

## **Disciple Making Movements (DMM)**

### Executive Summary

This paper presents a concise description of Disciple Making Movements, a method of making the Gospel of Jesus available to Muslims. It details the strengths as perceived by proponents, the weaknesses observed by critics and explores some of the factors to be considered when using, or thinking about using, this approach. Its strengths include being applicable where discretion is essential as well as its focus on engagement with scripture and obedience to God as a guide to daily life. A critical question is what comes next for those who accept the claims of Christ.

This paper includes a case study which notes that God is using this method at this time in a specific location as part of a sovereign work of God.

### Introduction: What is *Disciple Making Movements*?

One definition of Disciple Making Movements (DMM) is:

A means of identifying 'persons of peace' and discipling groups to faith based on engagement with and obedience to scripture leading to transformed lives. It seeks to facilitate replicating groups of disciples as instances of the body of Christ who pray for one another and uphold mutual accountability to scripture.

Key elements of the approach are the emphasis from the start on obedience to God's Word and sharing what is being learnt with others. It is designed for people who desire to learn and to explore Scripture and to decide for themselves whether it is truly a revelation from God. Most proponents prefer to expend minimal time and energy on those who wish to debate and argue. The approach is often described as looking for 'persons of peace' and working with those whom God has prepared. Crucial is that those leading model what is expected of others; their own discipleship is profoundly significant.

It seeks to be easily replicable. Participants are encouraged to share with others and invite others desiring to know more to join them or to become part of the next group as it forms. The small group nature is also suitable for situations in which large gatherings to explore Christianity are not appropriate. DMM can be kept small and discreet.

### Discovery Bible Studies:

DMM is based on small group formation, often using Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). (T4T is used in some contexts.) DBS is a programme of 30 studies that give a foundation of Biblical teaching. The studies are available online in a variety of languages.<sup>1</sup>

The usual pattern of a study is that the passage is read or played audibly. (DBS and DMM can be used with those who are illiterate.) Participants are then invited to retell the passage, helping one another to understand it. Participants discuss what the passage reveals about God and humanity. They are then invited to consider what changes they would like to make in their life if this really was a revelation from God. They are asked to consider who they should tell about this Bible story.

In subsequent studies participants are asked to reflect on their life since the previous study, asking what they are thankful for what they have struggled with and whether or not they were able to make the changes they committed to during the previous study. For their struggles, the group is

---

<sup>1</sup> One source is [www.bible.no-sandals.co.uk](http://www.bible.no-sandals.co.uk) (accessed 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017)

asked how anyone might be able to assist, and whether the group could ask God. The latter introduces prayer for God's activity to be visible in the daily life of participants.

### Strengths

One feature is that participants are invited to begin sharing and obeying immediately what they are learning of God and humanity. This establishes such practices in the daily life of those who come to faith in Christ. This enables replication to happen, since new believers can invite others to either join the group or become part of another group as it forms. It exemplifies witness by the sharing of what God is doing in the life of the believer. The phrase 'living out loud' is applicable.

Another aspect introduced early is prayer for the challenges and struggles of daily life. Also introduced is obedience to Christ and the need to grow one's understanding of God in a communal setting, initially a small group. It follows Jesus' model of being rooted in community and living out the gospel. Also present is the expectation that Jesus' followers will be transformed, probably incrementally, through obedience to scripture.

DMM is designed to allow all Jesus' followers to be active in witness and discipleship. Little formal training is required in order to lead a group. As such, it facilitates people living and acting as constant, life-giving, verbal witnesses to Christ.

This approach seeks to identify and include those whom God is touching; as noted above, it seeks people of peace, and people who wish to discuss and learn rather than argue. It invites people to study God's ways and God's prophets as revealed in the Bible. Proponents note that, in essence, it is rooted in reliance on God, not methodologies.

### Perceived weaknesses/challenges

These are presented not so much to mitigate or argue against usage but to point out what needs to be considered. Similar concerns occur with other evangelism methods.

One commonly expressed concern is the extent to which leadership development is enabled and facilitated. There is a perceived reliance on self-teaching with minimal input. In some applications this is addressed by new leaders having shadowed an experienced leader whilst participating in a group and then having a mentor when they become a group leader.

It is not clear what happens when a group completes the 30 studies. Some groups disband early as a collective decision is made to reject the claims of Christ. Some groups complete the course and stop meeting. Some participants make decisions to follow Jesus and are able to join a church. Other groups make a collective decision to go on. Several further series of studies have been developed for such scenarios. Some groups effectively become house fellowships which at some point might be recognised by participants and those supporting them as a home-based church. Accountability to the wider church can be problematic.

DMM is group based, which might be a concern for those who prioritise individual conversion as opposed to group decision making.

It is not always clear that when participants make a commitment to Christ exactly what their understanding of God is and what is the nature of their commitment. Have they counted the cost of being identified as a follower of Jesus? Have they considered how they will relate to their family

and local communities? One approach to mitigating such concerns is to include discussion of such matters in the training of group leaders.

One critique notes that DMM is based on the homogenous unit principle and therefore discourages interaction from people outside of the immediate context. Consequently, it has a tendency in some contexts to discourage input from mature Christians who are from outside of the area. Further, often insightful, teaching and resources from other settings are eschewed. While critics note that utilising teaching from other cultures without due consideration can be highly problematic, the non-engagement with material and people from the wider Christian body, where that occurs, can lead to scripture being understood solely from one perspective, albeit with DMM that being one rooted in the culture of the participants (and not that of 'foreign' Christians).

Perhaps crucial is the need for greater awareness and appreciation of how Biblical hermeneutical understanding operates as people move beyond the initial Scripture passages. In areas where new converts to Christianity are likely to be exposed to well informed and trained Islamic evangelists then deeper levels of Biblical knowledge, understanding and application will become necessary. Relevant here is the observation that the view of scripture in Christian and Muslim theology is different: translation and mystery are welcomed in the former but treated as suspicious by some in the latter. Discipleship needs to equip new believers for the challenges that they are likely to encounter. The extent to which DMM achieves this is debated.

DMM as practiced by some has been perceived by others as undervaluing the presence and engagement of Christians.<sup>2</sup> DMM is looked at, and valued, in places where the church cannot or will not engage with Muslim neighbours. The critique is that it mitigates against local Christians and churches engaging with their Muslim neighbours, preferring to leave such activities to others. One response to this is that DMM seeks to be self replicating as those who respond to the gospel invite others to participate. Typically, this happens along the lines of natural relationships, thereby making the gospel available within Muslim communities. So, whilst Christians are probably instrumental in initiating such processes/movements, the outworking of the methodology allows the gospel to be made known in places where Christians have few, if any, relationships. Another factor here is that in many societies that have some element of segregation on religious lines there are cultural and social as well as religious differences between Christian and Muslim communities. Crossing these is often problematic for all involved, both those Muslims coming to faith in Christ and those Christians welcoming and including such converts into Christian communities.

#### A case study from the Middle East

The following is a summary of the experience during 2015 of a collaborative work in one country in the Middle East. It is necessarily brief to respect the confidentiality of the sources. The number of DMM groups known to have started was in the hundreds.

The estimation was that 60% of groups stop meeting. This is regarded as the inevitable consequence that the claims of Christ are rejected by some who consider them.<sup>3</sup> More positively, 40% of groups complete the course, and face the decision as what to do next. Many of the participants of such groups have made a commitment to Christ.

---

<sup>2</sup> In this paragraph the term 'Christian' is used to mean people recognised as Christian by their society, i.e. it does not include those who have come to faith from Muslim backgrounds

<sup>3</sup> Equivalent statistics for other widely used evangelistic methods are not available to the author

There is no fixed pattern of whether new disciples of Jesus Christ continue in the same groups, join churches or do something else. The local context is crucial. In some places there are no recognised churches that people are able to join. Elsewhere there are churches but social, ethnic, cultural and other factors mean that it is inappropriate, unwise, or even impossible for new believers to become regular attendees. Some groups continue meeting as groups. Two programmes of further studies have been developed and the groups continue meeting in the same manner. This raises the ecclesiological question of whether such groups should be regarded as fellowships, house churches, micro-churches, churches or what. Such questions continue to be explored.

Those coordinating such work regard current events as a sovereign move of God; they state that DMM is the method used at present because it fits the current context very well.

#### Issues to consider when using DMM

First, ensure that the motivation for using DMM is honourable. Beware the temptation to apply a methodology that is claimed to be successful and rapid elsewhere; there are no guarantees that it will work in the local context even though it is working well elsewhere. Other approaches are available; conscious and carefully considered selection of the most applicable tool within the local context would be considered as best practice. Some people use multiple tools, with one as a follow-up for those who make a response to whatever is used first. An example is DMM following al-Massira.<sup>4</sup>

Second, consider the factors in using a group based approach. There is a widespread desire for authentic community in most contexts. However, is this always appropriate when engaging Muslims living in Muslim majority areas?

Third, consider how DMM groups relate to existing local churches, and vice-versa. There is no simple answer here. Simplistically, they can be viewed as part of a small/cell group structure. DMM groups typically start as mono-cultural and may remain as such. Some might morph into a multi-cultural cell of believers. Members of some groups will be willing and able to worship with an existing church, although for some, the cell will be the whole of the communal expression of their faith. This is likely to work best under a church leader that operates relationally based on a clear vision.

Fourth, note that at some point there will be the need for greater awareness and appreciation of how Biblical hermeneutical understanding operates. Typical Western approaches to long-term discipleship tend to focus on academic, cognitive levels. This contrasts with the DMM approach where the focus is more on obedience and transformation of daily life. A culturally and socially appropriate balance needs to be achieved.

#### Factors significant to Best Practice

DMM requires a group of similarly minded people agreeing to participate together in exploring what the Bible says. Best practice requires that those running groups allow God's Word to speak and the Holy Spirit to act. Leadership should focus on encouraging people to contribute in group meetings and to apply what they learn in their daily life. 'Living out loud' should be kept in mind.

---

<sup>4</sup> See <http://almassira.org/> (accessed 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017)

Those establishing groups should be constantly prayerful about who to invite, seeking people looking to explore and also actively looking for people in local communities whose presence and participation is likely to create the space and approval for others to join.

There needs to be sensitivity in the relationship with local churches, with careful attention to what might be possible if and when participants make a decision to follow Christ, either as individuals or collectively as a group. Accountability to the wider Christian community needs to be an explicitly pursued value.

CS Lewis described humility as seeing things as they really are. The application of this to DMM is to keep evaluating what is happening and what those making a commitment to Christ need in order to continue in and deepen their relationship with God whom they have come to know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Concluding remarks:

DMM is being widely used in a variety of contexts and some participants are turning to Christ. Praise the Lord!

The questions of what follows concerning continuing discipleship and membership of a 'church,' a local body of believers, are also faced by those using other methods. Those considering new initiatives to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ available to Muslims would be wise to include DMM in their consideration before God of which methodology would be most appropriate in their context.

Document details:

Version number:..... edition 1

Date: ..... 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Compiler: ..... Jonathan Andrews ([jonathanandrews@pobox.com](mailto:jonathanandrews@pobox.com))

This paper was written following a meeting of Global Connections' Muslim World Forum (MWF) held in October 2015.