This chapter is dedicated to Dr. Jerald Whitehouse, whose focus on meeting the spiritual heart needs of Muslim people touched an answering cord in my heart. At the center of all that Dr. Whitehouse has shared, both with Muslims and those of us who have been fortunate enough to journey with him, is the need for our hearts to be transformed through a living relationship with God. This focus has led me on a most unexpected journey, which not only transformed my own spiritual life, but has given me the privilege of being a witness to the work of God in the hearts of my Muslim friends.

Introduction

In this article I propose that ministry among Muslim women requires first and foremost a spiritually focused approach through which an individual or group or community connects with God at a deep spiritual level, thereby meeting their heart-felt needs.¹

¹Felt needs are at the heart of a person's and communities' worldview which, as Charles H. Kraft notes, is at the deep level of "assumptions, values and commitments" (1989:20).
Before proceeding it is important to define the term “spiritual” or “spirituality.” This is an often ill-defined concept in today’s world. Eugene Peterson notes that this pristine word, once used exclusively in religious contexts, has been used indiscriminately by all sorts of people, often being dragged into the rough and tumble dirt of the market place and playground (2005:27). In the process of retrieving its original meaning based in Scripture Peterson defines it as “an operation of God in which our human lives are pulled into and made participants in the life of God” (2005:31). Such a definition alludes to something that is both transcendent and yet intimate, something that is living and transformational and totally focused on God, rather than ourselves. It is in this sense that the term “spiritual” or “spirituality” is used in this chapter.

In the last five years or so I have been witness to the fact that when Muslim women have gathered together to worship God, a spiritually focused approach based in the heart-felt needs of women has set in motion a process of significant spiritual growth and development on a personal and communal level. Integral to this process has been the understanding and acceptance of the truth that God wants them to know about him and his plan for the resolution of the problem of sin appropriate to the particular stage in their journey of faith. A further significant factor was that we who were acting as facilitators found that our personal spiritual lives were also deeply enhanced and expanded as we witnessed and participated in the spiritual transformation taking place through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of women among whom we were ministering.

Such an approach is not centered on a method that is based on scriptural proof-texts which provides evidence or truth which is accepted or not, although the understanding of the truth about God and his plan for the salvation of human kind at a cognitive level (relating to the thought process) is absolutely core to the spiritual growth and development process. Neither is it a program which targets Muslim women with doctrines or theological explanations formulated in a foreign context. Instead, it is a holistic spiritual growth process which is triggered through a combination of the following seven dynamic interrelated key elements: first, through acknowledging and receiving the presence of God; second, through the escalating activity of the Holy Spirit as women seek to live a holy life before God; third, the dynamic interaction between God and the community or individual through prayer; fourth, a context specific community related approach to meeting spiritual heart needs at a deep worldview level; fifth, the communication of the truth about God’s revelation of himself in language, concepts, and thought categories which are familiar to Muslim women; sixth, a truth encounter
resulting in shifting allegiances; and finally, the influence and impact of the local spiritual leader.

While these seven elements have been separated for discussion and clarity purposes in this paper, it was evident that they were in constant dynamic interaction with each other, shifting and moving according to the spiritual needs of the women in their groups and communities and the very specific work of God’s Spirit in their lives in particular situations and locations.

Due to the need to respect the privacy of the groups, instead of describing a single gathering, I will combine the experiences of several women’s gatherings drawn from different setting and occasions and describe them in a single composite case study. In the process I will identify various elements in the spiritual growth and transformation process, which to a greater or lesser extent, were reflected in all the gatherings. From time to time I will refer to a particular gathering to make a particular observation.

A composite case study approach as described in Clark Moustakas’ Phenomenological Research Methods (1994) is a particularly useful tool for this study as it is based in experience. While the composite case study described and analyzed in this chapter arose out of personal participation, experience, and observation in various women’s gatherings rather than from specific formalized research, Moustakas’ methodology provides a useful framework within which to describe and analyse the various experiences that I and my colleagues have had as we have ministered among Muslim women.

Moustakas notes that the phenomenological research framework facilitates the identification of the “unique qualities of an experience that stands out”—the “core horizons” which enables the researcher to offer “thematic portrayals of the experience” (1994:131). From this an individual “composite textual description” is constructed (133) on the basis of vivid descriptions (135) which facilitates the development of a composite description where the invariant themes of all participants are studied and incorporated (138). Composite textual descriptions also incorporate “imaginative variations” (1994:141) which seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination to arrive at a structured description of an experience (97, 98, 141). Finally there is a synthesis of meanings and essences through the “integration of the composite textual and composite structural descriptions, providing a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience” (1994:144).

This chapter is divided into four parts. First, in a composite case study I will describe what happened in several women’s gatherings which took
place in differing regions where Muslims are largely “high identity” although ranging from “high practice to low practice,” depending on their spiritual maturity. Usually all of the key elements outlined above were in evidence, but not always, and at times in a different order. Second, I will outline the principles of engagement that facilitated the experiences described in the composite case study. Third, I will examine the nature of the interrelated key elements which brought about such significant results within such a short period of time with the purpose of demonstrating how each element contributed to an accelerated process of spiritual growth and transformation, individually and corporately. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

Due to the complexities of differing societies and the multiple differences in the way that Muslim women respond in different geographical or situational settings, adjustments were continuously made by the leaders and facilitators as they followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore it is recognized that while generalizations are made in the analysis of the seven key elements outlined in the composite case study, it was very clear to us that women respond differently in differing contexts. It would be impossible to include all of these finer details due to the length of this chapter. Due also to the need to respect the privacy of the various groups this chapter does not identify the locations or give a full explanation of all the teaching that took place during the gatherings as presented in the case study below. Only the main aspects which clearly contributed to the spiritual growth and transformation process are outlined and examined in the analysis section.

**Composite Case Study**

In this section, you, as the reader of this chapter, are invited to enter into an exceptional story of the work of God among Muslim women in differing contexts. As has been noted in the introduction, several gatherings are described in this composite case study. The journey begins with a gathering where a large number of women sat together on the floor in a culturally appropriate way, chatting together in groups. Most were literate, some semi-literate and a few illiterate. Many were already part of a community of believers that formed part of a growing in-context spiritual movement.

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2For the purposes of this chapter “high identity” refers to Muslims who have a strong identity as a Muslim. “High to low practice” refers to Muslims who are on a continuum between the two extremes in terms of practicing their faith. Some may be “high identity,” but “low in practice” of their faith.

3In this case a movement can be defined as a spontaneous response on the part of people to the spiritual heart-felt need to better understand God's will for their lives. The participants in the movement are
which is currently taking place across a significant geographical area. Many of the women had already matured in their faith, they trusted and believed in the Holy Bible (referred to as the Bible from now on) and read it regularly. Some were still in the early stages in their spiritual journey, understanding the importance of believing in the Bible, but having little trust in it (this group understood that it was the Word of God, but found it difficult to understand). Still others were entirely new to the believing community and did not trust the Bible at all. They also did not know much about their Book which was central to their faith, the Honorable Qur’an (referred to as the Qur’an from now on). This new group presented the facilitators with a challenge. After a quick consultation it was decided to focus mainly on aspects in the Qur’an which could act as a bridge to biblical truth and to introduce the use of the Bible in progressive stages.

As the time approached to start the first session, the atmosphere in the hall was electric with expectation and anticipation. This was the first time the women were invited to attend such a large gathering with others who were on a similar journey of faith. Up to this point many of the women had only heard about other believing groups who were also meeting together and keeping the Sabbath holy, but they had not met them before. In advance their spiritual leader had informed the women that there was going to be a special event and that they needed to prepare themselves to come and hear what God has to say to them about how to live a holy life. Many were eager to understand this better and those that had a copy of the Bible and the Qur’an opened them and placed them on the especially dedicated tawla (holder).

As the spiritual leader entered the room followed by the facilitators, a respectful silence descended on the group as the day started with a du’a (prayer of personal supplication) prefixed by the Arabic words auzobillahi minishaitanir rajim bismillahir rahmanir rahim. . . . ya Allah.

**Key Element 1: Responding to God’s Call to Live a Holy Life: Acknowledging and Receiving the Presence of God**

Almost without exception, in all the varying contexts, the facilitators started each session with a particular spiritual heart-felt need. Invariably

attached to clearly identifiable social groupings while at the same time seeing themselves as part of the wider community of faith. At the core of this movement is the perceived need for personal and communal change. The movement has a spiritual leader who has inspired and fostered the need for change. It also has an organizational structure which is geared to support the growth of the movement rather than being an end in itself.
many women do not think that they are worthy of God’s attention and fear
that they will not be one of the *ashab-al-jannah* (those who believe and do
good deeds and are destined for paradise (Surah Al Baqarah 2:82). This was a
matter of deep concern for them. To address this crucial issue the facilitators
focused on building a picture of God which showed him as being interested
in the everyday affairs of women and actively desiring to be involved in their
lives.

Intentionally starting with the *Qur’an*, due to the presence of those not
able to fully trust the Bible in this particular group, the facilitator focused
on God’s call in Surah Al Baqarah 2:186:4 “When my servants ask thee
concerning Me; I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every
suppliant when he calleth on Me: let them also, with a will, listen to My call,
and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way.”5

The women pondered over this *ayah* at length. The question hung in the
air. Does this really refer to them as women? Does God also call them? The
more spiritually mature among them affirmed that it did as they are believers
in God. Then they considered the meaning of the rest of the *ayah*. Does it
not also mean that they need to be responsible now as to how they live their
lives? They pondered over this question for a few minutes and talked among
themselves and then agreed—it is necessary to respond now so that they
can be ready for the Day of Judgment (*Yawm ad-Din*) and be able to enter
Paradise (*Jannah*).

As the interest built, the facilitator gave examples in story form of
people who heard and responded to God’s call, answered him, and in so
doing invited his presence in their lives. A lively discussion centered around
eamples of those honored by God such as Abraham (whom Muslims refer

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5The concept of *da’wah* referred to in Surah Al Baqarah 2:186 is mentioned many times in the Qur’an and
covers a range of etymological meanings from addressing, calling, appealing, requesting, demanding to
(2:186) a basic meaning for *da’wah*—perhaps its cardinal meaning—is the single act of prayer: “When My
servants ask thee about Me, I am indeed close by and answer the prayer [*da’wah*] of everyone when they
pray to Me.” *Da’wah*, therefore, can indicate a certain person’s prayer or an entreaty addressed to God.
. . . Each servant must recognize God’s own *da’wah*, his summons, requires their response. The ultimate
*da’wah* is that of God himself. This double principle—that God both summons through his *da’wah* and
that He alone answers the *da’wah* of his servants—results in a sense of the true *da’wah*, the *da’wat al-haqq*
of Surah Al Ra’d 13:14: “To Him is the prayer of truth [*da’wat al-haqq*] and all those they pray to, other
than Him, answer them not at all, no more than if they stretched out their hands to reach for water, which
reaches them not, for the prayer of the unbelievers is futile.” In the sessions with the women the concept
is utilized as described by Walker to open up wider spiritual conversations about how God relates to
humankind from a biblical perspective. The concept of *da’wah* has, however, been developed further with
to as a Prophet) and Isaiah who heard God’s call to live a holy life and who answered that call.

A particularly moving example which women relate to is found in the life of Hajar (Hagar)\(^6\) which is told in Muslim traditions and in the Tawrat (Gen 16 and 21). Almost without exception, whatever the group or context, I have found that women listen to this story and identify with it at a deep spiritual level. In one of the gatherings, after the facilitator told the story, she emphasized that in Hajar’s time of deepest distress and suffering, when she had no status or the basic necessities of life, she not only submitted to God, but she also became the object of God’s special care and attention in an exceptional way.

Several of the women identified with the story and together as a group concluded that it is one thing for Allah (God) to come close to a man or a prophet, but quite another thing for him to notice and engage with a woman who was a slave. Tears fell from the eyes of some who had suffered in their lives. As a community, after some had shared their pain and received love and attention from one another, they concluded that if Allah could be close to someone like Hajar then he could also be close to them. Significantly at this time, God, who had always seemed to be so distant, was now seen to be close and interested in their affairs as women. As a result of this time of sharing, women in this particular context were deeply moved by God’s Spirit to open themselves to the call of God and respond to that call by inviting God to be present in their hearts through du’ā (supplication to God). What happened was not only an individual response, but a response of a whole community of women which included the leader and facilitators. We were all drawn together to respond to God’s call and invite his presence in our midst.

In another context women who were still in the early stages of their spiritual development responded differently to the story of God’s intervention in the life of Hajar. Instead of seeing God as imminent and interested in and valuing women, they rather reflected the traditional orthodox Muslim worldview of God as distant, judging, and punishing women who do not obey and who are not worthy of his attention. They exclaimed that if Hajar had not done as the angel told her God would have punished her for her

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\(^6\)The Qur’an never mentions Hajar (Hagar) by name in any of its 114 surahs, but reference is made to her and her child in Abraham’s prayer to God in Surah Ibrahim 14:37: “Oh my Lord! I have made some of my offspring (dhuriyyati) to dwell in the valley without cultivation, by the Sacred House, in order, O our Lord, that they may establish regular prayer. So fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and feed them with fruits so that they may give thanks” (Abugideiri 2001:83). For the purposes of this chapter Hagar will at all times be referred to as Hajar, which is the Egyptian pronunciation.
disobedience. God’s concern for Hajar was not perceived. This gave the facilitators the opportunity to retell the story and give a step by step reflection on the verses in the Bible and references to some of the 99 names of God. After considerable discussion, a new and different picture of Allah began to emerge. They felt that perhaps Allah is after all interested in the affairs of women. Time and time again during the week together, different aspects of Allah and his relationship with people was explored and discussed. Finally through the work of the Holy Spirit a shift in worldview began to emerge. One of the women exclaimed, “Yes Allah did care about Hajar, and he does also care about me. We do not need to be afraid of him.” Several of the other women nodded in agreement.

As previously explained, we have often found that there are women in a gathering who have not been used to using the Bible. In one particular gathering there were quite a few women like this who were present. Before long some began to raise questions as to why Muslims were reading the Bible which had been corrupted by Christians and therefore could not be trusted. Almost in an instant, ripples of dissention began to spread from group to group. With a gentle smile and a relaxed manner the spiritual leader reached for the Qur’an and encouraged the women to see for themselves what it had to say. In a way appropriate to the context the major key ayats (verses) relating to the previous revelations were studied which indicated clearly that the Qur’an confirms (musaddiqan) the scriptures that came before (Surah Al Ma’idah 5:48) and affirms the validity of the previous revelations (Surah Al Ma’idah 5:23, 24; Surah Yunus 10:94) and that there can be no change (tabdil) in the words of Allah (Surah Yunus 10:64; Surah Al Kahf 18:27). The women continued to listen intently as the spiritual leader showed that the Qur’an spoke against those who tried to change the meaning (yuharifun) of the previous revelation (Surah Al Nis’ 4:46).

Much depended on the acceptance of this explanation by the women in this particular gathering. The women discussed the matter for some time, pouring over the ayats, struggling to determine the meaning. The spiritual leader, still with a smile, gave constant encouragement to the women to determine the meaning of the ayats for themselves, and then answered more questions. Some of the mature believers also got involved in explaining the ayats to the women who were new to the group. This had a significant impact on the outcome. Eventually, the majority of the women were satisfied, and everyone relaxed and settled down to hear more about how to live a holy life before God.
Key Element 2: The Escalating Activity of the Holy Spirit

As I have reflected on what we have witnessed in the varying contexts, it has become clear that the Holy Spirit always goes before us. Thus, even before we start to speak the women's hearts are open and receptivity is at a high level. In addition there is invariably a visible increase in the activity and movement of God's Spirit during these events evidenced by the response of the women themselves.

In all of the locations, building on the same theme of the need to answer God's call to live a holy life before him, the facilitators explained that answering this call from God is never just a simple matter because we know from our daily lives that we all struggle with wrong doing and this is the work of Shaytan or Iblis (Satan). In one of the locations, this particularly touched the hearts of many of the women, who nodded their heads in assent and voiced their agreement. Together, as women, we acknowledged this as a serious dilemma which we face as we live in this world (dunya).

Placing the matter of the seriousness of sin within the framework of the Great Controversy theme and within the heart-felt need for purity which women long for, the facilitator (starting with the references in the Qur'an and then moving to the Bible) explained how Iblis or Shaytan rebelled against God and was cast out of his presence. Then turning to the story of creation and the fall of the world's first parents Adam and Hawa (Eve) the women listened to the story that showed the seriousness of sin and the consequences for all of humankind. Through stories and textual references, the facilitator demonstrated how Iblis is always ready to deceive human beings into thinking that God is unjust and vengeful, obscuring the true picture of God who is deeply interested in the affairs of women and their families.

Following through on this topic with the same group, the facilitator explained that God does not leave us alone to struggle with sin which leads us to feel ashamed and impure. Rather he enables us to live a holy life before him by giving us a free gift of righteousness. “It is not something we can just have because we want it. We cannot go to the shop to buy it. It is rather a free gift from God which we need to accept,” the facilitator told the women. “However, in order to receive this beautiful gift, we need to allow God to fill our hearts with his Spirit which strengthens us,” she said. Through a story which illustrated the role of the Holy Spirit, the women were invited to open up their lives and receive God’s Spirit into their hearts so that they could be purified and transformed.

In all of the locations, this invitation resulted in a significant response. In this particular location the response was instantaneous. It could be
described as a visible movement which surged and flowed thought the whole community. Thus, in this context, it was not only an individual response, but also a communal response where significant numbers of women moved together. Through tears and expressions of deep spiritual emotion women quietly articulated their longing to be cleansed from impurity and to live holy lives before God. The facilitators were also moved to tears of joy as the Holy Spirit also touched their lives—for the Spirit moved in the hearts and lives of everyone present. None were excluded from this movement as it swept around the hall reaching even those who were new to the group and were hearing this for the first time.

**Key Element 3: The Dynamic Interaction between God and the Community or Individual Through Prayer**

Deeply connected to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the women was prayer, which became a living and dynamic experience where Allah’s healing power was demonstrated in the lives of the women, from the youngest to the oldest. Focusing on the *du’a* form of prayer (personal supplication) the women in all the locations were encouraged to seek help from God for their own personal needs and for the needs of others. Many were not used to approaching Allah for personal spiritual and physical needs. However, when it became clear, both through the discussions and in the prayer sessions, that Allah both hears and answers the prayers of the believers, which included both women and men, the Holy Spirit was seen to move in tangible way among the women.

Once again you are invited into the story in one of the locations. After some discussion about the true meaning and centrality of prayer in the believer’s life and how Allah hears and answers prayer, the women quietly formed into groups, sharing their problems and heartfelt needs with each other and then praying for one another. At the invitation of the leader and facilitators, some requested special prayer, bringing before Allah their need for spiritual and physical healing, some requested prayer for their families, and for help with the deep sorrows in their lives. Some also requested that Allah would give them a pure heart so that they might live righteous lives before him.

At first the prayer sessions lasted a short time. However, as God’s Spirit stirred the hearts of the women, the *du’a* sessions lasted longer each day,

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*There are two forms of prayer: *salat* (formal prayer) and *du’a* (personal supplication).*
until on the fourth day all the presentations were cancelled as women, old and young alike, gave public personal testimonies. Some were moved to seek forgiveness from one another and reconciliation between friends and families and between mothers and daughters took place publically. Thus, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, healing was widespread in the community as a whole.

The spiritual leader said afterwards that “it was clear during the du'a sessions that the teenagers also felt that Allah was interested in them, even in their youth. Not only did they start to pray for themselves, but they also asked God for healing and forgiveness and renewal of body and spirit for their brothers, mothers, fathers, husbands and others whom they loved. They felt important before their Creator!” It was not only the lives of the women who were touched. We, who were leading out, were profoundly affected by the experience of the movement of God's Spirit in our midst and also received significant renewal and blessing in our personal lives. That day we were witnesses to the power of God moving among us for everyone was part of it in differing ways—each according to their need.

Join me in another location, where after several days of discussion about Allah’s willingness to answer the prayers of believing women (with many examples from the Bible), the group decided to pray for one of the women present who had experienced a persistent illness. Every day as she came to join the group her suffering was evident for all to see and was obviously a long-term illness. For three days the women, who had never before engaged in prayer for one another let alone prayer for healing, prayed for the afflicted women. Each day, she was a little better until on the fourth day she no longer showed evidence of her illness. One year later I enquired about her health. The spiritual leader informed me that she was fully healed and restored to her community. Once again we were witnesses to the power of God moving among us according to the needs of the community.

**Key Element 4: A Context Specific Community Related Approach to Meeting Spiritual Heart-felt Needs**

Once again I invite you to enter into the story. In one of the locations the women were seated on the floor clustered together in their own social groupings. A presentation had just been given and the women conferred with one another within their group about the meaning of a text or the spiritual heart of a story. One or two people in a group ventured to share what they thought the text or story meant to them within their own thought
patterns and framework of thinking which they then shared with the others in the group. The others grasped it and added to it. Before long the whole group reached a similar understanding. When invited to share what they had found in each of the groups, one person shared their conclusions on behalf of the others in their particular group, who then all nodded in agreement. The momentum grew as another group picked up on the topic in hand until there was a contagious chain reaction around the hall, as group after group, led by the Holy Spirit, grasped the idea, belief, or concept, and internalized it.

As part of the process, individuals, supported by their groups, articulated in public their willingness for God to transform and change their lives. For example, after one story which showed the difference between a woman who lived a holy life and one who did not, one woman shared. “I have been just like the woman that you have described who has not lived a holy life! From today I will no longer be like that any more.” Other women followed her example sharing how they too wanted to change their lives. As the momentum gathered, those who were new to the group also experienced the desire to change and grow in their faith (iman). The Holy Spirit was also poured out in equal measure on this group.

Reflecting later on this experience, the spiritual leader of the community said, “What was achieved during that event was something amazing and truly the work of the Holy Spirit. For those who have been regular members, it was a culmination of their spiritual renewal, but for others it was an ‘unexplained experience.’ That is why a large gathering like this was Allah’s way of giving the Holy Spirit to those who were new to the believing community.”

Key Element 5: Communicating about God in Concepts and Thought Categories Which Are Familiar to Muslim Women

Integral to this process of spiritual transformation which took place in the hearts of the women was the way in which the truth about God was presented. Recognizing that the women were at various stages of their spiritual journey the facilitators referred to Qur’anic passages which provided windows to understand biblical truth. Gradually biblical truth was revealed in progressive stages, as and when the women were ready to receive it. Islamic
Ministering to the Spiritual Heart

concepts which related to the spiritual life such as taqwah\(^8\) and mutaqaeeen\(^9\) found in the Qur’an were explored, enhanced, and extended by consideration of the biblical meanings (with the Bible as the final authority). This was then applied to the life of the community as a whole and consequently to individuals within the group.

A further important factor was the sharing of biblical truth through stories which utilized concepts and thought patterns familiar to the women, yet at the same time directly challenging and transforming current understandings of faith (iman). At times the sharing took place through a story in parable form which was then applied directly to their life situation. For example the story of Mary’s beautiful act of pouring perfume on the feet of Isa al-Masih (the Muslim name of Jesus) was told through the perspective of a defiled woman being restored back into the community, purified, cleansed, and forgiven through her encounter with Isaa al-Masih. This resulted in an instantaneous response as it met one of the deepest heart-felt needs of Muslim women—the longing to be pure in the sight of God.

At other times it was the women who had been part of a believing community for some time who took the lead through sharing their spiritual journey, focusing on how their lives had changed. They also shared their struggles as they sought to live a holy life before Allah. Also included were references to the everyday life of women, such as food, clothes, cooking, and household duties, which were utilized to convey spiritual meaning within their context.

Key Element 6: An Encounter Which Reveals the Truth about God Resulting in a Shift in Allegiance

While our approach in all the events was spiritually focused and centered on God’s desire for women to have a “new heart” experience, there was also, throughout the various sessions, a significant sharing about God at a

\(^{8}\)Most English translations use the word “piety” or “fear of Allah” when referring to taqwah. The aspect of “fear of Allah” was present early in the usage of the word, especially in the light of the expected judgment. Eventually, “as attention was focused on building the spiritual life of the believers in Medina, this end time ‘fear of Allah’ was replaced with the spiritual life understanding of ‘piety’ or ‘righteousness’” (Nur 2003). Hibba Abugideiri refers to taqwah as “God consciousness” (2001:82).

\(^{9}\)To be one of the mutaqaeeen means to be a person who has taqwah—a person who has the assurance of the hereafter. Surah Al Baqararah 2:1-4, defines this as follows: “This is [the] book; in it is guidance for sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah [mutaqaeeen—those who have taqwah]; who believe in the unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what we have provided for them; and who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the hereafter.”
cognitive level. This was done through an intentionally staged process which built an atmosphere where questions of ultimate spiritual concern relevant to the particular group could flow naturally.

Enter into the story again with me in some locations where the women themselves set the agenda rather than the facilitators. Already stories and information about Isa al-Masih had been shared throughout the sessions, starting from the understanding from a Qur’anic perspective, and then consistently moving to the biblical account. After some time the questions started to flow: “Where is Isa now and did he really die?” “How can we be ready for the judgment day (Yawm ad-Din)?” Such questions originated from the felt need of the women for more knowledge of God’s purposes for humankind. Further questions flowed such as, “What happens when you die?” “What shall we do about polygamy?” The answers were often arrived at by the women themselves either through discussion or personal testimonies. Throughout the process current beliefs and practices were challenged, expanded, or developed to include new understanding from a biblical text which the women pondered over (with the help of the facilitators where necessary) until they had arrived at a conclusion themselves.

As the understanding of the women developed over time, allegiances shifted from old ways of thinking about God, faith, and practice, to a new biblically-based perspective, resulting in shifts in allegiance at deep worldview levels. This transformation took place in a way that the truth about God from a biblical perspective was recognizable within their cultural context and thought categories. In other words the gospel was incorporated into their cultural context in a way that was uniquely theirs in each of the contexts.

**Key Element 7: God Inspired Local Spiritual Leadership**

Central to the process of spiritual growth and transformation in the community was the role of a spiritual leader, who at some significant point in his or her life had heard God’s call and answered it with dedication, perseverance, and trust in God for guidance. Modeling what it meant to live a righteous life and focusing on communicating the truth about God in ways that connected and resonated with local culture and faith, a deep trust developed between the leader and the people. With deep love and concern as well as a spiritual authority conferred and confirmed by God, the leader guided and directed the community to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the biblical picture of God. Constantly challenging both men and women to come to conclusions themselves about their own faith
journey (both on an individual and communal level) the leader facilitated the development of local theological understandings rooted in God’s revelation of himself found in Scripture during the gatherings.

Intimately connected to and part of the community, we saw that the leader lived out a life which demonstrated a truly sacrificial, incarnational, and deeply loving form of servant leadership which was and continues to be totally dependent on God in every respect. The leadership style and the structures put in place to support the growing movements were clearly not imported, but rather rooted in the local cultural forms and thus easily reproducible.

In conclusion of this section of the chapter, it is evident that the seven elements discussed in this section facilitated a dynamic process of spiritual growth and transformation resulting in significant shifts at a deep worldview

Diagram 1. The Process of Spiritual Growth and Transformation as Evidenced in the Composite Case Study
level. Inevitably once women opened their hearts to God, his Spirit became an active driving force for change, while at the same time correcting and aligning all of our understanding of what it truly means to live a holy life before God. Diagram 1 illustrates the process of spiritual growth and transformation which took place.

Finally, as a witness to what I have outlined in this composite case study, I can affirm, along with my colleagues, that it has often been a deeply moving and often exhausting experience to witness and be part of the demonstration of God’s power and might as his Spirit has convicted hearts and minds, cleansing all and perfecting in holiness.

**Principles of Engagement When Ministering among Muslim Women**

As has been evident throughout the composite case study described in this chapter, focusing on spiritual heart-felt needs acted as a trigger to significant spiritual growth and transformation of both the individual within their social groupings and the wider community as a whole. In this section I will discuss principles of engagement gleaned from several models, which together, formed the foundation of all the interaction which took place during the women’s gatherings. These principles are also the key to the spiritual dynamics that led to spiritual growth and transformation. In addition, the concept of “conversion” will also be discussed and conclusions will be drawn as to how to relate to this sensitive topic when ministering among Muslims. These principles could also apply when ministering in any context.

**Carl Coffman’s Spiritual Growth and Transformation Framework**

Carl Coffman’s thesis, *Unto a Perfect Man* (1976), while written within a Western Christian faith context which focuses on the individual rather than a group or communal level, articulates many of the principles which formed the foundation of our approach during the women’s gatherings. Coffman places the conversion process within the “Plan of Restoration Framework” (1976:13-16) which focuses on the physical, mental, and spiritual restoration of the human race into the image of God resulting in “a new perfect creation” and the “end of sin” (Rev 20) and which emphasizes the priority of fostering a personal spiritual experience which is living and transformational, rather than taking a doctrinal proof-texting approach
Driving the point home Coffman asks the question, “Does our normal presentation series have any tendency to be overly proof-text in nature, toward the development of an overwhelming mountain of evidence from which a person cannot possibly escape?” (12). Furthermore he also affirms the importance of avoiding the use of terms that are “too theological for digestion of some most important truths. Again, [he notes] we are striving to lead him [the person receiving Bible studies] to an experience, not to theological ideas” (15).

Furthermore, Coffman advocates a progressive presentation of the more difficult doctrines, noting that “when the heart and mind are ‘surrendered,’ ‘subdued,’ ‘melted,’ then we are to present to a man or woman who loves the Lord the doctrines, the testing truths” (1976:19). Another key aspect that Coffman notes is that the doctrines are not “just subjects which are singular points needful of acceptance before becoming a member of the church” (20). Instead he posits that “every teaching of the Bible plays a part in bringing or deepening the conversion experience of the needy sinner. In other words, the experience of conversion restores a man to a right relation with God where God can treat him as ‘safe to save’ even though he has much to learn” (20, 21). Coffman also points to the need for there to be a salvation focus to every doctrine with every doctrine becoming “a step towards final, complete restoration” (22). In other words it is not a question of just believing something, but rather an understanding of what that belief means in terms of its transformational effect on the heart and life of the person who is seeking the truth about God.

Finally, Coffman outlines four spiritual dynamics which are an evidence as spiritual transformation takes place in a person’s life and character (facilitated through the Holy Spirit): (1) a hunger and thirst for truth, (2) a growth in confidence [faith] in God, (3) a personal [and in our case when ministering among Muslims a communal] response of love towards God, and (4) an experience of the joy of forgiveness and a sense of God’s enabling grace (1976:38, 39). As is evident from the composite case study all of these dynamics were in action during the women’s gatherings.

Concluding this section it is important to note two things. First, that at no point does Coffman advocate the watering down or minimalization of the gospel or the role of Jesus in the salvific process. His approach is rather to facilitate a spiritual growth and transformational experience which enables the acceptance of the truth about God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, resulting in an enduring change in the person’s life. Second, when the principles advocated by Coffman were applied in the Muslim context
of social groupings and at a wider community level rather than just on an individual level, it resulted in significant numbers of people moving together through a process of spiritual growth and transformation. This will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

Lewis Rambo’s Model of the Stages of Conversion

While Coffman (1976) outlines a staged process, Lewis Rambo adds to the discussion by proposing seven stages which he has labeled context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences (1993:168, 169). At the heart of this staged progression is a transformational process which includes change, active searching, new orientation and commitment (166, 167, 168), and the experience of surrender which “empowers the convert with a sense of connection with God and the community” (169).

Rambo’s model is helpful to this discussion in several ways. First, his focus on conversion as a staged transformational process affirms the approach taken by the facilitators and the spiritual leaders as they led the women through a carefully thought through progression, which led to the expansion of their worldview to include the biblical perspective and at the same time reject certain aspects of faith due to deep worldview level changes. Second, Rambo’s assertion that of all the stages he outlines “context” is the most comprehensive as it is the “dynamic force field in which conversion takes place” (165) proved to be a highly significant factor during the women’s events as it took place within social groupings which formed part of a wider community. Third, his model also includes the notion of a significantly transformed life (168, 170) which is fostered through relationships and therefore based in community (167, 169). This is particularly helpful when it comes to facilitating a transformational process within entire communities. His model will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

Developing an Appropriate Approach to “Conversion”

While it is not possible to do full justice to this topic due to the length of this chapter it is essential to discuss the matter of conversion. Several problematic assumptions have undermined what it means to be converted. Coffman notes the tendency to treat conversion as one of our many doctrines (1976:13) which is to be believed rather than experienced. To address this problem he advocates the importance of beginning with a “block of studies that leads to the experience of conversion” (19). This does not mean that
doctrine is not shared. On the contrary doctrines provide the building blocks which lead to a transformed life. Coffman’s suggested approach was taken in the women’s gatherings with an intentional focus on a transformational faith experience intended to build a joint response to God’s call.

A second problematic assumption is highlighted by Andrew Buckser and Stephen Glazier when they note that

academic models of conversion tend to draw heavily on Christian imagery, particularly on such dramatic scenes as Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus. These images construct conversion as a radical, sudden change of belief in which old ways and associations are left behind as a result of a new theological outlook. How can such models encompass non-Christian religions, which often regard belief as less important that religious practice? How can they accommodate the slow and partial stages through which conversion often takes place? (2003:xvi)

In some rare cases such a sudden type of experience does occur, especially if a Muslim is geographically removed from their normal communal environment and location. But experience has certainly shown that this is rare among Muslims who live in communities that are largely “high identity,” even though they may not necessarily practice their faith.

In the preface of Buckster’s and Glazier’s book this discussion is extended further when it is noted that inevitably there will be some continuity with past faith and practice. This, it is argued, allows for the possibility that certain aspects in a person’s previous faith system, if it does not contradict the new faith, can legitimately remain (2003:xviii). Following this line of thought Diane Austin-Broos describes conversion as “a form of passage, a ‘turning from and to’ that is neither syncretism nor absolute breach” (2003:1). For Austin-Broos, this passage involves “interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course” (2). In her view, if conversion is neither syncretism nor an absolute breach with the past (which is rooted in a person’s social life) then it is also “a quest for human belonging.” It is a passage which “involves an encultured being arriving at a particular place” (2).

A fact that we often overlook is that the disciples of Jesus (Isa al Masih) went through a process of change in their understanding and convictions. Ellen White with prophetic insight states,

When on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, they understood the truths that Christ had spoken in parables. The
teachings that had been mysteries to them were made clear. The understanding that came to them with the outpouring of the Spirit made them ashamed of their fanciful theories. Their suppositions and interpretations were foolishness when compared with the knowledge of heavenly things which they now received. They were led by the Spirit, and light shone into their once darkened understanding. (White 1957:76)

Richard Peace adds the concept of “spiritual journey or pilgrimage” to describe the “conversion process” as the metaphor enables the identification of various typical stages of pilgrimage which “helps us to see and understand exactly where a person is in spiritual pilgrimage” (1999:309). Once again a staged approach is outlined: quest, commitment, and formation (311-317). However he notes that the process of formation never ends (316), not just in terms of a person who is coming to faith as we would like to think, but also extends to those of us who have been on a faith journey for some time (328). To emphasize the point he writes, “As Witherup [1994] has shown, in the Old Testament the message of conversion is addressed internally to the people of God, and not externally to others.” . . . Through conversion we make frequent course correction or order to embrace the relationship to God anew” (328, 329). This helps us to recognize that we too are on a journey into the “greater light” as the Spirit of God leads us day by day and as we seek to know him and his will for our lives.

Additionally, Peace, through Ronald Witherup (1994:18), provides a definition of the conversion process in the Old Testament which is “not a singular event but an ongoing process of realignment to God. God continually reaches out to human beings in relationship, yet we continue to stray from that relationship. Through conversion we make frequent course correction in order to embrace the relationship to God anew” (329).

Since many of the concepts that are integral to the Hebrew worldview as found in the Old Testament also resonate with the Islamic worldview, considering conversion from an Old Testament perspective is helpful in developing a theology of conversion that is both familiar to the Muslim context while at the same expressed in a way that opens up possibilities for new conversations and understandings as a person or community matures in their faith.

Finally two challenging verses in the Bible and some principles outlined by Ellen White add further to the framework under discussion. First, Jon Paulien (2005:18, 19) reminds us that God “is not without witness” anywhere in this world (Acts 14:17). Second, John 1:9 states that Jesus (the Word) is the “Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (KJV).
We can, therefore, expect this light to be shining among all people in all contexts. Ellen White explains:

Among all nations, kindred and tongues, He [God] sees men and women who are praying for light and knowledge. . . .

. . . The “Light”, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), is shining in his soul [the noble seeker after truth]; and this Light if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God. The prophet Mica said: “When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. . . . He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness” Micah 7:8, 9.

Heaven’s plan is broad enough to embrace the whole world. . . . Constantly He is sending his angels to those who, while surrounded by circumstances the most discouraging, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to take possession of them and bring deliverance and peace. (1917:376-378)

Lesslie Newbiggen places this in our practical everyday life in today’s world when he says that we “shall expect, look for and welcome the signs of the grace of God at work in the lives of those who do not know Jesus as Lord. . . . He [Jesus] is the true light of the world, and that light shines into every corner of the world in spite of all that seek to shut it out” (1989:180).

A question that arises at this point is at what stage do we see the conversion process beginning in a person’s life? If human beings are the recipients of light from God, even if they do not know who Jesus is, then it is reasonable to suggest that the conversion process starts at the point when they respond to the light that God is pouring on them, in their specific situation. 10 Once again Newbiggen gets to the heart of the matter when he says, “In our contact with people who do not acknowledge Jesus as Lord, our first business, our first privilege, is to seek out and to welcome all the reflections of that one true light [Jesus] in the lives of those we meet” (1989:180).

Another way of expressing it would be to say that it is when we expect, look for, and find the evidences of God’s work among people groups, and identify the redemptive analogies 11 that have been preserved within that context, and build on those, we become effective stewards of the “light” that God has left among all people. This opens up possibilities for wider and new spiritual conversations to take place from a biblical perspective. Furthermore we ourselves may be able to benefit and learn from the “light” that God has

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10 A distinction is made between knowledge of Christ (epistemology) and the eternal existence (ontology) of Christ in relation to salvation.
11 Redemptive analogies are defined as cultural phenomena which have been preserved by divine purposes which can be used to illustrate and make clear certain biblical truths.
left among Muslim people. Mathais Zahniser (2008:3) makes an important point when he quotes David Shenk (Kateregga and Shenk 1997). “The profound Muslim appreciation of the sovereignty and transcendence of God is a witness . . . Christians need to hear” (34). Newbiggen makes an extremely relevant point when he says, “There is something deeply repulsive in the attitude, sometimes found among Christians, which makes only grudging acknowledgement of the faith, the godliness, and the nobility to be found in the lives of non-Christians. Even more repulsive is the idea that in order to communicate the gospel to them one must, as it were, ferret out their hidden sins, show that their goodness is not so good after all, as a precondition for presenting the offer of grace in Christ” (1986:180).

So where does this leave us? Does this mean that we are taking a pluralist theological position? The answer is definitely no. Once again Newbiggin offers a way forward which enables us to be faithful from a biblical perspective, while at the same time facilitating the work of God’s Spirit in today’s world in the lives of those who are not yet ready to call Jesus Lord.

It has become customary to classify views on the relation of Christianity to the world religions as either pluralist, exclusivist, or inclusivist. . . . The position which I have outlined is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious works of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ. (1989:182, 183)

In summary, the following principles underpin the re-generative process of spiritual growth and transformation which took place, and continues to take place during the women’s gatherings: identifying and meeting spiritual heart-felt needs of the women, embedded within the “Plan of Restoration” framework as they are gathered together (in groups and in community) in worship before God; a spiritually transformational approach which leads women to experience God’s saving grace through the work of the Holy Spirit; a salvation focused staged approach to sharing doctrinal truth as questions arise, with testing truths (such as the divinity of Christ) being shared later in the process; avoidance of complicated theological terms; understanding conversion largely as a staged process of spiritual growth and
transformation—a spiritual journey, embedded in a context which resonates with the Old Testament worldview and yet opens up spiritual conversations which leads to a full understanding of the process of salvation from a biblical perspective; the recognition that no people group is left without the “light” from God and that it is our responsibility to welcome all the reflections of that “light” and build on it as we are led through the work of his spirit in our lives. As we recognize the “light” in others, so we ourselves are deeply moved by God to grow and develop spiritually in our own lives as we join others on their journey of faith.

An Examination of the Seven Key Elements Which Contributed to the Spiritual Growth and Development of Muslim Women

This section does a brief post-analysis of the seven key elements described in the composite case study. While it is hoped that this will bring a certain amount of understanding as to how the key elements in dynamic interaction with one another produced the kind of response described in the composite case study, it is also known that it is impossible for us to grasp fully all that God is doing in the hearts and lives of people who are open to his leading. With this in mind I will proceed to make an analysis of the seven key elements in terms of their contribution to the spiritual growth and transformation witnessed during the various gatherings.

Key Element 1: Responding to God’s Call to Live a Holy Life: Acknowledging and Receiving the Presence of God

Not only is the Qur’anic worldview theocentric, but the majority of Muslims live out their daily lives recognizing and acknowledging that everything finds its source and meaning in God. Notice the concept of ‘ilm al Tawhid, the oneness of God in Al Ikhlas 112:1. “Say: He is Allah, The One (Ahad) and Only.” Farid Esack explains this in terms of the “absolute unicity of God” (2005:45), while as Mathais Zahniser notes for Sayyid Qutb (1974:3:390), a leading Islamist and intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, the meaning of tawhid is not “only the singularity and unity of the Divine (tawhid al-ilahiyah) but also the unity and order of the way we are to live (tawhid al-qawamah) that results from this basic unity” (2008:28, 29). This “unity” or “oneness of God” is central to the unity of the community which is expressed as Muslims unite together with a common purpose of worship through the hajj (the pilgrimage), salat (ritual prayer)
and during *sawm* (fasting particularly at the time of Ramadan) (Harlan 2005:67).

Furthermore Harlan notes, closely connected to the concept of *tawhid* is the orthodox Muslim understanding that God is utterly transcendent and unknowable (2005:67). At the heart of this belief is the “throne verse” which expresses God’s otherness and self-sufficiency.

Allah! There is no god but He—the Living, The Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doeth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, The Supreme (in glory). (*Al Baqarah* 2:255)

This concept of God as remote and inaccessible has roots in the theological debates in Islamic *İlmc Kalam* (theology) concerning whether it could be said that divine attributes such as mercy and compassion (*al-Rahman, al-Rahim*) existed in God. The Mutazalites, influenced by Greek philosophy and rationalism (believing that there is no conflict between reason and revelation) argued that divine attributes did not exist in the divine being, even though the Qur’an contains imagery and descriptions of God’s ways and nature that reflects the attributes of his creatures. For example, as Frederick Denny notes, Surah *Al Baqarah* 2:225 refers to “God’s throne” which suggests that he sits as a cosmic ruler and Surah *Ali ‘Imran* 3:73 and Surah *Ya Sim* 36:71 speaks of God’s hands, while Surah *Hud* 11:37 and Surah *Al Baqarah* 2:115 suggests eyes and face and “speaking and hearing and seeing, these last three frequently” (2005:173). However, according to the Mutazalites such anthropomorphisms (*tashbih*) were considered metaphorical not literal and were there to help humans understand about God. They feared the unity of God would be compromised.

The Asharites, who ultimately defined orthodox Sunni *kalam*, disagreed with the Mutazalites on the issues of God’s attributes being metaphorical in nature arguing that “God’s attributes are not identical with, but not other
Ministering to the Spiritual Heart

than His essence; and anthropomorphisms (tashbih) are real, but *bila kayf*\(^\text{12}\) (without asking how)" (Harlan 2005:151, 152). In summary Asharites

"neither anthropomorphized (tashbih) God, nor stripped him bare (ta'til) but took a middle course known as *tanzih*, “keeping pure,” in the sense of refraining from speaking of God in human terms” (Denny 2005:182).

Conversely, the 99 names of God (*al-‘isma al-husna*), are revered by Muslims who follow the qur’anic command in Surah Al A’raf 7:180. “The most beautiful names belong to Allah: So call on him by them.” In their daily life Muslims call on God by the use of these names. It is very likely that when you enter a believing Muslim’s home you will find a book containing the 99 names of God wrapped in green silk cloth and placed in the highest part of the room along with the Qur’an. Although there has been some dispute as to the meanings of these names among Islamic theologians, Bill Musk points out that “some may be seen as nouns expressing who God is in essence (titles in effect) or as adjectives describing his “action-attributes” (2005:135). Musk then goes on to say “some of the names are known as ‘glorious’ (such as ‘the Nobel,’ ‘the Forgiver’), others as ‘terrible,’ (such as ‘the Taker of Life,’ ‘the Avenger’). The contrast is reminiscent of God revealing himself as ‘merciful’ and ‘gracious’ in Exod 34:6 and ‘jealous’ and ‘furious’ in Ezek 16:38” (135, 137). Given the history of the development of Kalam (which I have only dealt with briefly with specific regard to how Muslims view God), it is not surprising that in the practical realities of everyday life of orthodox Sunni Muslims the idea that God is far away and disconnected from human affairs persists despite familiarity with the 99 beautiful names of God. (However it should be noted that the same cannot be said for Sufis\(^\text{13}\) who focus on both the transcendence and immanence of God). The understanding of God as transcendent rather than immanent was clearly at the core of the worldview

\(^{12}\)Daniel Brown, commenting on the concept of *bila kayf*, points out this meant that al-Ashari “denied any resemblance between God and his creatures. The danger of associating God with creation was so serious, in fact, that it would be sinful to even move one’s hand while reading a passage concerning the hand of God. It was wrong to seek out metaphorical explanations, thus denying the plain sense of scripture; it is equally wrong to attribute human characteristics to God. Thus the language of the Qur’an and the tradition is simply to be accepted, *bila kayfa*, without knowing how … without recourse either to rationalistic speculation or indulgence in anthropomorphism” (2004:147).

\(^{13}\)Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is both Shi’ite and Sufi, in the context of discussion regarding the names and qualities of God sees God states that “all that can be said of the Divine Nature as being both transcendent and immanent, Creator and beyond creation, personal and suprapersonal, Being and Beyond-Being pertains to Allah, Who is the Divine as such and not one of the aspects of the Divinity to which other Quranic Names of God refer ” (1987:312). Al Ghazali (d.1111), a follower of the Ash’arite school and a Sufi, wrote many fundamental scholarly writings (philosophy, fiqh, logic, and theology). He achieved a synthesis between Sufism (by reforming aberrations) and *kalam* which was generally accepted as orthodox by consensus (Harlan 2005:147).
of the majority of the women represented in the composite case study, although some who had been part of the believing groups for some time had already made considerable progress in their thinking due to exposure to the Bible.

Recognizing the importance of relating to God as transcendent and yet understanding the deep heartfelt need for God to be present and active in women’s lives, we intentionally, in the first instance, focused on the greatness and transcendence of God, which it is possible to affirm both from a qur’anic perspective (e.g., the concept of Ta’ala—to be exalted in Surah Ta Ha 20:114, “High above all is Allah. The King, The Truth!” and from a biblical perspective (Deut 10:17), while at the same time linking into the deep heartfelt longing of women to be worthy of receiving God’s attention to their needs in their daily lives.

It was this initial primary focus on God as the epicenter of faith and practice, and the connection with the deep heartfelt need to be close to him that opened the way for us, as believing women, to invite God’s presence to be in our midst. This in turn opened up the hearts of all present to the further work of God’s Spirit, setting in motion the understanding of God as both transcendent and imminent, and intimately interested in the affairs of women. As the composite case study showed this was a significant step forward both cognitively and experientially. It also held significance for those of us who were leading out, as we were witnesses to the beginnings of a transformation of thinking about God and his relationship to women at a deep worldview level, albeit at differing levels of understanding depending on the spiritual maturity of the person and the dynamics within the group and the wider community.

There are many ways of taking this particular conversation to new levels of understanding about the imminence of God and his relationship with people. Mathais Zahnisrer (2008:246, 247) offers one way forward. Referencing Surah Al Shu’ara 26:68 which says, “And verily thy Lord is He, the Exalted in Might, most Merciful.” Zahnisrer says, “The mighty one, the merciful”: obvious common ground exists here with the Bible; God is clearly both ultimate and intimate.” He then argues that one name in the Qur’an which is particularly helpful in interpreting how these two attributes come together is the name al-Halim [one of the 99 names of God] “forbearing, ever-forbearing, or most forbearing.” Appearing 15 times in the Qur’an, with 11 of those times describing God (Surahs Al Baqarah 2:225, 235, 263; Ali ‘Imram

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14 Much depends on how far the women have progressed in their understanding and experience of God in their lives as to whether it is necessary to start from the Qur’an and then move to the Bible.
Ministering to the Spiritual Heart

3:155; Al Nisa 4:12; Al Ma’ida 5:101; Al Isra’ 17:44; Al Hajj 22:59; Al Ahzab 33:51; Fati 35:41; Al Taghabun 64:17, Zahniser shows that halim “occurs in the rhyme phrase at the end of the verse [ayah]. When it contains a name or attribute of God, a single rhyme phrase often provides a commentary on its verse or verse group from the divine perspective. And together such rhyme phrases in a thematic unit of the Qur’an provide a theological and ethical frame for the content of that unit” (2008:247).

Expanding on this further, Zahniser notes, “In six of the eleven instances where the Qur’an attributes halim to God, the name is combined with “Oft-forgiving” (ghafur). That is, God is in complete control and has the unfettered freedom to forgive whomever he pleases. But God is friend, trustee, loving and guardian, but always from a position of superior strength” (2008:247).

While recognizing the Muslim tendency to emphasize the ultimacy of God, Zahniser pursues the possibilities of opening up wider conversations from a biblical perspective about the intimacy of God within the Islamic frame of reference when he refers to other qur’anic names for God. For example al-Wudud (the loving one—Suras Hud 11:90 and Al Buruj 85:14) which points “in the direction of God’s intimate concern for humankind. Such an understanding of God is compatible with the name Al-Halim” (Zahniser 2008:255, 256). Turning to the Bible Zahniser states:

The Hebrew scriptures also feature stories about God and names for God that support divine intimacy. Among the names is ha-’Ozer, “the Helper.” “You have been the helper of the orphan” (Psalms 10:14); “O Lord, be my helper” (Psalms 30:10); and “But surely God is my helper (Psalms 54:4). In the Gospels a related term is rich in meaning: ho parakletos, “the Helper, the Advocate, the Mediator,” is used for the Holy Spirit in John 14:26. The same term is used for Jesus in 1 John 2:1. What Jesus taught about the Father coheres with this concept. God is certainly the Ultimate Reality; but God is also the Intimate Reality. (2008:256)

In conclusion through this limited analysis of the worldview assumptions of Muslims, it is clear that God is able, through the work of his Spirit, to shift long held views about himself in terms of his transcendence and imminence and rapidly replace them with new understandings when women are gathered together (albeit it still in a staged process). This has been clearly demonstrated in the composite case study. Moreover, as Zahiniser has

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15“But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance): for my Lord is indeed full of mercy and loving-kindness.”

16“And He is the Oft-Forgiving, full of loving-kindness.”
shown, there is within the Qur'an itself the possibility of developing a
different picture of God which is far closer to the biblical picture of God
than is commonly understood today.

Key Element 2: The Escalating Activity of the Holy Spirit

The introduction of the Holy Spirit very early on during the Muslim
women’s gatherings, or in fact any gathering, including those in our own faith
community, is something that I and my colleagues have come to understand
through experience is vitally important to the process of spiritual growth
and transformation. However, when we made the decision to implement this
we were not aware of the significant impact this would have on all of our
lives. Quite frankly we were amazed to witness the intense escalating activity
of the God’s Spirit. Never before, in my experience, had I or my colleagues
(especially in one particular gathering), witnessed God’s Spirit so strongly
evident among a group of people or so strongly personally challenging those
of us who were leading out. So what happened which caught us unawares?

In one of the gatherings we particularly witnessed a momentum building
up each day which enabled rapid shifts in worldview (as described in the
composite case study); there was evidence of the fruits of the spirit expressed
in word and deed; the fact that we as facilitators and leaders often said so little
and yet so much was happening was significantly beyond human initiation;
and finally the sudden epiphanies which occurred as women narrated their
personal testimony or during discussion about faith within a group. Norman
Denzin defines an “epiphany” as a “turning point” (1989:70). However, from
my experience it may not be seen by the person as a significant turning
point, but rather a sudden revelation of truth (for which the person has been
seeking for some time) through the power of the Holy Spirit which results
in action, at both an internal and external level, albeit as part of a staged
process. Furthermore, epiphanies were also experienced by the facilitators
as the Spirit of God worked among them.

The expressed need for God’s spirit in the women’s lives and the speed of
the transforming work of God’s Spirit evident in their lives in a particular
circumstance has led me to seek answers. Why did this occur so readily
among Muslims who are still on a journey of faith? Why did God’s Spirit
become so central to people’s spiritual growth and development during the
gatherings? A further question I had was, Why did we, as facilitators and
leaders (particularly so in one of the large gatherings), experience a sense of
the Spirit’s leading and direction so acutely, to the point where we felt that
we were simply channels through which he was pouring out his enabling power on the women? It seemed that our words were no longer necessary for God to do his work among his people.

To try to explain the workings of God’s Spirit is almost impossible to put into words, however several contributing factors come to mind which could be said in some small way to explain what we experienced. Bryant Myers makes a simple point which I believe is a vital key. He suggests that “the Holy Spirit is [already] indwelling in all cultures” (2009:237).\(^{17}\) It is just a question of being the channel through which the Holy Spirit can work further. The concept of God’s Spirit or the Holy Spirit, is referred to in the Qur’an, but is not developed or understood as it is outlined in the Bible. It is little understood or known in the Muslim context and most importantly has not been a point of controversy between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Today most Muslims simply think that the term God’s Spirit, or the Holy Spirit refers to the angel Gabriel. Thus the concept does not carry with it the baggage that is attached to the cross or the divinity of Jesus, therefore providing the opportunity to introduce the Holy Spirit into the context with little resistance.

It is not my purpose here to outline in detail how the Qur’an relates to the term Holy Spirit, or God’s Spirit as it is sometimes referred to. That is the topic for another paper—one which should be pursued. However, one of the verses (ayats) in the Qur’an which helped provide an initial platform for introducing the Holy Spirit from a biblical perspective to the women is found in Surah Al Mujadila 58:22 which says, “For such He has written Faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit of Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow to dwell therein (forever).”\(^{18}\)

The understanding that God promised in the Qur’an to strengthen people with his Spirit plus the biblical stories and personal testimonies of the facilitators of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, touched a deep heartfelt need—their sense of unworthiness, impurity and powerlessness—among the women. In an uncertain and hostile world where women often

\(^{17}\)Fig 8-3: Helping each other change worldview.

\(^{18}\)In note 5365 commenting on this verse Yusuf Ali indicates his own difficulty in describing God’s Spirit when he says, “cf/ 2:87 and 253, where it is said that Allah strengthened the Prophet Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Here we learn that all good and righteous men are strengthened by Allah with the Holy Spirit. If anything, the phrase used here is stronger ‘a spirit from Himself’. Whenever anyone offers his heart in faith and purity to Allah, Allah accepts it, engraves that Faith on the seeker’s heart, and further fortifies him with the divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of Allah.”
seek after spiritual power which is not from God, the understanding that God was making available a legitimate form of spiritual power was liberating and empowering for many. However, the facilitator cautioned the women that “to receive something that is from God means that we ourselves need to take responsibility for what is not good in our lives and ask God to empty everything out of our lives which is impure and allow him to fill us with his Spirit.” This challenge reached right to the deep heartfelt need for purity. As women expressed their yearning for God to strengthen them through his Spirit and prayed for cleansing from all that was evil in their lives, so God’s Spirit was released among us as a group.

Having discovered through experience the importance of prioritizing the Holy Spirit early in our conversations with Muslim women, I came across an article by S. P. Steinhaus in which he advocates a “Spirit first” approach which resonated closely to our experience. He notes that several times while talking about the Spirit to Muslims “I have been interrupted with this wonderful question ‘Yes, but how does a person receive the Spirit?’” (2000:24). One of the most relevant points that he makes is that focusing on the Holy Spirit does not in any way minimize the importance of Jesus in the process of salvation, but rather the Spirit’s role is to “work in our spirits so that we will be moved to listen to, believe, obey, and glorify Christ” (2000:28).

Steinhaus makes a further important point when he says that Jesus and his apostles gave people seeds rather than the whole message at once. “There were occasions where a more complete gospel was presented in one meeting [he notes that John 3:1-21 was probably the clearest presentation from Jesus himself, but also identifies the central role of the Holy Spirit], however these are in the minority.” Utilizing John 14:16 Steinhaus notes that the role of the Holy Spirit is to work in the interests of Christ as one who “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Steinhaus 2000:28). Certainly, as described in the case study, when women heard the stories of Jesus from the Bible and became more aware of the unique role of Jesus in the Qur’an, significant steps forward in understanding the nature of Jesus (Isa al-Masih) from a biblical perspective were taken. Later, we witnessed one of the women from one of the gatherings having an epiphany experience which led her through a staged process to a clearer understanding of the true nature of Jesus and his relation to God from a biblical perspective.

Moving from the personal practical experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in our everyday life and our response to him to the wider implications of the work and role of the Holy Spirit, the Bible reveals a compelling picture of an ever present accelerating transformative force. I believe that this is far
more significant than we have allowed for or comprehended as a possibility. The Holy Spirit (also referred to as the Spirit of God or the Holy Ghost) of the Bible is portrayed as overwhelmingly evident and active, especially at times of new beginnings or when some momentous change or transformation is about to take place is in the process of taking place. While it is impossible to include all of the biblical instances, a few significant examples will be given. For example Christopher Wright underlines that in Gen 1:1-2, at the time of creation the Spirit of God was “hovering” (ESV), “poised for action” (Wright 2006:14); at the conception of Jesus, Mary is informed that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Luke 1:35 ESV); at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:16 KJV) “he [Jesus] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove” which marked the beginning of his transformational ministry; at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) the intense activity of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. This resulted in the birth of the new community of faith as the Holy Spirit moved among the people which not only, as Peter Roennfeldt points out in his chapter in this book, took “the gospel across the cultural divide to the Gentiles, [but] it also reshaped the message of the gospel for the Jewish believers and recreated their movement of faith” (Acts 15) (Roennfeldt 2011:83).

In conclusion, it is clear that the role of the Holy Spirit is not only central to the salvation process, but it is the key active agent in the process. Furthermore, at this time in the history of the world, he is intimately and actively involved in the development of faith in whole communities and in the hearts of individuals who are part of those communities. The Holy Spirit is also central to the process of restoration of the relationship which was severed between humankind and God at Eden. In John 16:12-15, Jesus told his disciples, “I have many things to say to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

Steinhaus significantly challenges us when he asks if “we personally are living in step with the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:25)” (2000:29). This question needs to be continually in our minds as we come before God in humility seeking the infilling of his Spirit in order that we may truly reflect the image of God to those with whom we seek to share the gospel. We cannot call others to something we are not experiencing ourselves. I concur with Steinhaus when he says, “Whenever I talk with a Muslim I am reminded
of my own shallow experience with him [God] and yet God's willingness to ‘give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him’ (Luke 11:13). I believe this promise extends to Muslims as well” (Steinhaus 2000:29).

**Key Element 3: The Dynamic Interaction between God and the Community or Individual Through Prayer**

One of the reasons why such significant spiritual growth and development was able to take place during the women’s gatherings was, in my opinion, due to the fact that prayer is so central in Islam generally and in the life of Muslim people, whether it is the formal prayer (salat) which is very public in nature, or prayer of personal supplication (du’a). Integral to these two forms of prayer is the heartfelt need to be pure (salim)\(^1\) before God and to receive blessing (barakah)\(^2\) from him. Dudley Woodberry, through extensive research, shows that the term chosen (salla “to bow,” from the noun salat) is not as foreign as we might think as it “had long been used in institutionalized prayer in Synagogues and churches.” He notes that “‘Aqama ‘l-salat (to perform the prayer) was apparently borrowed from the Syrian church while Muhammad was still in Mecca” and that the roots of the prayer service are also seen in Judaism, including postures and content (1996:175).

In his excellent and detailed article Woodberry (1996:175-178) points to various references in the Bible and Jewish practice which highlight regular prayers and removal of sandals (which was also practiced by the Eastern churches) and ablutions associated with impurity/purity. A point relevant to the discussion in this chapter is made when he says that “Jewish Christians maintained their former institutionalized prayer times and places (Acts 3:1; 10:9; 16:13)” (175). This is helpful in terms of deciding how to relate to the Salat as in-context ministries develop.

It is not my purpose in this discussion to go into greater depth concerning the origins and meanings of the Muslim formal prayer of Salat (nor du’â) except to say that we need to be aware as we minister in the Muslim context that rituals in all faith traditions can become corrupted or an end in themselves and can lose their original meaning and content. For example

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\(^{1}\)Taken from the Arabic root *S L M n.m (adj)—pure; safe, secure; whole, unblemished, unimpaired; sound (Hanna Kassis 1983:1078). See also Surah Ash Shu’araa 26:89 (Malik translation) “and when none shall be saved except him who will come before Allah with a pure heart.” Others translate it as “heart free of evil!” (Assad translation) and “whole heart” (Marmaduke Pickthall and Yusuf Ali translation.

\(^{2}\)Taken from the the Arabic root *B R K Barakah n.f. blessing and Baraka vb (III) to bless (pcple. pass) one who is blessed, holy (Hanna Kassis 1983:332).
Salat in orthodox Islam is focused on bodily purity for the worship of God, whereas in Popular Piety (Folk Islam which is based in the spirit world)\(^{21}\) the meaning changes, focusing on removal by water of demonic pollution and sins. If meanings have changed, then it is important to clarify the extent to which this is the case in ministry contexts in consultation with the local leader and then address the specific aspects that are problematic as well as building further understanding from a biblical perspective.

During the gatherings it became clear to us that women wanted to pray and as has been shared in the composite case study we focused on du'ā, personal supplication to God, starting, in many cases on the first day of a gathering. While some of the women were more comfortable initially repeating memorized du'ā prayers which they had in written form, it soon caught on that it was possible, and indeed preferable to formulate one's own prayers to God, either on behalf of one's self or for others in the group. Parallel to the prayer sessions the facilitators and leaders built up the women's understanding of how to pray in a way that is acceptable to God so that the purity and blessing that they longed for could be received. “This is not something that will help you gain merit or earn you something or something to be worked for [the leader said in one of the gatherings], it is rather a gift from God which is freely given—all you have to do is receive this gift.” The scriptural texts and stories about Jesus (Isa al-Masih) and the way he related to women provided the impetus to understand the legitimate source of forgiveness, blessing, and purity.

In conclusion, it was very clear that as women prayed, the Holy Spirit moved upon their hearts correcting former understandings, bringing new knowledge, healing, and blessing at varying levels, depending on the stage a woman (or the group of which she was a part) was at in her spiritual growth and development. In some cases it was demonstrated that a small step had been taken towards a new understanding of the meaning of prayer, while for others, their prayer life would never be the same again due to their new understandings as a result of their own experience of the power of prayer rooted in a picture of God that they had not clearly understood before.

\(^{21}\)Folk Islam, now known as Popular Piety, is based within an animistic worldview which operates within the domain of “spirits, demons, blessings, cursing, healing, evil eye and sorcery” (Love 1994:87). It should be noted that there is a broad spectrum from little to high involvement, while many Muslims are not involved in Popular Piety at all.
Key Element 4: A Context Specific Community Related Approach to Meeting Spiritual Heart-felt Needs

As demonstrated in the composite case study both context and community played a vital role in the women’s spiritual growth and development. In this section I will first examine those aspects of context which have particular relevance to spiritual growth and development, either personally or as a group. Second, some relevant aspects of community will be discussed with a view to understanding their importance both as an inhibitor or accelerator to the spread of the gospel.

Lewis Rambo’s assertion that context is the most comprehensive of all the seven stages of the conversion process has already been discussed in this chapter. Before proceeding, a further comment made by Rambo is worthy of our full attention, as, in my opinion, it has been one of the major inhibitors in our ministry among Muslims. He argues that many theories or even popular beliefs tend to divorce a person from his or her context which can include political, economic, religious, social, and cultural influences. People tend to forget that human beings shape these influences and then conversely, are “shaped by the socialization process of the wider world” (1993:166). The discussion below will show the importance of not divorcing people from their context when it comes to faith development.

One of the most important aspects of context in relation to a person’s receptivity to the gospel is connected to culture. In recent years much attention has been given to the importance of understanding culture in order to communicate effectively in differing cultural settings (see Nida 1954; Hiebert 1983, 1985; Grunlan and Mayers 1988; Hesselgrave 1991; Lingenfelter 1992; Kraft 1996, 2005). For the purpose of this article culture is defined as the “complex structuring of customs and the assumptions that underlie them in terms of which people govern their lives” (Kraft 1996:31). Thus, every human being is part of a specific culture and is influenced by it and responds to their immediate context and the wider world through a specific cultural framework.

The connection between culture and emotion and the importance of understanding how emotions are expressed in differing societies has recently been highlighted as vital to understanding the communication process. Research by Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Rose Markus note that not only is culture and emotion “mutually and reciprocally related” (1994:2) but that the “emotion process, and thus the ensuing conscious experience of emotion, may be drastically different, depending on the socio-cultural environment” (4). This certainly was demonstrated to a greater or lesser extent during our
various gatherings of Muslim women or in single interactions with women. Emotions were always evident, but there were differences in the way that they were expressed and experienced, depending on the person, group, or location.

A good example of the culture/emotion connection is given by Phoebe Ellsworth who indicates that some “societies assign greater power to destiny or to supernatural forces not easily controlled by human efforts,” and that in such cultures “sorrow and resignation would be more common emotions” (1994:33). I would also add the strong emotion of fear of the unknown. These kinds of emotional responses are common among Muslim women who are involved to a lesser or greater degree in Popular Piety (Folk Islamic practices). However, when a woman or group of women understand that God is able to both release and protect from illegitimate sources of spiritual power, there is a significant emotional response—a movement from sorrow and resignation to one of joy and hope. This may be expressed through tears, physical hugging and touching, or through language of joy and repentance. The stories in the Bible of Isa al Masih casting out demons—particularly the story of Mary, out of whom seven devils fled at the command of Jesus (Mark 16:9), is particularly appealing to such women.

Since research has shown that emotion is linked intimately to spiritual development, it therefore is important to understand how culture affects the experience and expression of emotion in order to not misunderstand, offend, or cast blame, or cause our attempts to share faith rejected. For example, when sharing biblical truth in some societies, there would be little point in emphasizing the concept of “guilt” (which is the dominant emotion found in more individualistic societies) in relation to the Atonement in a society where the emotions of “shame” and “honor” are dominant (as found in societies that have a collectivist orientation). Rather, God’s way of dealing with the problem of sin needs to be shared within the “shame/honor” paradigm as this will provide the most significant motivating force for change. Among most Muslim women, shame/honor and defilement/purity are examples of just two significant culturally related emotions which provide the motivating force for spiritual growth and change.

There is another aspect of the emotion/culture link which needs attention—the way that emotions are described in language. Anna Wierzbicka argues that every language imposes its own interpretive grid, lexical or grammatical on the various emotions experienced (1994:135-139). Not only is the study of language itself very complex but what is understood and experienced will
vary significantly.²² Harry Triandis affirms this and adds that cultures are more than just customs. They include subjective elements which are widely shared and transmitted from generation to generation such as “characteristic ways of categorizing experience, linguistic terms that correspond to these categories, widely shared associations among the categories, beliefs about how the categories are linked to each other, beliefs about correct action in specific situations (norms), beliefs about actions that are appropriate for persons who holds specific positions in social structures (roles) and guiding principles that direct the lives of individuals (values)” (Triandis 1994:285). He also notes that “people develop specialized vocabularies and learn to feel differently in different situations” (286). Additionally the more differentiated the vocabulary the more complex the emotions that are experienced in a given society (286).

Thus the importance of understanding linguistic forms and their attached emotional components which are linked to a person’s culture is vital to the mission process. This is reflected in research done in Sefrou, Morocco, by Lawrence Rosen who examined the linguistic form known in Arabic as the nisba. This relates to a person’s identity which “encapsulates a particular attachment or quality by which its bearer may, in part be known” (1984:19). Although his discussion is not directly related to the culture/emotion/faith link, it does provide some insight into the way that terms and concepts embedded within a local culture have certain meanings and inevitably also carry emotional components. Rosen notes:

The root of the term nisba (n-s-b) yields a variety of words centered around verbs “to link,” “to bring into relation,” to trace one’s ancestry.” Among its many ramifications are words that translates as “lineage,” “relativity,” “proportionate,” and “apt.” Nisba itself means “attribution,” “ascription,” and “relationship,” and as a linguistic form it thus encapsulates a particular attachment or quality by which its bearer may, in part be known. (1984:19)

This notion of attachment and place, which is very important to the way Moroccans identify others and create a baseline for relationship, is itself embraced in the Arabic word asel. In its basic application asel means “origin,” “root” and “source.” . . . [In addition] its derived forms include “to found or

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²²An example of the complex nature of linguistic terms is cited by Wierzbicka when she shows that in French the word émotion differs in meaning from the English word emotion with the French word “referring only to internal events that are intense and difficult to control. For example, triste (sadness) or dépression, déprimé (depression, depressed) are not considered by my French informants as des emotions, whereas in English, sadness and depression rate highly on the list of prototypical emotions” (1994:150).
establish,” “lineage,” “descent,” “nobility of descent,” “real estate,” strength of character,” “authentic,” “proper,” and “indigenous.” . . . To be attached to a place is therefore, not only to have a point of origin—it is to have those social roots, those human attachments, that are distinctive to the kind of social person one is.” (Rosen 1984:21, 23)

Any discussion related to a person’s identity and place in society will have emotional components attached to it. For example, a person who is respected and has established significant social relationships and networks within a particular context will feel emotions such as pride, happiness, belonging, and empowerment. On the other hand if something occurs which creates disequilibrium, such as one of the family members embracing a “foreign” faith, emotions such as anger, fear, grief, shame, sadness, and embarrassment may be felt and become a driving force to re-establish what is accepted as the norm within the community.

In the light of this brief excursion into the field of linguistics it seems clear that as we journey with Muslims to deepen relationships with God the question we need to be asking is, How can understanding the linguistic form, such as the *nisba* and all that it implies for the individual and community become a vehicle for the spread of the gospel rather than an inhibitor? Kitayama and Markus make a relevant point when they state that we should “try to enter the conceptual world of other peoples and abandon our Anglo perspective [I would add Western or whatever other perspective we come with] in interpreting that world” (1994:139).

Interestingly, as we have ministered among Muslim women, we have found that it is not just abandoning our perspective and stepping into their world and respecting culturally embedded emotional responses at the deep worldview level that is needed. It may also mean assisting the work of the Holy Spirit in awakening hidden emotional responses which have been suppressed and allowing them to flow naturally within the context of sharing faith. For example, at one gathering it was clear that women were not normally expected or allowed to reveal their emotions. It was not until two or three days into the event that the women came to understand, after hearing the testimonies of the facilitators and leaders which included deep emotional responses, that it was legitimate to express their thoughts and emotions. Significantly in one particular case it was in the context of being given Bibles and then being asked to interpret what they were reading themselves, that women felt empowered to express their thoughts and eventually their feelings in a culturally appropriate way, thus providing opportunity for the gospel to be incorporated seamlessly within their own thought patterns and
emotional responses. In that particular situation the use of object lessons which appealed to the five senses—sight, sound, hearing, taste, and touch—facilitated the process of spiritual growth and development.

The second important consideration in relation to context is the importance and strength of the community in the life of Muslims and its relationship to the receptivity and spread of the gospel through strategic networks. As we have already noted, all that is implied in the *nisba* in Morocco is community based, particularly in the light of the socialization process. The community (*ummah*), which is intimately connected to culture, is an important topic when ministering among Muslim women. As Denny notes, “Islam is a complete way of life and not merely a system of belief and ritual practices” (2006:263). While there are significant variations according to the context and the individual’s response as to what it means to be “Muslim” within a particular context, Islam invariably manifests itself as a highly integrated and complete way of life into which individuals are integrated. Such a society has collectivist characteristics where women’s lives are particularly integrated into the community due to cultural customs and *Shariah* (particularly family law) which give very specific roles to women that are significantly different to those given to men.

Harry Triandis presents a number of characteristics of collectivist societies (or another way of putting it in the Muslim context, a group oriented mentality in which cohesiveness comes from the same Islamic worldview) which help inform us as we help facilitate spiritual growth and transformation in the lives of Muslims. Examples of these characteristics include subordination of personal goals to the group; in-group/out-group mentality; interdependence and family integrity and the values; obedience and duty; in-group harmony and in-group hierarchy, and personalized relationships (1994: 287, 286, 292). Triandis also notes that “collectivists interact mostly with in-group members and relatively little with strangers or in formal situations. The result is that they value intimacy and feel uneasy about superficial relationships” (293). Such cohesiveness can be a barrier to change and the incorporation of the gospel into the community. However, if the gospel is shared in a locally sustainable and transferrable way which enables the group as a whole to move together, it provides the kind of environment which facilitates a movement as illustrated by the composite case study.

Another key point is made when Triandis says that there is significant variability within cultures so that “in both collectivist and individualistic cultures there are individuals who are countercultural” (1994:289). Again
this can result in both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, individuals such as these are often able to change from one faith system to another in whatever form it is presented. However, as the mission endeavor has shown, this is the exception rather than the rule for in most cases such a person becomes isolated from the community and any possibility of witness within that community, particularly in “high identity” contexts (whether it is high, low, or medium practice) are curtailed. Unfortunately, many struggle to survive psychologically, emotionally, and socially unless they can be part of a community which provides them with the kind of support and nurture which has significant familiarity.

For example, if a woman from a large core, high identity culture decides to leave Islam and becomes a Christian, she will inevitably have to leave her family (she will be divorced by her husband) and flee to another country (often under a death threat) in order to practice her new faith. Often, the receiving faith community either does not understand the extent of the disruption and disequilibrium such a person faces in terms of her identity and need for social, spiritual, and communal support, or does understand it, but is not able to provide what is needed. One woman I know was searching desperately for the similar kind of support framework and sense of belonging in her new adopted faith community when I met her. In her former Muslim community, family law (one of the branches of Shar’iah) provided clear guidelines as to how she should live her life in practical terms as well as providing social support. To illustrate the importance of understanding the impact of family law in the lives of women Evelyne Reisacher quotes the reason why a young Pakistani mother of five children did not want to become a Christian. She said, “I love the words of Jesus in the gospel, but if I decide to follow him, what will my daily life look like? What will I do with the laws my family follows? How will Christianity work for me on a practical and legal level?” (Reisacher 2005:56). Reisacher then poses questions which we cannot ignore and which must be engaged, such as, “How for instance, do Christians take into account the legal aspect of Islam when they share their faith in Jesus? What response can they offer to women’s questions about the law?” (2005:56).

A further factor that we must engage with is the levels of emotional and practical support that women receive within the Muslim community, whether it is characterized as a large core high identity community or a small core low identity community. Within the family, women support one another in a positive way (although there are exceptions). If there are strong moral and spiritual values within the family there is usually an older woman to whom a younger woman can go to for advice and help on every aspect of
life. This might be her mother, or mother-in-law, or the second wife of her father. There will also be a prominent male figure who, ideally, will protect her honor within the family and community and provide for her until she marries and who will continue to provide some form of protection even after she is married. The wider community, through laws and customs, can also act as a safeguard for women within an often quite hostile environment (again there are exceptions to this). If this kind of support is not available or even understood in a woman's adopted faith community she finds herself vulnerable, alone, and without all the normal structures in place to provide her with emotional stability and a sense of belonging. This is an urgent matter that we must understand and address as we minister among Muslim women, as it becomes the driving factor in a decision to return to the former faith community, rather than it being a question of rejection of the new faith and its associated beliefs.

Paul Markham emphasizes the importance of community in the process of faith development when he says that

the religious community is the “structuring cause” of conversion—the community through its respective cultural-linguistic context, makes possible the particular kind of agent through which God can act. It is an important theological truth that this community is a holy community [referring to the Christian community] that God brought into existence through the incarnation ... a community embodying the dynamic reign of God in the world (Kingdom of God) (2007:186, 187)

In summary Markham is pointing out that God acts in our lives through the local culturally embedded spiritual community.

Michael Welker makes a further important point when he says that “complex and strengthening sentiments arise in me when my action is embedded in an interconnection with the action of other human beings” (Welker 1999:171). Thus we need to be relating to others as we develop our faith. Markam takes this one step further, namely that such corporate, service communities are actually “conversion communities” as opposed to “communities of togetherness” and that “while communities of togetherness share affinity and culture-shaping potential, conversion communities act as divine structuring causes of human transformation by providing the possibility for believers to act as agents of God’s work in the world” (2007:201, 202). This understanding of social embeddedness and its connection with spirituality implies that God works through the interactions of the spiritual community to help facilitate spiritual/socio-moral development.
I believe that this is one of the key elements which explain the kind of spiritual transformation that I and my colleagues have witnessed among Muslim women as their spiritual growth and development was taking place organically within the community with which they were familiar.

Concluding this section it is clear that not only does the context and community in which people live out their lives provide a favorable and essential environment for spiritual growth and development, but it also opens up possibilities for the development of in-context movements among people groups.

Key Element 5: Communicating about God in Concepts and Thought Categories Which Are Familiar to Muslim Women

Whenever God calls and we respond, the heart and mind become open to hear what God has to say to us and we begin to recognize that we are spiritually in need. This is universally applicable. As has already been outlined in the composite case study, through the work of the Holy Spirit, this spiritual neediness was expressed in a variety of ways by the women which in turn led to doctrinal questions pertinent to their salvation flowing naturally from the conversations that we were having. Central to this process was the utilization of language, concepts, and thought categories which are not only familiar to Muslim women, but which also bring understanding about all that God wants them to know about their salvation.

Paul Hiebert’s insights are important to note when he says “all cultures can adequately serve as vehicles for the communication of the gospel” and people “cannot receive it apart from their languages, symbols and rituals. The gospel must become incarnate in cultural forms if people are to hear and believe” (1985:55, 54). In our experience this has proved to be one of the most important aspects in the transformative process described in this chapter. However, at the same time note Hiebert’s statement that “the gospel calls all cultures to change. . . . A truly indigenous theology must not only affirm the positive values of the culture in which it is being formulated, but it must also challenge those aspects which express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil” (1985:55, 56). These challenges must ever be before us as we seek to facilitate the development of local theological explanations of God’s revelation of himself.

An example of how to utilize familiar concepts to build up and further develop a person’s understanding of God can be found in the Qur’ānic concept of Guardian (Wakil)—one of the names of God: “someone in whom
one trusts: a Guardian, a Trustee, a Disposer of Affairs” (Hanna Kassis 1983:1271). For example, Surah Al Nisa’ 4:81 invites people to “put thy trust in God; God suffices for a guardian.” Surah Al ‘Imram 3:173 affirms that “God is sufficient for us; an excellent Guardian is He” (Kassis 1983:1271). Associated with the concept of Wakil is Waliy (listed as one of the names of God in Kassis 1983:93). This broadens the Qur’anic picture of God, not only as protector but also friend. Surah Al Nisa’ 4:123 indicates that “they shall not find for them, apart from God, a friend or helper” (Kassis 1983:93).23 The concept is extended further in Surah Al Jathiyah 45:19, “Allah is the protector of the Righteous,” thus hinting at God’s special attention to those who seek to live a holy life before him.

As has been already noted, the role of guardian in the life of Muslim women is usually part and parcel of their lives. For some it will have been a negative experience, while for others it will have been positive. Even if it has been negative, women understand that in their society it is a necessity and that in an ideal world it has a positive function. Having read the Qur’anic verses (ayat), the idea of God in the role of Guardian of her honor (and consequently her purity) is particularly appealing, especially if a woman has seen God to be distant and uninvolved in her life or as one to be feared. Once the Bible becomes part of a woman’s faith journey, the picture of a loving God portrayed in the life of Jesus as he related to women, invariably leads to a desire for cleansing from sin that defiles the human heart, thus taking a significant step in their spiritual growth and development.

In conclusion, as we discuss matters of faith with Muslim women and participate with them in a shared journey of faith, we need to humbly acknowledge our own need of God’s saving grace. It is only with this spirit of humility that God will be able to do the work of cleansing and healing in our own lives and in the lives of the women he places in our pathway.

Key Element 6: An Encounter Which Reveals the Truth about God Resulting in a Shift in Allegiance

At several points throughout this chapter I have indicated that shifts at the worldview level took place as women gathered together to worship God. Out of the several examples that have been given already, one significant shift is worthy of being mentioned again—the rapid shift in their understanding of God as both transcendent and imminent—a God both interested and

intimately involved in the affairs of women.

To change one’s worldview is a complex matter. Exactly how and when changes take place are in God’s timing, not ours. From my observation, in some locations the changes described in the composite case study took place through a single small step, while in other locations, significant changes took place as the women’s worldview enlarged rapidly to include new facets of understanding about the role and nature of Jesus in relation to God. For others, seeds were planted which bore fruit at a later date. For example, one woman, not long after one of the women’s gatherings, had an epiphany while sharing her testimony during which she made rapid shifts at a deep worldview level from seeing Jesus as a prophet with special powers, to seeing him as intimately involved in the process of her salvation. At the same time she took significant steps towards acknowledging the divinity of Jesus. Such shifts are often preceded by a dream or vision in which Jesus appears, giving women confirmation (in the form of a male figure which is often a necessity for women) that they are doing what is right.

For those of us involved in ministry it is important to be aware of the complex nature of worldview. Societies are changing all the time, but in an uneven and complex way. An excellent example is current day Turkey. I have personally observed, at least on the surface among some Turks, a materialistic worldview with a focus on economic gain and self improvement, which appears to push spiritual matters into a secondary place. Due to this phenomena Turks have been labeled as “secular” Muslims. However, Wonho Kim, who rightly states that Folk Islam is widely practiced, offers some significant insights into the complexities of worldview change. On the one hand he points out that the spirit world can act as a barrier to change as Muslims influenced by folk traditions tend to be protective of their worldview assumptions (2006:102). However, on the other hand, he indicates that involvement in the spirit world can also be a motivator in a person’s faith journey because “the majority of folk Muslims feel oppressed by evil spiritual powers [and] one of the most powerful motivators for change is the desire to gain greater spiritual power. In particular, Muslims who feel oppressed by evil spiritual powers tend to be more open to the gospel than those who have not [been oppressed] (Kraft 1996:392)” (Kim 2006:106).

Before concluding this section, two statements made by Bryant Myers in relation to the process of changing worldview are also worthy of attention. First, worldview change is more than changing behavior, beliefs, or values. It rather means “changing a people’s entire story so that the community adopts a new story [I would add here a familiar, yet new story which is “theirs” rather
than “ours” as the gospel challenges aspects of faith and culture that are in need of transformation]. This can only be done [says Myers] by people, not by individuals. While changing the worldview of a people must be the goal of discipleship, it is the work of the Spirit of God” (2009:236, 237). Second, Myers reminds us that our witness needs to be holistic, bringing change to every level of a person’s worldview (2009:238). This includes those aspects which are usually hidden. Paul Hiebert refers to this hidden area of the spirit world as the “excluded middle” (1994:196) because many who live in the West are unaware of the extent of its existence.

Finally, I would like to conclude this section with the observation that as I have been involved in personal relationships with Muslim women and the spiritual leaders of the various ministries, I have undergone a change in my own worldview in terms of understanding the full extent of God’s gracious salvific activity among Muslims demonstrated in diverse ways. We have been continually reminded that God is already at work. It is his story, not ours. We are graciously invited by him to be part of it, not to own it.

**Key Element 7: God Inspired Local Spiritual Leadership**

The final key factor in the dynamic interactive process of spiritual growth and development outlined in this chapter is the role of the local spiritual leader. As I have interacted with our in-context ministry leaders it is clear that their effectiveness as leaders is due to their total commitment to being part of and deeply embedded in the local community which they serve. While they reflect expected social, moral, and spiritual norms, at the same time they exceed traditional leadership models in terms of their deep spirituality, knowledge of God and his Word, and their sacrificial and authentic love for the community they serve. As I have seen some of our leaders in action it is clear that their spiritual authority is both perceived and acknowledged by the community itself resulting in a deep level of trust. This trust and the respect that accompanies it, enables the community as a whole and individuals within that community to develop and grow spiritually. In short, these significant men and women lead the transformation of entire communities from within at a deep worldview level.

Much discussion has taken place with leaders recently to try to identify the dynamics of change that is currently occurring in their communities. It is clear that the leaders themselves, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, are a significant factor in the transformational process in the following ways (although it should be noted that it varies according to the context): first,
local theological explanations which are transferable in their own context are being developed and transmitted; second, local leadership from the community is being developed; third, whatever is done, is incorporated in a transformational way within local structures which are deeply embedded within the community; fourth, training is continually taking place, facilitating cordial witness, and resulting in enduring change at a deep worldview level; fifth, strategic networks are channels of change and transformation in entire communities. Another dynamic worthy of note is that as individuals and groupings within the community search for greater spiritual understanding and meaning in their lives, their trusted leaders play a central role in leading and guiding the spiritual transformational process.

Up to this point, while the leaders are operating within various contexts, specific thought has not been given to the development of an in-context leadership model for our ministry leaders which is devoid of Western influence. This is currently in the process of being constructed as the leaders themselves reflect on what constitutes spiritual leadership in their contexts while at the same time firmly basing it on biblical values. The Islamic model of moral leadership outlined by Rafik Beekus and Jamal Badawi provides an Islamic example. It includes the central role of belief, willing submission to the Creator, a focus on serving Allah, and spiritually-based concepts such as iman (faith) in Allah; taqwa (fear of Allah, or more recently understood as piety or righteousness), and Ihsan (love of Allah) (1999:19-25).

A major factor which needs to be considered in any formulation of a non-western leadership model is the kinship system. Kinship relationships, whether through affinal, consanguine, or fictive ties are the bases of the social structure of most non-Western societies, and are at the heart of family and community life. A quote from Stephen Grunlan and Marvin Mayers encapsulates this importance: “What is a man? A man is nothing without his family. Without his family he is of less importance than a bug crossing the trail, of less importance than the sputum or exuviae. . . . A man

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24Kinship is constructed from a set of categories, groups, relationships, and behaviors based upon culturally determined beliefs and values concerning human biology and reproduction.
25Affinal ties are kinship relationships tied together by marital bonds; consanguine ties are relationships tied together biologically, e.g., father son; fictive ties are socio-legal relationships where someone outside the network is ceremonially or religiously tied to that group. It should be noted that there are many nuances attached to these three basic categories.
26While it is recognized that kinships are not static structures and do change over time, they still constitute the basis for social structure, to a greater or lesser extent, even if the family moves into a Western environment. Certainly this is often the case at the first and second generational level. Much will depend on how closely the migrant group remains in contact with their family in their homeland. My own experience with a migrant group has been with a first generation family group who were clearly operating within this structural framework and passing it on to their children who were born outside their homeland.
must be with his family to amount to anything with us” (1988:161).

The implications of this statement are far reaching as experience has shown that people who have had to leave their family (particularly those located in high identity areas) due to identification with Christianity will likely find it difficult, if not impossible, to share the gospel with their kin (even if they are low practice or Muslims that have been categorized as “secular”). Thus the kind of Spirit-led obedient reflective action (based on biblical antecedents) taken by the Jerusalem Council in response to the movement of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles as advocated by Roennfeldt in his chapter in this book becomes a vitally important model for consideration when ministering in Muslim contexts today.

The key is a healthy respect for the realities of the everyday life and culture in which Muslims live out their daily lives. At the same we need to recognize that there are aspects in every culture, including our own, that have become captive to Satan as humans have made sinful choices, thus bringing a corrupting influence to bear on all societies. However, when biblical truth is expressed in a society appropriately and the society is open to change, it inevitably will challenge and expose what is contrary to the values of the Kingdom of God as expressed most succinctly through the life and ministry of Jesus, bringing transformation and healing into the lives of individuals and communities.

Another factor that has to be considered in any model of leadership is the patron/client system which constitutes the chief bond of human society in non-Western societies. It needs to be understood by the wider hermeneutical community that part of being an in-context leader is to be part of the patron/client system and its associated networks, but living a transformed life from a biblical perspective. The importance of this cannot be underestimated as it is one of the major keys to enabling the gospel to be transmitted through large family networks. Due to the length of this chapter, it is impossible to do full justice to this theme which needs to be the topic of a full paper. However, I will give a couple of examples.

Todd Elefson’s study on the socio-religio-political power of men in the Javanese context is particularly helpful. He notes an ongoing pursuit by

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27 See Kraft 1996, chapter 3 for a thorough discussion of this complex topic which refutes the view that cultures are evil in themselves. Kraft argues that cultural structuring is natural though warped by the pervasive influence of human sinfulness. For Kraft it is people themselves who make sinful choices which lead to the development of certain negative aspects in culture. In Kraft’s view people are not determined by culture as they are the ones who create culture and who have the choice to bring about change. Others take a less positive view of culture. However, I have chosen to take a respectful view of culture coupled with a high view of Scripture.
men of the holistic *berkah* (Allah’s blessing) complex which is “derived from *karisma* ‘Islamic potency,’ and social capital in personalized hierarchical social networks” (Elefson 2008:2). These social networks are formed through constructed kinship circles which include the nuclear family, extended family, kin-like neighborhood groups, kin-like personal networks, and kin-like associations (2008:44). Elefson also notes that those individuals “with the most highly endorsed social power [which is achieved in a variety of complex ways specific to the cultural framework and includes significant levels of trust] have the greatest number of strands in their relationship” (2008:305). It is through such networks that every aspect of life is lived. Obviously those with the most social capital and endorsed social power will be the most influential in the community and therefore be able to share their faith most effectively.

Recent research has confirmed both the importance and necessity of utilizing local networks to facilitate the organic flow of the gospel within a given context. For example, Eric Adams, Don Allen, and Bob Fish conducted extensive research among 300 practitioners, and identified social networks as one of the seven themes of fruitfulness when ministering in a Muslim context. They state:

> Fruitful workers also tend to be more effective when they allow the gospel to transform networks among whom trust relationships already exist, such as within families and other natural social groups. Some call this a transformational model of forming fellowships. This approach was demonstrated to be more effective than an attractional model of forming fellowships, which extracts people from their natural social networks and gathers them into new parallel networks of relative strangers who may have little trust for each. (2009:78)

The significance of working through these networks is only just beginning to become clear to many of us. The urgent question is whether we, as a faith community which was founded in the West, can grasp the potential that this holds for future ministry in the Muslim context and find ways to facilitate the flow of the gospel organically in a way which is uniquely theirs. As I have ministered in various contexts it has become clear to me that each community is unique and complex and yet within that context there is a key to spiritual growth and transformation. Our local spiritual leaders are the ones who can identify that key and use it in a way that enables the gospel to be locally transferable and sustainable, although they would be the first to

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28Elefson notes the elastic nature of relational lines in the Javanese context. We need to be aware however that in another context the lines could be more clearly defined and less flexible.
recognize that theirs is a story that is still unfolding from day to day. Furthermore, our local spiritual leaders would be the first to recognize that their spiritual journey, which they understand to be rooted in God’s mission, has been and still is being enhanced by those of us from outside their particular community who have also answered God’s call to minister in the Muslim context. As God has placed each within the other’s sphere of influence for a time, mutual learning, mentoring, visioning, and involvement in a shared hermeneutical and exegetical process has enhanced their story of faith development, as well as ours. Not only have the leaders of each community been challenged by the relationship, but it is helping, even as you read this chapter, to define an appropriate shared eschatological vision. Diagram 2 illustrates the process of transformation at a leadership level through the convergence of their story with our story.

Finally, it is clear that I would have had no story to tell in this chapter if it had not been for godly men and women leaders and their families. Year after year they have responded to God’s call not only to live exceptionally challenging and lonely lives, but they have unflinchingly dedicated themselves to following the leading of God’s Spirit, even in the face of what appears to be insurmountable obstacles. They have experienced persecution, been mocked, misunderstood, and rejected, and yet they have continued with a humble spirit to serve the One who called them with passion and dedication, recognizing their personal limitations, and yet ever seeking to be the instruments through whom God challenges and transforms the human heart and the community in which they serve.

**Conclusion**

As has been evident throughout this paper, reaching the spiritual heart of Muslim women and Muslims in general is first and foremost the work of God rather than our work. We are simply invited to join God in what he is already doing in the hearts and lives of Muslim people through the work of the Holy Spirit. Along the way, as we have journeyed together, we have come to understand and identify particular spiritual dynamics which contributed to a wholistic process of spiritual growth and transformation, not only in the lives of Muslim women and the communities of which they are a part, but also in our own lives as we have ministered among them. Rather than summarizing all that has been said or giving recommendations, I prefer that the story and the consequent analysis of each of the elements that have been identified speak for themselves, as you, the reader prayerfully consider what is written in these pages.

However, before finally concluding this chapter I would like to address two issues that we have to wrestle with when ministering among Muslims and then make some closing remarks regarding the missional process.

The first matter that needs to be addressed is the way that we share with Muslims about Isa al-Masih. As has been noted throughout this chapter, there is a vast difference between contexts and people groups as to whether or not there is an openness to discussion about Isa al-Masih. In the case of the composite case study described in this chapter, the spiritual leaders knew their people intimately. Therefore, they were able to identify and communicate to us whether the women needed to be gently led through a series of steps until they themselves reached their own conclusion as to the nature of Isa al-Masih and his relation to God, or whether they were already
familiar enough with the Bible to listen to stories about him.

The communities of Muslim women described in the composite case study all required a staged process to bring them to the point where their worldview had expanded sufficiently to incorporate the picture of *Isa al-Masih* from a biblical perspective. At the same time those of us leading out also had to expand our own worldview to find ways in which we could present the biblical picture of *Isa al-Masih* in a way that could be understood and transmitted effectively within their contexts. Invariably it was essential to start with the known references to *Isa al-Masih* in the Qur’an and then move to the unknown as found in the Bible. However, in all the contexts we reached a point where we could share about Jesus through stories about the way that he related to the women of his day, restoring, healing, forgiving, and treating them with honor and dignity. As a result many of the women made significant shifts in their understanding as to the nature and role of *Isa al-Masih* in relation to God, either instantaneously (through a small or more significant step) as a story was told, or through a discussion about a text. Or, as has already been shared, in some cases the shift took place at a later date when reflecting on what they had heard during one of the gatherings or when reading the Bible.

The second matter that must be addressed in this paper is syncretism. A question that always must be before us is, How do we remain faithful to biblical truth and yet at the same time open up the possibilities of new locally sustainable and transmittable theological explanations being developed? At the same time we have to be aware of the realities of the ministry contexts. Bruce Bauer makes a relevant point when he says that “syncretism is present every time a person begins the conversion process and turns toward Christ” (2007:72). Through a discussion of the centered and bounded set model originated by Hiebert (1979) and expanded upon by authors such as Andrews (2005), Hjalmarson (2005), and Collins (2005), Bauer points to a possible combination of the two sets as a way of ensuring that syncretism is addressed and yet such a model facilitates inclusion of those from other world religions and secular societies.

The length of this chapter does not allow a full discussion of this topic. Therefore, only those aspects pertinent to the discussion in this chapter will be explored. Bauer (2007:65, 66) argues that centered sets (intrinsic rather than extrinsic in nature) that are characterized by a person’s relationship with and movement towards the center (which has as its focus the Cross and all that this implies regarding God’s plan of salvation) are the most appropriate in the missional process, particularly with regards to the other
world religions. In this model an individual (or group) can be at some distance from the center, but at the same time be included as long as they are moving towards the center (implying that that people or a group will be at differing levels of maturity and yet still be accepted as part of the community of faith as they journey towards the center).

Bauer notes that in the centered set model, belonging to the faith community does not depend on “giving mental assent to a list of essential beliefs [although these are important], but belonging is instead based on a life of living and being because of commitment to a common center” (68). This allows for those who have not yet fully developed “a biblically shaped worldview” (Bauer 2007:69) to be considered as believers as long as they are pointing towards the center. However this does not mean that change does not take place. Those pointing to the center are continually developing and growing in their spiritual lives and moving ever closer to the center.

To deal with the issue of syncretism Bauer advocates an approach that initially is based on the centered set model where “much emphasis is placed on a relationship with the center, of tasting to see that the Lord is good” (71). At the same time, based on suggestions by Frost and Hirsh (2003), Hjalmarson (2005) and Cuder (1998), the idea is put forward that centered sets should be soft at the edges but include an inner bounded set residing at the center (73, 74). The purpose of this would be to have a carefully defined theological and spiritual center that deals with corporate theological and behavioral aspects which mature believers adhere to and new believers learn (74, 75).

To illustrate this, Bauer proposes a model that “is more like a funnel—far from the spout there is width, but as people move towards the spout there is a narrowing and movement towards the center, or even movement towards a bounded set in the centered set” (2007:71). Such a model, it is argued “incorporates the vital importance of spirituality and continued movement towards the center, while at the same time realizing that the direction for those growing in faith is towards the bounded set that has greater and greater definition as people mature in their faith in Christ and have their worldview impacted by the Word of God (74).

My conclusion is that Bauer’s (2007:72-78) suggestion as to how to deal with syncretism and yet also facilitate inclusion of those of other faith has significant merit. However I would like to add to this particular conversation by referring back to the composite case study in which the Holy Spirit was involved in the process of spiritual growth and transformation. The more the women reflected and acted on the deep convictions of their hearts, the more
the activity of the Spirit increased by stimulating questions and bringing new knowledge that helped to bring shifts in thinking at a deep worldview level and inspiring them to seek reconciliation and ask for forgiveness. Furthermore, the work of contextualization was clearly taking place as women reflected on what they read and heard and started to express it in their own words to one another—either arriving at their own conclusions or seeking the help of the spiritual leader to reach conclusions which helped the process of shifting from one set of worldview assumptions to another.

My experience in ministry leads me to add two further dimensions to the funnel model proposed by Bruce Bauer (see diagram 3). First, as has already been mentioned in the composite case study, it was clear to those of us who were present during the events that, in addition to personal transformation, the increased activity of the Holy Spirit stimulated doctrinal questions which helped the women take a significant step forward on a cognitive level. On reflection, it could be legitimately argued that during this phase the women were moving towards the area that Bauer has identified as the narrower end of the spout (2007:71). Thus, I have added to Bauer’s model the growing contextualizing activity of God’s Spirit as women began to shift allegiances and start to demonstrate change in their behavior. Second, when reflecting on Bauer’s model and my own personal experience, I have identified a distinctive point on the diagram at the base of Bauer’s funnel spout where the Holy Spirit acts as a contextualizing force, bringing worldview change not only among the people in the community, but also in our own theological and missiological worldview assumptions. My observation is that when such a change takes place in tandem, it facilitates the movement of locally sustainable, culturally appropriate, and transmittable forms of the gospel to flow effectively through strategic networks deep into the heart of the communities we are called to serve.

Finally, when reflecting on all that I and my colleagues have been witness to as we have had the privilege of ministering among Muslim women, I am reminded that it is their story and yet at the same time our story as there is only one story, the story of God’s sacrificial love for humankind which transforms the human heart and mind.

**Basic Premise:** God is already at work in all communities through His Spirit. See numbers in diagram below.

1. People respond to God's call to live a holy life and start to move towards the center.
   1a. People's spirituality and belonging is defined by their movement towards the center.
2. Those not yet ready to call Jesus "Lord" are drawn into the spiritual transformation process in stages which starts from where they are in their faith journey (soft edges in the centered set model which has clear boundaries)
   2a. Activity of the Holy Spirit increases, acting as the motivating force for spiritual growth and transformation (see composite case study in this chapter).
3. As the new believer moves towards the center, doctrines are clearly defined resulting in changes in worldview (bounded set within the centered set)
4. Holy Spirit acts as contextualizing force in the process of change
5. Development of local theological explanations of the gospel appropriate to each community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit
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