



# 24:14

24:14 Goal: Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (20 months)

## How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed DMMs among UPGs

By DAVE COLES

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**A**ila Tasse began attending the mosque at an early age. Raised in a strong Muslim family in northern Kenya, he took his Islamic studies seriously and avoided Christians. At around the age of nine, he developed a deep desire to know more about his Islamic faith. He started spending time with the elders after each day's afternoon prayers, listening to them discuss the Qur'an and other issues. But a question gnawed at Aila's heart: Who is Allah?

Through unexpected and terrifying circumstances, God opened Aila's heart to receive the gospel and Christ's forgiveness. Aila describes the details of this radical transformation in *Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements among Unreached Peoples*. The following are two excerpts adapted from this book.

### Can cabbage grow in this desert?

One day, I [Aila] summoned my courage and boldly asked the Lord, "God, I want to have an appointment with you. I want to hear you. I want you to lead me." A week later, I went to a campsite in the Marsabit forest to pray in solitude. I sat on the ground, leaned against a tree, and closed my eyes to pray, putting my Bible on the ground next to me. Suddenly, I felt such a strong presence of God that the environment around me totally changed. I thought to myself, "God is here!"

I was terrified and didn't dare to open my eyes. I thought, "I asked God to give me an appointment and now he's here! I can't open my eyes because if I see him, I'll die!" While praying in his presence, I had a dramatic vision that lasted for many hours and came in three parts.

The first was like a slideshow. A screen opened before me and to my astonishment, I saw the imam of our home mosque. As I fixed my eyes on him, a kind strong voice said to me, "Forgive him. Bless him and pray for him."

He had hurt me the most when I was persecuted and banished from my family. Now I was being asked to forgive, bless, and pray for him! I couldn't understand the purpose. I struggled in my thoughts and weighed whether to obey the command of that clear voice. I finally chose to obey. I prayed for and blessed the imam until I had no words left. Then his face disappeared, and another took its place. One by one, all who had hurt me appeared on the screen, and I repeated the process for each one. Each time I did, I felt like an arrow, once buried in my heart, was removed and, with it, bitterness and hatred evaporated.

The second part of the vision came like scenes in a movie theatre. But I wasn't just watching; I was a key actor in the drama. I watched the back of a person walk down the road. He turned right before sitting near a potter at work. I didn't see the potter's face, only his hands working the clay. The clay broke in his hand as

he worked and a voice said to me, “You see that? You are the one sitting there watching the potter.” He told me, “I am the Potter, you are the clay, and I will make you.”

The vision then moved to the third part. I saw myself in a place I recognized as the Dida Galgalu Desert, a part of the Chalbi Desert in northern Kenya between Moyale and Marsabit. This desert is so barren that it has only one small tree nicknamed Tigo. This is a point of reference when crossing the desert. In my vision, I saw the vast emptiness of this dry and rocky desert. Then, I heard a question in my ears, “Can cabbage grow in this desert?”

I said to myself, “How could cabbage grow here? There’s no grass, nothing! Nothing grows in this desert!” At that point, the vision seemed to stop. I stood up to stretch and realized almost three hours had passed. I sat back down to pray, and suddenly the vision resumed. I again saw the Chalbi Desert. This time the voice did not ask a question. Instead, a male voice made a statement, “Cabbage can grow in this desert.” Suddenly, I saw rows of healthy cabbages growing in it!

Along with this, Isaiah 43:18–20 came to mind: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (NIV). The Lord’s words echoed a prophetic application: “I will cause these rivers to grow cabbages in the desert.”

As abruptly as the visions had begun, this third vision ended. As my mind cleared, I realized it was about 5:00 p.m. and elephants were grazing close by me! I had not heard them approach. At some distance, I saw two game wardens watching, probably worried for my safety but not knowing how to alert me without alarming the animals, lest they panic and charge toward me. The elephants, however, were not bothered by my presence and continued breaking branches as they ate. So I quietly took my Bible and walked away, choosing a path away from them and toward home.

The vision of cabbages in the desert stuck in my mind, and I prayed about it for weeks. Finally, the Lord gave me understanding. The arid northern parts of Kenya are home to tribes like the Gabra, Rendille, Borana, Burji, and Daasanach, all classified (currently or until recently) as unreached people groups (UPGs). Reaching them is

difficult because they live in remote, difficult-to-reach areas. Poor infrastructure in that region remains a great challenge, even up to the present. Fourteen of the 26 unreached people groups in Kenya live in *that* desert, the exact desert where I saw the cabbage growing. I began to pray specifically about those people and tribes. It became clear to me that this was my calling. Bringing these people groups into God’s kingdom was the “new thing” God was going to do. I began reaching out to the UPGs in that region.

## Who will remain behind?

The Lord orchestrated yet another life-changing experience for me. World Vision asked me to help distribute food to the Rendille people in Lontolio village after rains failed to come the previous year. Lontolio lies outside the town of Laisamis, home to many pastoralist communities, near a sacred hill locally called “The House of God.”



In circumstances like these, safety is paramount. Distributions require good cooperation with local administrative officials. Three of us went ahead to assess the situation before the team and the food truck arrived. In the area designated for food distribution, scattered around acacia trees, huddled in small groups, we found about 200 men and women. They seemed engaged in deep conversation, probably about their predicament.

Looking at the small crowd, I saw an opportunity to preach the gospel to them. I was with a friend who was as zealous as I was in evangelism. We agreed that I would preach. My Rendille friend would translate the message to his tribespeople. This was an exciting moment as we anticipated a harvest of souls for God’s kingdom. We were on fire for Jesus and ready to set the place ablaze with the gospel.

I started preaching but, before long, realized they didn't comprehend the message. In utter confusion, they looked at my mouth and then at my friend's mouth, back and forth, but they seemed not to understand a thing.

I realized that these people had no categories to grasp what I was talking about. They had no prior contact with Christians or the gospel. Even with the translation of my words, we might as well have been speaking Greek!

So I stopped preaching and began simply to tell them the Bible's message as a story. I told them that God created and loved human beings, but mankind fell into sin because of disobedience. I described how God later redeemed us through Christ's sacrifice. They understood this, since in times of tribal distress, their elders offered animal sacrifices to appease their deities at the nearby hill. They also comprehended the Genesis creation story, as it resembles their own creation folklore.

Our interaction became a dialogue, as the elderly men asked questions. The concept of a loving God was not foreign to the Rendille. But they were amazed by the love of Jesus that led him to suffer for our sins at Calvary. They asked, "Why did he do all that?" I told them, "Because he loved you and me!" At the end of the story, I asked, "Who among you would like to believe in this God?"

Before they could respond, the village elder stood up and began walking around addressing his people. He said, "Who among you cannot receive a God like this? This God who gave us his son, who made him a sacrifice? How can you not accept this God, who also has sent these men to bring us food?" My friend busily translated to me what the elder was saying. Overflowing with joy, I thought to myself, "This is just amazing!"

In response to the elder, most present raised their hands, indicating their desire to follow Christ. I was elated and continued to tell them Bible stories as the truck arrived and the food was unloaded.

Finally, our team had to leave. We led the villagers in a prayer of commitment, but I was not confident they truly grasped the meaning of salvation. I had no time to tell them more, as the truck driver was getting impatient, trying to be responsible and get us out safely. He kept honking the horn to motivate us, so we said quick goodbyes and headed for the truck.

Suddenly, one woman stepped in our way. My friend went around her, but I stopped. She said, "You've told us

about this God who loves us, who gave us his son, and also sent you to give us food. So that means he knows about and even cares about us?" "Yes," I confirmed. Then she looked me in the eye and asked, "Now who among you will remain behind to teach us about this God you've told us about?"

I froze, my heartbeat suddenly moving to my throat, my whole body beginning to sweat. We hadn't anticipated such a soul-searching question. But there she stood, waiting for an answer! I couldn't respond. I had no answer! I knew I couldn't stay behind, and neither could my friend.

Numbed by her question, I needed to get away from her heart-piercing eyes. As I quietly and sadly stepped past her, she turned and kept staring at me. When I got into the truck and looked back, she hadn't moved an inch. As the truck drove away, her silhouetted form receded into the distance as she continued to stand there looking at me. Her question haunted me.

The others in the truck rejoiced. Men and women were not only fed but also had come to the Lord! Amid animated conversation among my colleagues, I was drowning in deep thought, my heart heavy with grief. Etched in my mind was the image of the woman standing, expecting an answer to her question. "Who among you will remain behind to teach us about this God you've told us about?"

That night I wrestled with grief because I had no answer for that woman. Finally, I concluded that from that point on, whenever I proclaimed the gospel, I would stay on to teach the converts about how to follow God's way. I would move *from decision-making to disciple-making*.

I asked the Lord in prayer, "How will it be possible to do this every time?" The insight I received in response was this: "Multiply yourself in the lives of others, so they do the same things you do. You cannot be everywhere." Like cool water to a thirsty soul, this answer refreshed my troubled mind. With a newly calmed heart, I contemplated the implications of this approach.

Discover more of Aila's journey in *Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements among Unreached Peoples* by Aila Tasse with Dave Coles. 