of Ananias** (Acts 9:10). Saul of Tarsus had come to Damascus breathing threats and murder to all the believers in the Lord Jesus. Ananias was a believer in the Lord Jesus (v. 10). The Lord told Ananias in a vision to go to a certain house on a certain street. Ananias was very reluctant to go for he knew of all the harm Saul had done to other believers. But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go"!

When Ananias got to the place where Saul was staying, he placed his hands on Saul and said, ***"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."***

How would you react if God sent you to the leader of a radical Muslim group who was known to be hunting for believers in order to kill them? I ask myself whether I would go if God asked me to go to a

radical Islamic leader and ask him to become a believer. Would I go? What was in Ananias' mind as he went to find Saul? His first words were, ***"Brother Saul"***. These are some of the most wonderful words in the New Testament! This terrible man who had come to kill all the believers in the Lord Jesus including himself walks in and Ananias says, ***"Brother Saul"***. Amazing! That is love! He is basically saying, *"You are one of **us** now!"* This is the Spirit we need in our hearts and lives. This is the Spirit we have got!

So when a Muslim professes that he/she has left Islam, what do we do? Are we suspicious? Is he/she for real? Should I dare invite him/her to our meeting with the other Muslim background believers? Do I really trust this new believer? Is this just a trap? Not so Ananias! *"Brother Saul, you have seen the Lord!"* That is the key isn't it?

Over the years I have met a number of Muslim background believers and in every case they were going on with the Lord. The Lord has His own ways of reaching out to Muslims – especially where there is persecution. If we meet such a new Muslim background believer we should trust him, make friends with him and disciple him. We should love him and accept him into our group. This is a really great Biblical example of Christian love in action – ***"Brother Saul***"!

There was a third factor. They wanted to bring Saul into the church, but a lot of people doubted if he was really a believer. So what happened? Barnabas came along! Barnabas took Saul to meet the other apostles and told them how Saul had met the Lord.

When Saul returned to Jerusalem he had attempted to follow the disciples and the other believers in the Lord Jesus, but they were afraid of him! But **Barnabas took him to the apostles** and Saul told them that on the road to Damascus he has seen the Lord Jesus. The apostles believed him and accepted him and he became a member of the church.

So the **prayers of Stephen**, the **love and obedience of Ananias** and **the friendship of Barnabas** all played a part. They all built up love. So, ***"The church in the whole of Judea, Samaria and Galilee enjoyed a time of peace! It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in number living in the fear of the Lord."***

Here the church is not a "body". It is a "building". It is being built up. There is a threefold building up. If we are going to retain new believers in our fellowships, we need to "build them up". How are we to do this?

Give them something to do. This will help them to grow. Until they are brought into the fellowship they remain 'a stone'. But they become 'living stones' as they get involved in the group. It is especially important that they should be built up in reading and studying their Bibles.

Here in England there seem to be two sorts of 'youth groups'. There are those that attract others by many social activities and they often have just a 5-10 minute epilogue. They may attract a lot of young people but they rarely have great sustainability. Then there is another kind of group where they get down to a serious study of the Bible at least once a week. They sing Christian songs and have good fellowship with each other, but they don't fail to get down to a serious study of the Bible and as a result they are built up and strengthened.

So how are we to help new believers from a Muslim background? We need to carefully explain to them what 'a Christian' is. It is someone who is saved **and** who remains in communication with the Lord Jesus every day. We need to explain about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What is love? What are Biblical male/female relationships? We need to help new believers to study the Bible perhaps for ~40 minutes and then discuss it together. They will be built up and strengthened.

So in the church we enjoy fellowship, but fellowship is not enough a you are a you you you you are. There must be edification and building up of the believers. The Lord Jesus said, ***"I will build my church"***. (Mt. 16:18) This is a promise. He will do it. He is the Master Builder.

We read in Jude 20, ***"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."*** So each individual needs to build himself/herself up. We need to learn how to do this.

1 Cor. 3:10 gives us the role of a teacher in the fellowship, ***"By the grace of God given to me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds."*** Building the body is the work of teaching.

So the church was built up. Your group must be strong. It must be built up. We are also to **walk** in the Lord. 1 Cor. 3:16 says, ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple!"*** "Walking" in this passage can be misunderstood as walking around idly not doing much! No, we are to go in the fear of the Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some passages with "go" in the power of God and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There are many 'go's in the New Testament. Here are just a few:

"Go and search diligently for the young child." (Mt. 2:8)

"Go and make disciples." (Mt. 28:19)

"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel" (Mk. 16:15)

"Go and speak in the temple all the words of this life." (Acts 5:20)

To Philip: ***"Arise and go towards the south road that goes down from Jerusalem."*** (Acts 8:26)

To Ananias: ***"Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul."*** (Acts 9:11)

"Walking" is going with intention. It is outreach. It is the aim of reaching others. It is not just 'going'. It is going with a definite purpose in view. ***"Go in the fear of the Lord."*** Go remembering His commission, ***"All authority has been given to Me, go therefore into all the world and make disciples."*** We go because we are under His authority!

We will meet opposition but, ***"All authority has been given to Me in heaven."*** All the evil spirits are ultimately under His control. There are vast armies of angels under His control. He has complete authority over everything in heaven. Nothing can happen here on earth without the permission of the Lord Jesus. So He can say to us, ***"Go, therefore,*** (under My authority) ***and baptise people under this authority." "Go therefore and teach"*** under this authority. Create groups (churches) of worshipping believers.

"Therefore" is an important word! It is not just 'go'. It is 'go and do something' – ***"Make disciples and preach the Gospel"***. Go and form churches. Every "go" is dependent on the fact that all authority has been given to Him – the Lord Jesus.

What is the difference between power and authority? Suppose you tried to stop a huge juggernaut by trying to push it back. What do you think might happen? You are likely to be run over! But a policeman, in his uniform, sees one of these juggernauts coming down the street. He moves into the street and holds up his hand and the juggernaut quickly comes to a stop. Why? Because there is a difference between power and authority. The policeman exercises authority and it is recognised. The Lord Jesus said, ***"All authority has been given to Me."*** We don't have power. All of us are weak. But the disciples had to walk in the fear of the Lord. They were under His authority. Jesus is Lord! Lord of all!

The second thing is "the Comfort of the Holy Spirit". He comforts us and He counsels us. He is the One who is called alongside us to counsel and comfort when we are in difficulty. He upholds us! We go counting on Him and His continuous work **in** us and **for** us.

I would like to suggest that the Holy Spirit acts in a threefold way:

Firstly, in the dynamics of Christian service the Holy Spirit **leads**. We need to look for the leading of the Holy Spirit where we are. We are to follow the Lord Jesus. Let him lead you to individual people. ***"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*** (Rom. 8:14) In Acts 8:26-27 Philip was going about his business when an 'angel of the Lord' said to him, ***"Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian – an important official in charge of all the Treasury of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians."*** That Ethiopian was a key man and the Lord needed him!

In Acts 10: 19 we read that the Holy Spirit said to Peter, ***"Arise and go downstairs"***. Peter went down and met the man who had come to find him. He said to them, ***"I am the one you are looking for. Why have you come?"*** This was how Peter was led to meet Cornelius. He explained his actions in Acts 11:12, ***"The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them."*** He describes what happened, (v. 16) ***"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He came on us at the beginning."***

When the Holy Spirit is at work we need to get let Him get on with what He is doing without any hindrance from us – especially if it is different from what we traditionally do! Acts 11:16-17 says, ***"Then I remembered what the Lord Jesus said, 'John baptised with water but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. So if God gave them the same gift as He gave us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"***

We read in Acts 16:6-7, ***"Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the Province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to."***

So here is the Holy Spirit acting in another way! He is closing the door to ministry. We have experienced this from time to time with our teams in the Muslim World. The Lord Jesus has closed the door. What are we to do? Clearly the Lord Jesus had some other purpose for them. Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9). After seeing this vision Paul, together with Silas and Timothy, crossed into Europe (Macedonia/Greece). This led to some Philippians and Thessalonians and others in Greece coming to faith in the Lord Jesus.

So the Lord may close the door to your particular location, but don't be overly concerned. He will open another opportunity for you to serve Him. Sometimes the Holy Spirit leads us to go to a new situation/people and sometimes He prevents us going. Often we are happy when we are led into a situation, but when He shuts the door we become frustrated and sad. But the Book of Acts reminds us that this will be our experience. Often when we look back a decade or two later we can see that God's plans were much better than ours. Often the Lord gives us a different ministry that soon becomes very satisfying to us. Rarely does "harvest time" come at once! But in the end it will all be worth it!

So if you are slogging away, year after year with a broken heart longing to see a strong fellowship of Muslim background believers established but seeing very little, remember you can't see everything! You don't know everything! You don't know what is going on in the hearts and minds of those Muslims you have talked to. They are watching you. I believe that in the coming days we are going to get some surprises if we have been faithful. In heaven we are going to meet many former Muslims who we never sensed had any interest when we met them on the earth! Even now we need to ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to these people even though we may not know how they will eventually respond.

Secondly, in the dynamics of Christian service the Holy Spirit **speaks**. See Jn. 14:26, ***"But the counsellor, the Holy Spirit, who the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you"***.

So the Holy Spirit **speaks**. He will help you to give the message and make it 'live' in the hearts and minds of the hearers. Paul put it this way, ***"That I might open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel."*** (Eph. 6:19-20)

This is what we will experience. Remember that the promise given in Jn. 14:26 was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. So the Holy Spirit will put into our minds an appropriate word at the appropriate time for both men and women. So it is possible for all believers to bring a message from God.

We need to look to the Holy Spirit when we are preparing a message and this is especially so if you have to give the message in a language that is not your own. But even if you are speaking in your own language, be conscious of the Holy Spirit standing with you, speaking through you and making the message 'live' in the hearts and minds of the hearers.

The Holy Spirit will give you the message and He will help you to communicate the message. This is so when you are dealing with an individual.

As you speak to someone about the Gospel, the tendency is to focus on what **you** are saying. But we need to listen to what **the person** is saying and also at the same time to listen to what **the Holy Spirit** is saying about what the person is saying. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you and then you can pass on what He is telling you to say. If you do this, then at the same time the Holy Spirit will bring conviction to that person. If we are conscious of the Holy Spirit giving us just the words and just the phrase – just the Scripture – that will pierce the armour of that man or woman, then we know God is speaking to him/her. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He leads you to specific individuals and he gives you just the right words. He is the One who has the power to bring about change.

So the Holy Spirit **leads**. He **speaks** and He has **power to bring about change**.

Look again at Acts 9:31, ***"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers living in the fear of the Lord."***