**A Bridging Model**

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Early on in my ministry work to reach the N Unreached People Group on the island of Java, there weren’t any Christian workers committed to serve the M\*lim majority. When I began there, I met with one man who had a young family. He was experiencing loss of hope and depression. It was a problem with his work, but also a problem with his family. Several times we discussed things together. There was a part of the discussion where we were able to bring out things from the Holy Book (Bible), for example understanding the blessings [baraka] of the LORD, to what it can be compared. Also, about family. The friend was interested, and began to invite me to his home. There I shared with the extended family, especially with the friend’s parents-in-law, and the extended family of the friend’s wife. Eventually we discussed portions of the Word together, and this segment of his family was the embryo from which a seeker group emerged in that location.

As things moved on from this stage, to make the story short, eventually this friend and his wife and two other friends in that group, seven people altogether, became believers. In the second stage four of them came to faith, but three where not yet believers. When the three also became believers in the third stage, there was one issue I always presented to them, it was how to experience Allah.

During the first part of this story, I had been using with a different ministry model, when I was with a different team. We had been using a more conventional church planting model. Later I started experimenting with various methods, precisely so that I could reach more M\*lims, and we continue experimenting our this team as a regular part process. I needed a style that could be more easily received by M\*lims and replicated by believers among them. So we tested various methods, and through this process I embraced several guidelines for finding fruitful practices. We identified some guidelines, our practices had to be: 1) simple, 2) easily replicated, 3) anyone could do it (even people who are completely uneducated), and 4) repeated over and over again. Through discussions with my mentor, and while trading ideas with other planters in our group, these guidelines have become a standard part of our model. They are guidelines for how we discover and use fruitful practices or principles, an ongoing process.

One day a sick woman visited the neighbors of my wife’s friend in a village. The Javanese people would say she had been hit with a death-curse [santet], black magic to kill people. So this lady’s stomach swelled up, her legs swelled up. She had already gone to the largest hospital where she was checked by eight different doctors who were specialists. But they weren’t able to help her. After that she went to seven different spiritists [dukun]. Each of them was different, but none of them could heal her. So her stomach was actually getting bigger. This phase occurred over a period of six months and eleven days. She had almost sold her house to pay for these failed attempts to heal her. She had already sold her rice field and several small plots of ground. Her money had been almost completely spent on doctors and spiritists by this time.

One day my wife’s friend who had heard about this sick lady, discussed the sick lady with my wife. Starting with that conversation and some linked conversations, I was asked to come and pray for this lady. When I arrived, this lady was lying on her bed because she couldn’t get up. I asked the whole family to quickly gather. Then they all came into the house. There were maybe 9 people besides myself and my friend, so the total there was about 11 people. At that time I presented Isa al-Masih, Who He is, and what He has done. I especially focused on several miracles that He accomplishd. Next I took the opportunity to challenge the sick lady, “Do you, madam, want to have a personal experience of Allah, and enjoy a miracle like the ones that were done by Isa?” Subsequently, the lady said “Yes, I want to experience it.” Then I asked the family and also invited them, “Do you also want to believe the things that this mother has expressed?” At that time, several of them said that they wanted to, but her husband said he didn’t want to experience God through Isa. So, after I presented all that, then I asked her to pray. At one point I asked, “Is there any knowledge/power [ilmu] which was given by a spiritist [dukun]? That will have to be removed.” She surrendered several amulets, and under her bed there were several magical knives [keris]. And subsequently they were all removed. After that I declared to the lady, “Madam, go ahead and pray to Isa for healing, and I will also pray for you, and in worship [sembahyang] ask for deliverance from this evil power.” We prayed. And after that I went home.

Two days later, I heard the news that this lady’s stomach and legs had already shrunken back to normal, and she could get up and walk and eat again! God had worked a miracle in that location. After that, the news was spread quickly by several people. Through this family, the news travelled to many nearby places in that village. People began to question the family, “Is it true that you witnessed this woman’s healing, even though the hospital couldn’t heal her, and the spiritists couldn’t?” The family explained that they had learned about Isa, and then made their request to Isa. So in that village as a result of this miracle, there were three new family groups that were begun to learn about Isa.

Now, that’s not the end of that story, because news also spread to the next village. And several people in that nearby village began to question, “What has been going on in your village?” So many people heard in a second village, then a third. They heard that it was a person who prayed in the name of Isa Al-Masih that had introduced healing. They asked to study from the “former holy books”, the Torah [Kitab Suci Taurat], Psalms, and the Holy Gospel [Kitab Suci Injil] about is Who Isa.

They became interested in what they read. So people from the first village made a group. And after that group shared with other people, they made four more groups in that second village.

After a little over three more months, people from this village went to yet another village, somewhat distant, and told the story of this phenomenon. They told the story of how this lady was sick and then was miraculously healed while her family witnessed this, and they immediately believed in Isa Al Masih? And they carried the news to this somewhat distant village. When they gave a testimony there, it was heard by some traders. So it was among traders they told the story and subsequently they, too, were interested. These were village people, but they often traded in the city.

So after that, there were a group of traders who would always meet up informally, in order to learn about “Who is this Isa?” Eventually, there was a steady believer group among traders in that third village. And since they were all traders, quite naturally in their work, they would travel to other places and share stories with people in the markets. In that region, after about 6 months, believer group multiplication had already birthed groups in the fifth or sixth generation. This was in 2011 and 2012. And they are still meeting.

And one of them, because of their work or their family, moved to Sumatra, to one province in Sumatra, where they are trading. Before they moved, I had met with them once or twice for training, as a coach. As it turns out, in that province in Sumatra where they moved, they are building the same model of multiplying groups that we have here in Java! Apparently they had picked up enough of the DNA via their village mentors even though they had little time directly with me. In this last quarter, they gave their report, and they have multiplied to 540 believers in 6 generations in Sumatra.

And from that first province in Sumatra, where those believers trained several people, it has spread to another province in Sumatra as well! Because of trading, one of the families moved to another city by the border, and they began this same process of multiplying believer groups in the adjacent province. And they have built it there as well, it is up to 113 believers in this second province on Sumatra.

My coaching of leaders is an ongoing part of the process. For the leaders’ groups within 3 hours drive, I empower their leaders’ groups every month or two. For the fruit on Sumatra, I visit the island to equip the leaders during one trip each year, and I keep coaching via text and phone calls.

I discovered that from this one region on Java the gospel was embraced by groups, and spread to birth believer groups in other locations and other ethnic groups. There is something about the people in this location, a tendency to move, to find a new adventure, to interact with other people groups . . . the people from this region seem to be natural missionaries. Up to this point in this story, they spread the gospel within our province, and they carried it to another island, and from there to a third province.

There was even one man from the region who moved to Singapore, he went there as a migrant worker. Then I went and visited with him in Singapore. And there begins another fascinating tale!

I visited this Javanese man in Singapore as well as some other of our believers who had moved there. They are multiplying believer groups among Indonesians living in Singapore too. During this trip, I wanted to buy a meal in one location. Because my budget was really limited, I was looking for the cheapest meal.

When I had found the right place, I noticed a man who came to eat there as well. The man was dark skinned, and after I started talking with him he said he was from Bangladesh. I started talking with him, and it came out that he was a M\*slim. I tried to talk to him but there was a serious language limitation . . . yet it was like there was a moving of the Holy Spirit which enabled me to share the gospel as much as possible. So, I shared about salvation in Isa. And that turned into a discussion that went on for 5 days! Each day I would meet him at lunch and then our dialogue went on into evening each day. He responded well, and eventually wanted to receive Isa. I asked him, “Do you want to share this good news with your family in your home country?”

After that I returned to Indonesia. I next heard news from him almost a year later. He said that he was in good health. He also said that he had started a group upon his return to Bangladesh after his work project had finished in Singapore. And he said, “I have already shared the good news with my family.” He had an extended family of 48 members. 19 people among them were Isl\*mic teachers [Imam, Kiyai], and they had a residential Isl\*mic training center [pondok pesantren].

He related that near the beginning when he first shared the gospel he was persecuted by his family. He was chased away by his parents. He had to leave his home city and work in another location. But he still wanted to share the gospel about Isa with people in B country. And he eventually emboldened himself and shared the gospel again to his parents. And this time his parents wanted to receive Isa. From the 48 family members, 7 became believers in that first year. And now they have multiplied small groups, which birthed other small groups. Now the believers are up to 666 believers in 7 generations of small groups. I don’t have a recent update yet, but at the end of last year he said he planned to go to P Country and minister to those people!

There is another interesting tale. One of his nephews came to faith. That nephew was rejected by his parents. Now, I don’t know all the details, but eventually this nephew was evacuated for security reasons to Indonesia, because his family was planning to kill him. So when his nephew got to Indonesia, it happened that he was in a city not far from me. I asked the man in B Country if I could meet with his nephew. He wrote back and arranged for us to meet. He was so happy to hear that we’d gotten together! When through the influence of his uncle there had been some improvement in the family’s reception of him in B Country, I was able to meet up with both of them before he returned to B Country. It eventually became safe for him to return to B Country, because there more of the family members had become believers. The persecution, thankfully, was not too terrible, I don’t know of any who were killed. They were only imprisoned for around a week. The means of them being able to have a Bible is by hiding it in their handphones.

Questions:

Baptism. One thing that becomes a stumbling block to Muslims is the issue of baptism. Tell a little about baptism among the people in these stories. Using the Arabic word shibgah can help, it is found in Qs. 2:138. And staying with the biblical idea of shibgah makes it easier for M\*slims, rather than adding church traditions. Yes, shibgah can be a dilemma.

But in my life it was more of a dilemma for me than for M\*slims. Because of my background in the church after I believed during grade school, I interact with church leaders, who wanted to know who would perform the baptisms. I have felt attacked by their questions. The opinions of church leaders, who limit the task of baptizing only to the highest status pastors, and only after long instruction, immobilized me for many years. Meanwhile, the number of those who had believed had grown to a large number, which increased the difficulty of starting to baptize, because a pattern had not been set from the beginning.

My mentor and I deepened our study on this. I wanted to teach them about shibgah. Finally, I concluded from a deeper study of the Word that every person who believes in Isa, must have a high level of commitment to Isa. And that commitment must culminate in shibgah, and not long after they believe. And that anyone who makes disciples must baptize, not just pastors with high status.

So we decided I would approach it as an experiment. For a two month period, whenever I met with believers and especially with group leaders and cluster leaders, I would have us discuss a passage from the Bible on shibgah. At the end of each study I would ask, what do you think you should do to apply the truth from this passage? So they started baptizing each other (I didn’t baptize any of them), and they started baptizing their disciples. Groups in a strand would study these passages and be baptized, and then they would mentor the groups they had previously formed, to do the same. In one year we had over 4000 baptisms. It surprised me how quickly this multiplied. But even more surprising was the other benefits linked to this. Overall, we had a huge surge in commitment and in ministry action. People were sharing their faith more often, discipling other people more often, and bridging to open new groups and new areas more often. As a result, it was the fastest growth year we have had.

How do we teach about shibgah to M\*slim people now? Among the early lessons that I share with former M\*slims, in the first three months after they come to faith, when I am sharing the foundational modules with them, we investigate passages that discuss baptism. After we’ve gone through those passages, I ask them what they’ve discovered about shibgah in their study of the holy books in these 3 months of study? They said that they concluded that the apostles [hawariun] and their disciples who had a commitment to Isa experienced shibgah. I ask if there was any hindrance or reason that we shouldn’t do the same? They came to embrace a new level of understanding about shibgah. And they pass this on to those they disciple, and baptize them. This process is replicated in each new generation of believer groups.

Language. Back to the early parts of the story, did you use Javanese language or Indonesian national language with them? And which Bible translation did you use? I am Javanese and grew up in the area I am trying to reach. On Java at first I used Javanese language with them, but after a while I used Bahasa Indonesia with them. With the older people who are not as fluent in Indonesian, we use Javanese. For the Bible, we use the cousin friendly translation in Indonesian language. The Javanese translation was done in a high level version of Javanese language, and does not use any Arabic origin words. It doesn’t sound like the language of the people we are reaching. With people from other countries, I use English when I mentor them, but of course they use their own language when they disciple others. They find the best Bible translations they can find in their languages, to download to their android phones from Playstore.