

Every healthy baby is born quite helpless. Still within no time, major changes start to happen. Let's look just at the ability newborn babies have to move around. They cannot even turn over by themselves, yet by six months most of them turn over and push themselves up a bit, while others may sit already. Our oldest son started even walking at six months, skipping crawling altogether. Most children turn at least one year of age before crawling happens and next comes walking and sometimes by the age of two, a toddler will not only start climbing, but also running, and also jump and play with rolling objects, like balls. With our five children we never set them down and lectured them about any of these things. They observed and engaged at their own natural level. Their engagement was through following what was modeled and they then tried. They also failed and tried again. Sometimes we also coached them by using encouraging words and giving them practical hints. Yet, they had to grow, literally, step by step on their own. By the age of four they climbed trees, jumped ditches, they raced each other and started games like skip rope and learned to ride bicycles. Again, no classes, no tests, no certificates needed, only other people coming alongside. People that had a relationship with them. People that loved them. People that empowered them to do and to be in a way that helped them discover their own potential.

In this same way, God desires to help people, establishing healthy and growing communities among them. Are we willing to let them discover their own potential within their own culture and from their own worldview perspective, or will we keep forcing our ways of learning on people? If we really want to empower people, then we have no choice but to let them discover by observation and learning through engagement. If they need any foreign methods, then they will learn quickly from observation what may work for them. Will there be trials? Sure, but those will only help them own the methods that work for them. For oral preference learners the methods will look quite different than for those coming from an academic literate perspective. Our challenge is that often we make our methods their mandate. We should help them discover relevant methods that work best for them, based on sound principles and best practices. We should never dictate that our methods are the only methods or better methods. Sadly, this is very difficult for us. Consequently, we impede local ownership, since it remains largely our initiative, instead of the initiative of the people we serve. Local ownership and empowerment always go hand in hand. It doesn't mean that there are no partnerships or that people don't learn from outsiders. But we need to serve predominantly as catalysts, because it is essential that their efforts become an outflow of their own walk with God, as He leads them personally.

Do we really consider those we serve as equal or do we think that we are better or superior by our knowledge and training methods? If so, we are quite arrogant, since we actually imply that the people we are serving are inferior. We even imply that we know better than God, if we do not acknowledge God being able to empower them in ways that fit them best. Will we choose to be wise stewards of the tasks God entrusts us with and not do things 'our' way? Will we take the time and effort to build deep genuine relationships, through which we become real partners that are willing to serve alongside the people we serve? Are we acknowledging that they understand their own culture much better than we ever can? Are we willing for them to be directly responsible to God and not to us? Are we ready to see God work among a people His way?

The only way is to provide the opportunity for people to learn to walk, and for us to be real partners, who, under God's leadership, provide relevant participatory and engagement learning opportunities that help the people we serve have fruitful experiences.