The Preparation Necessary to be an Effective Servant of God in the Muslim World

You won't gain this preparation by going to a Bible College or any other similar course and then assuming you are ready. This is preparation you will need to work at continually!

Acts 1:1-3, ***"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day He was taking up to heaven after giving instructions, through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the Kingdom of God."***

Luke wrote two books:

Luke's Gospel – all that ***"Jesus began to do and to teach"***

Acts – all that the Lord Jesus continued to do and to teach

We thank God that the Holy Spirit continues to teach and direct us today. God is working and we want to be in on it!

When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, He worked through His **physical** body. Today He is working through His **"spiritual body"** of which you and I are members.

Now our spiritual bodies are being continuously renewed. It is vital that we know and experience this spiritual revival and so are continuously prepared for His service. In this way our ministry will be vitally alive instead of dead!

Basically the Christian faith is contagious – people catch it! The theology comes afterwards. So the usual pattern is that unbelievers in general – including Muslims – get to know a believer and over time they recognise, "they have something I haven't got, but that I would like to have!" Of course we know what that is! So we need to live in continuous spiritual renewal as preparation for service.

Titus 3:5 says, ***"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of re-birth and by the Holy Spirit."***

So the Holy Spirit has regenerated us and made us anew. We have become **living members** of the Body of Christ. We have received new life. We started out as 'babes in Christ', but babies grow continuously and this is what we have to do.

The New Testament teaches us that this renewal is continuous, ***"Our inner nature is being renewed day by day."*** (2 Cor. 4:16) ***"You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator."*** (Col. 3:9-10)

So continuous spiritual renewal is essential preparation for ministry to Muslims. This will enable us to speak to them of the Lord Jesus. So when we 'give our testimonies' we shouldn't go back to 'when I was a teenager ….' (50 years ago!) We should be able to tell people what the Lord Jesus has done for us this week! This is why we need to be constantly renewed.

There are five steps to constant spiritual renewal.

1. A renewed confidence in the Living Lord

Acts 1:3, ***"After His suffering, He showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the Kingdom of God."***

The word people often use is "reality". The disciples met the real Lord Jesus. It was reality! Jesus met them! They saw Him. They heard Him. They knew Him. And they went out to convince the world that He was alive! ***"They turned the world upside down!"*** (Acts 17:6)

There are three things to note about this:

- He presented Himself to them in their hour of **deep need**. He met them just where they were. They were very sad, doubting and disappointed. They were turning their backs on all their hopes.

It was **there**, in that situation, that the Lord Jesus met them. He met them in the valley of defeat.

This is where the Lord Jesus wants to meet each one of us. Consider the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. (Lk. 24:13-35) Can you discern the huge disappointment in their voices? ***"But we hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. What is more it is the third day since all this took place. … Some women went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find the body."*** They were terribly disappointed. They were on their way home.

Have you ever felt that the Lord Jesus has been a disappointment to you? Has He ever let you down? Perhaps for many years you have been working in a town/land seeking to share the Gospel with Muslims but none have come to faith and you are disappointed with Him!

Certainly we will have been a disappointment to Him! But the Lord Jesus can meet with us just where we are. He met those disciples on the road to Emmaus and stayed with them and as they shared the bread together, ***"Their eyes were opened and they recognised Him and He disappeared from their sight."***

So what at one time "seemed like idle tales" was now amazingly true! The men were doubters! They wouldn't believe the women! Have you ever had the experience of reading the Bible and wondering if it was all true? If it is true, then why don't we see the Lord working in a greater way among Muslims? Sometimes we get discouraged and disappointed by the slow progress or even no progress! We get depressed and we begin to doubt. Many of us have experienced this. It is there that the Lord Jesus comes to us and meets with us. There is no reason to be a defeated believer. Let the Lord take you over if you feel defeated. He will restore you to a joyful, victorious, effective life. That is what He wants to do for each one of us.

"He presents himself alive!" This is revival! One of the major ways to experience revival is to name the sin that has been blocking your spiritual progress, ask the Lord to forgive you and thank Him for His forgiveness.

- <u>He presented Himself to each individual.</u>

He met Mary in all her despondency. This weak, fearful woman who had been controlled by seven demons said, ***"I have seen the Lord!"*** He was very real to her! He can be just as real to every believer.

This is what we read of Peter when he stood up with the eleven on the Day of Pentecost, ***" 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' When the people heard it, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'. Those who accepted his message were baptised and about 3000 were added to their number that day."***

You can read the full account in Acts 2. About 3000 people were 'born again'. They had been in the crowd but now they were 'born again'. They were re-created in the Lord Jesus! This is a very great miracle! The miracle of Pentecost was that God used Peter who had denied the Lord Jesus in front of a serving girl. He now preached in such a way that all those people were 'born again'.

The Lord Jesus meets with individuals. He met the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-32). He met doubting Thomas (Jn. 20:24-28). We can see that the Lord Jesus met with one after another before He got them together to form a group (a team).

So it is really important that he should meet with us. It is vital to have a "quiet time" each day. Often the biggest temptation in our lives is to skip our quiet times.

- ***<u>"He presented Himself alive."</u>***

The word 'present' is a very important word. In Luke 1:11-23 we read that the Angel Gabriel came to Zechariah with the message that he and his wife would have a baby (John the Baptist). Zechariah said it couldn't happen since both he and his wife were old. The angel answered,

"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God." Gabriel then went on to present to Zechariah God's message to him.

I need to present myself to the Lord Jesus. We need to say, "Here I am Lord Jesus. My whole ransomed being is totally yours. What do You want me to do?" We are to **present** ourselves. When we do that, the Lord Jesus will take us up and use us.

On the Cross the Lord Jesus spoke to John saying that His mother was now to be John's mother. He wanted John to take her away so she couldn't see Him suffer any more and John did so.

So when I present myself to the Lord Jesus in all the areas of my being, the Lord Jesus presents Himself to me with all that He is. This is the really great thing. I give to Him what I can give – little as it may be – and He puts Himself at my disposal with all His infinite wisdom and power! That is the idea behind the word 'present'.

So our first intention in our work for God is that we should know Him and live out the reality of being in His presence. We know that the Lord Jesus died for our sins, but are we really very excited about the Lord Jesus?

Muslims are very good at reading you like a book! First of all we must grasp the reality of our Living Lord. John baptised with water, but the Lord Jesus promised that His disciples – including us – would be baptised with the Holy Spirit. He said to them, ***"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set out by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."*** (Acts 1:7-8) A realisation of this will renew our confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is vital in our ministry/service.

Clearly these early disciples still didn't understand the Lord Jesus. They ask Him, ***"Lord at this time are You going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?"*** That wasn't at all the purpose of the Lord Jesus. Peter had failed in his witness. They were not able to organise and plan. They wanted someone to take the place of Judas, but they made a sad mistake. Clearly Saul of Tarsus was God's chosen man. They failed in their plans and they failed in their thinking. What they needed was <u>power</u>!

There are two distinct things:

- ✓ baptism of the Holy Spirit
- ✓ baptism into water

Baptism is always "in to". You are placed **in** the water. So also you are baptised **in**to the Spirit. But then there is also 'anointing' (some 'thing' comes on you). The New Testament is clear that we have all received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, ***"By the one Spirit you were all baptised into the one Body."*** (1 Cor. 12:13) This took place at our conversion. We need to be clear about this. There is some misleading teaching that confuses the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the 'fullness of the Holy Spirit' which we must also have – the anointing of the Spirit.

So we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, but we are still missing out. We need the Holy Spirit and some people go on to suggest that we need to know God as our Father. I would suggest that it is wrong to believe that God can be divided up into three so that we have to accept each member of the Trinity separately. This is very irrational! ***"In him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily." "We are complete in him."*** When we received the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we were born again. We were regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit and immediately God became our Father. We are children of God!

Often workers have noticed that in their work there have been periods of great fruitfulness and other periods of just hard work with few results. Sometimes it appears that we are 'working for God' and at other times there is the experience of allowing God to work through us. Perhaps this is what God means by the anointing of the Holy Spirit and this prepares us to witness. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and He went about doing good! This was His initial ministry.

So we need this renewal – this continual 'fullness' – this spiritual power. ***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."***

As you read the Book of Acts you can see that the Holy Spirit led people to particular individuals. Today the Holy Spirit also leads us to specific individuals. You can see this in Acts 8:29 – the story of Philip and the Ethiopian. ***"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading from Isaiah the prophet …. He asked Philip, 'Please tell me who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."*** The result was that Philip baptised this man from Ethiopia.

In Acts 10 we read the story of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius. Note v. 19 – Peter had had a vision and was wondering what it meant. ***"While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon three men are looking for you. Get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them for I have sent them."***

In Acts 10:44 we read, ***"While Peter was still speaking these words, Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message."***

Acts 11:12-13, 17, ***"The Spirit told me*** (Peter) ***to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers went with me and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved. As I*** (Peter) ***began to speak the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come upon us who believed in the Lord Jesus. ….. Who was I to think that I could oppose God?"***

Right through the Book of Acts we find the Holy Spirit leading the believers to specific people who had been prepared by the Holy Spirit.

There are other things that the Holy Spirit does. He co-ordinates our witness. We can see how we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. We need His renewal daily so He can lead us to individuals in whom He is already working.

This is vital among Muslims. As you know, Muslim culture in general is largely against our message, but there are those the Lord is calling right now and they are the ones God wants us to reach out to. One of the many vital roles of the Holy Spirit is to lead us to those God is calling.

"Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand there looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

We need to have a renewed confidence and expectation that soon the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. Sadly, after about 2000 years we have largely lost the hope of His coming. There are many different theories in the church concerning this. Believers get divided so easily about such things that in some places it is a taboo subject.

The result is that we have marginalised it even to the point of wondering if He is coming and even if we want Him to come! We need to be like an old saint of old who every morning when he woke up and drew back the curtain said, "Lord, perhaps today!" Such an attitude will lend urgency to our message as we realise that when He comes, the door will be shut for ever for our Muslim friends and many others.

So there should be an urgency about our message we live in the last times. ***"What I mean brothers is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they have none …. For the world in its present form is passing away."*** (1 Cor. 7:29)

So the time is short and every one of us needs to urgently seek to reach Muslims with the truth about the Lord Jesus. We need a renewed confidence. ***"They all join together constantly in prayer, along with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brother."*** (Acts 1:14) Note the threefold 'with'.

Notice that these people all seem to have a new confidence in one another. This is what we need especially when we are working in teams. Confidence in one another will enable us to be absolutely honest, absolutely open and able to really, honestly pray together. This is the result of love.

Look at the above list - Peter, James and John, and Andrew is also added. We don't know much about Andrew. He is only mentioned three times in the Gospels, but each time he brings an individual to the Lord Jesus! Peter and John had disagreements between them. When Peter saw John following he asked, "What about this man, Lord?" Jesus replied in effect, 'You mind your own business!' So there was friction between Peter and John.

But in Acts we find them together going to the temple at the hour of prayer. So they prayed together! Some other disciples might have had conflicts Nathaniel – the man in whom ***"there was no guile"*** – was a team member of Matthew who was an astute tax collector! They were both totally different in character, but here they are living together and all of them praying together. This is what we need more and more. On our teams we don't just need a weekly evening of prayer but to really get to know one another. Sometimes it takes time to get through to unity of heart and sometimes we don't reach this. But we must be able to continue in prayer with one another. It is really very important that we should be free with one another, loving one another with all hindrances put away.

Lastly, from Acts 1:15 onwards we can see a renewed confidence in the Scriptures as relevant to the need, ***"In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (about 120 of them) and said, 'Brothers the Scriptures had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas'."*** Then Peter quotes from the book of Psalms including the phrase, ***"Let another take his office"***.

In the context of the original of writing of the Psalms there is no apparent relationship to the issue of replacing Judas. I assume it was the work of the Holy Spirit putting into Peter's mind the application of this rather obscure Old Testament passage to the current situation in which they found themselves. As a result Matthias was chosen.

So we need to have absolute confidence in the Scriptures as the Word of God. Are we sure that the Scriptures have the answer and are completely relevant to every situation we are placed in? I believe the answer is "yes"! Sometimes you will have to look for it and pray about it, then I am sure you will find the Scripture is all-sufficient.

It is essential that you should know your Muslim friend well in order to share the relevant Scriptures with him/her. We need to make the message relevant to each person. Unless we do this, what we say will be meaningless. Scripture must be directly related to the situation. We need to know the person and then the situation and we need to know the Scriptures. Then we need to be prompted by the Holy Spirit to use the most suitable Scriptures to share with the person in that situation. The Bible does have the answer every time!

A review of the five points that are vital in our preparation:

- Every day I must know Him as alive. He must be real to me before I can make it real to others. I need the anointing of the Holy Spirit and each time I speak I need a fresh anointing.
- I need a renewed realisation that the Lord Jesus is coming back and I don't want to shrink back in shame when He comes.
- I need a renewed confidence in my brothers and sisters. If there is anything between myself and any other believer I must put it right. As a team we need a renewed confidence in one another which helps us to love one another and be open with one another.
- I need a new confidence in the Word of God. In this way I will learn to trust God to lead and direct me as I seek to help my Muslim friend in his/her distress

These things will continuously prepare us for the Lord's service amongst Muslims.