

GET READY!

There are more converts from Islam to Christianity today than there have ever been before. When I first started to work amongst Muslims, the advice from the mission agencies was, "Be faithful. You won't see much fruit, but be faithful." While the call to be faithful is still apt, the bit about not seeing much fruit is now outdated.

Before we first went to South Asia we had the privilege of meeting with a long-term mission worker, who had been based in the area we were being sent to. His advice stuck in my memory. "You may not see it initially," he said, "but there are pockets of fire there." He was right. There *were* pockets of fire (which we didn't see initially), and they started to grow. At one point the growth was so marked I used to joke that rather than church *planting*, I was actually church *finding*, with new groups that had started from just one or two believers coming on to our radar.

This surprises many in the church. Many Muslims are coming to faith in Christ Jesus (*Isa al Masih*) as Lord, as Saviour, as the One who died and rose again and now reigns in heaven. They are seeking to follow Him,

facing the cost of doing so, and they walk a path of faithfulness to Him and His way.

Now that I work for Urban Vision in the UK, it's my pleasure to visit churches and tell them, "Get ready! There are Muslims coming to faith in Jesus all around the world. And it will be the same here in the UK."

KING'S HALL METHODIST CHURCH			
SUNDAY SERVICES	रविवार	शनिवार	अल्लाह की عبادत
11am WORSHIP IN ENGLISH	अष्टमी से सूर्योदय सुहा 11-00 बजे।	अष्टमी से सूर्योदय सुहा 11-00 बजे।	11-00 बजे
2.30pm WORSHIP IN HINDI/URDU	और हिन्दी, उर्दू का मजली से सूर्योदय सुहा 2-30 बजे।	अने हिन्दी, उर्दू के भजनों विच मजलीम संधि 2-30 बजे।	अष्टमी से सूर्योदय सुहा 2-30 बजे
WEDNESDAY 10am LORD'S SUPPER	बुधवार	शनिवार	अल्लाह की عبادत
	रविवार सुहा 10-00 बजे।	शनिवार सुहा 10-00 बजे।	10-00 बजे

This is the first step in discipling these new believers from Muslim backgrounds: we need to get ready. Many of us, and many churches, haven't even thought of this. What would we do if a Muslim walked into our church? How would we respond? Could we talk to them about Jesus in a way they would warm to? And what if they came to

faith in Jesus? What would we need to do and how would we need to change and adapt? We need to think these things through *before* it happens. The time to get ready is now!

Family

Most Muslims come from a setting where family is strong and important. Someone who comes to faith often finds these relationships become severely strained as they and their family adjust to their new allegiance to Jesus. There may be pressure to convert back to Islam; there may be threats, violence or ostracism.

The new believer needs two things at this time. The first is a new family. We are called to be their brothers and sisters, to invite them to our house, to eat with them, share with them... basically, we have to become their family. They need new older brothers and sisters, parent figures, and grandparent figures. They need new family time.

Being their new family will require both time and effort from us. Seeing people on Sunday and at home group, with the odd phone call in-between, is not enough. They need *close* family. This is a real challenge to the church. Can we provide that? Do we have that time to invest in relationships?

This is the first call – we may need to adapt who we are. It is a call to strengthen our sense of being family, of having open homes and of being the support that is the family of God.

The second thing that these new believers need is the strength and encouragement to



remain as close to their natural family as possible. This may be difficult for them, as it may involve being hurt emotionally, physically and socially. Even though the church is called to be their new family, we have to resist the temptation to totally replace their natural family. Cutting off new believers' connections with their family and culture rarely works out for the best. If people can stay as close as possible to their family, then, slowly, over time, their family can get used to their change of faith and adjust. Experience shows that this may be over a five- or ten-year period. And experience also shows that those who can

walk this walk often find that their family members come to know Jesus too. So this is the second thing we need to do: to support these new believers as they strive to stay as close to their family as possible.

A community of worship

People who have grown up as Muslims are used to praying and worshipping in community. Those who come to faith in Jesus Christ find it strange that their new church only meets on Sunday and mid-week. Where is the community prayer? Where is the joint worship of praying together up to five times a day?

This is a real challenge. Should we, as a church, be looking to worship together more? One of my friends, sensing new believers needed this, made a room in his house a prayer room and invited anyone who wanted to, to gather together daily at 7:00 am and 7:00 pm to pray. This initiative was warmly received by new believers from Muslim backgrounds. However, my friend quickly discovered that he also appreciated the group prayer times, and soon other church members also started to attend. He told me that he has grown to love that time spent together in prayer, knowing the presence of Jesus in the group.

Challenge

New believers are a challenge – a challenge to us to provide for their needs and a challenge to us to grow. They challenge our faith: can we believe this can happen? They challenge us to be family, often in a deeper way than we have been used to. They challenge us to provide support for them to stay close to their family through very difficult times. They challenge us to be a worshipping community daily.

Yet it is a positive challenge. It is a challenge that, if we rise to it, will change us for the better and make us more of a community that reflects the Spirit and life of Jesus, the One we follow. ☞

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