



Learning to Advance the Kingdom

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What could a network of missions like the Global Network of Mission Structures do with and for each other and to advance God's Kingdom? The ideas elsewhere in this issue of *Mission Frontiers* outline some possibilities. They range widely, and naturally much depends on the willingness and ability of one agency to connect with another in the midst of other ministry.

One example comes from a worker who was on our staff and who then went to a Muslim country. He has served there for 20 years. He recounts an experience that highlights the value of learning from the insights of others and applying those transferable insights in "on-the-ground" situations.

More than 15 years ago I plopped myself down on a wooden seat on a commuter train. Across from me sat a conservatively dressed Muslim man reading a fundamentalist Muslim newspaper. Just by looking at him, I knew what kind of conversation we would have.

We said hello to each other, and it wasn't long before this man's eyes brightened and he sat up in his seat. I was the first Christian he had ever met, which also made me the first non-Muslim he had the chance to witness to in his life. I could see the excitement welling up inside him as he tried to recall all of the sermons he'd heard in the mosque, which declared the falsehood of Christianity and condemned the immorality of Christians. I could almost hear his inner voice whispering, "Wait till the guys at Friday prayers hear about this!"

He hardly knew where to begin, but once he got started he shot questions and accusations at me in rapid fire: The Bible's been corrupted and is unreliable! Jesus didn't die on the cross! Christians believe in three gods! Muhammed is the last and final prophet!

What this sincere Muslim gentleman had not anticipated was that I just might have legitimate answers to his questions, and reasonable responses to his accusations. The imams in the mosque never prepared him for this possibility. When I had respectfully countered each of his claims one-by-one, he ran out of steam. Slumping back into his seat, he flung out his arms in exasperation and blurted out, "OK, Mr. Elliot, just what do you want me to do?" He had tried and failed to convert me to Islam on the spot. He wanted to know what my intention might be for him.

Now it was my turn to be caught speechless. No Muslim had asked me that kind of question before. In a nanosecond my mind processed — and rejected — a series of possible responses:

"Receive Jesus as Savior and Lord!" I suppressed that because he would hear it as, "Blaspheme against God!"

"Become a Christian!" I nixed this one because he would hear it as, "Reject your ethnicity and your nationality and bring eternal shame on your family!"

"Come to church!" I eliminated this one because he would hear it as, "Risk being struck by lightning as God's judgment!"

By God's grace, I eventually got to the gospel with this man, but I wished I'd had a succinct phrase for him then like the one I use now: "Be reconciled to God!"

So how does a Muslim man hear this statement, which I lifted from 2 Corinthians 5:17-20? Well, at the very least, he does not have a knee-jerk reaction from his file of Friday sermons. He might ask a benign clarifying question like, "What do you mean by that?" Or, he may be provoked and respond in a challenging tone, "Are you insinuating that I'm not reconciled to God?" In either case, we can skip religious arguments and get right to his need to be reconciled to God through the Messiah because his sin has made him an enemy of God, no matter how religious he is (Romans 5:10-12).

These insights are simple and clear. They express the kind of thoughtfulness we need to effectively understand people from cultures without a Christian background. This is just one example of the kinds of things we can glean from those "at the coalface" of the advance of the Kingdom. If you have other examples, please share them with us. 🌐



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