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A MODERN TAKE ON MISSION

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For some reason, stacks of Aussie believers seem to think that reaching people for Jesus requires a Billy Graham gift of evangelism – the ability to stand, microphone in one hand, Big Black Bible in the other, and passionately convince the masses of their need to repent. While this method may have worked back in the 1950s, mass rallies couldn't be further from the current reality for cross-cultural missions. In China, it's often just a conversation over a cup of tea, no microphone needed.

It seems a great many regular church attendees are suddenly 'busy' whenever a visiting mission speaker is coming through.

They'll talk about their need for more recruits . . . 'the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few' saying will be trotted out, and I'll feel miserable and guilt ridden . . . again. There's no way I could do that. I couldn't lead the masses to Jesus!

And just as well.

Statistics reveal that not many folk get introduced to JC via the tent crusade method. But a whole lot more do come to know Jesus through a trusted relationship with a friend or family member - more than 90% in fact. Even if they do go to the tent crusade it's because a friend got them there in the first place.

It begs the question: since you most likely came to trust in Jesus via a relationship, why would it take something else overseas?

Mission isn't that different, it's not rocket science. Minus the passport, language and cultural differences, you've got the same basic issues. Folks overseas aren't likely to respond to a stranger wielding a microphone, but they certainly might be willing to listen to their Aussie friend who has come to live among them.

Or knit among them.

Or go to the gym among them.

As a Global Interaction team member serving amongst a Muslim Unreached People Group in China, I have to restrain myself from the urge to strangle some well-meaning Christians when we're back in Australia. It drives me crazy whenever I hear someone say, 'What you're doing over there is so brave/amazing/terrific. I could never do what you're doing!' I want to scream, 'Why not?' What's so brave about drinking cups of tea? Where's the 'magic' in going to the gym with your buddy? What's all the fuss about sitting down with others and knitting (or any other hobby for that matter)?



Spread across China, Muslims are strong in number, well over 11 million. Although they live alongside millions of Chinese Christians, very few have come to faith through the witness of Chinese believers.

It's not complicated reaching out to Muslims with the good news that Jesus is more than just a prophet. It's all about relationship, relationship, re-la-tion-ship.

It may shock some of our supporters to learn that we didn't mention the name 'Jesus' publicly for the better part of our first three years overseas. We were learning the language, getting into our new culture, and investing in friendships. We had to earn the right to be heard. We couldn't jump off the plane and toss around Bibles, Jesus film DVDs, or (gulp) tracts. Muslims in this part of the world are all too wary of the ways of the 'Crusaders'. They despise that approach as much as Australians do when they go shopping and get an ear full from the guy outside Westfield shouting about sin and damnation.

But our Muslim friends don't have an issue with us living among them, sharing meals together and visiting one another's homes. We spend a great deal of time just 'being', rather than 'doing'. Naturally they ask us questions about our faith, and then we have permission to share how Jesus is real and how he changed our lives.

"Initially I didn't have a clue how I was going to reach out to Muslim women," says my wife Rebecca (name changed). "So I took my knitting down to where they gather and sat with the women each day. In those early days when my language gave out, knitting eased the silence.

"It wasn't long though before the shop where I frequented soon became 'knitting central'. Muslim women from all over began coming around to compare patterns, techniques and show off their jumpers. I soon became infamous as 'the foreigner who knits'!

"Jumpers and scarves weren't the only things made during the many hours spent among those women. Very special and precious friendships developed, some of which are now eternal friendships. We simply decided to love our new circle of friends into the Kingdom. At the end of the day, it's the ones and twos that reach the ones and twos."

We've been here for eight years and unfortunately there are few team members or culturally relevant resources for Muslim Chinese yet several hundred have come to know Jesus. Across China, small communities of Jesus-followers are beginning to emerge. They avoid calling themselves 'Christians', preferring instead to be known as 'lovers of Jesus'.

Being labelled as a 'Christian' is akin to social suicide for a Chinese Muslim. Helping them to find their own distinctive ways to follow Jesus means that their community identity remains 'Muslim', but their faith identity changes to following Jesus.

They don't see any conflict with being a 'Muslim lover of Jesus'. After all, the majority in this city are not adherents of Islam. Rather, Islam underpins a cultural identity, but there isn't a lot of faith to be found for many people.

Westerners get hung up with images of headscarves and thinking that the clothing automatically makes someone a follower of Islam. For many, the head covering is more of a fashion accessory than a statement of humility or Islamic piety.

Most Muslims in our city are secular Muslims. Some take Islam seriously, the rest see it as a community identity which differentiates them from the majority of Chinese. So if they decide to follow Jesus, remaining connected to their community means remaining 'Muslim', that is, Muslim in culture, lovers of Jesus in faith.

"Our part in that transformation is miniscule," says Rebecca. "We simply make friends, sow seeds, and watch the Holy Spirit go to work. We have the fabulous privilege of having front-row seats in watching a people group come to grips with unconditional love, a personal relationship, and the wonder of grace.

"We wouldn't trade this for all the tea in China."