

Culture Study: Egypt

BY: KELLI OLDHAM

Prepare:

Familiarize yourself with the following background information:

The Oldham family was appointed by Church of God Ministries to serve as pastors to the Middle East in January 2011, just days before the revolution that toppled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Ken and Keli moved with their three children (Grace, Titus, and Zeke) to live in Cairo, Egypt, on January 7, 2012, and have lived there since. The Oldham family works as part of the Three Worlds Team, the Europe and Middle East Regional Ministries of the Church of God, primarily in service to Christians in Cairo and with the Church of God congregations in Egypt and Lebanon. The Three Worlds Team has three ministry goals for the region: 1) to raise up empowered, accountable leaders especially under the age of forty-five years; 2) to encourage and develop ministries to children and youth within each church and country; 3) to enhance inner-connectivity between each church and country.

The Church of God in Egypt (*Be careful not to share this information prior to completing the "Egypt Information Quiz."*): The Church of God in North America began partnering and serving Christians in Egypt in 1898. At first, the service was primarily through literature, but then grew with the request for leaders who could help teach and establish congregations. There are currently twelve Church of God congregations in Egypt, with about fifteen hundred believers worshiping in those congregations. The new national leader is

Dr. Latif Tawfik, who entered the ministry after years of success as a pharmacist and businessman. With his fellow pastors, Dr. Latif has helped to lead the Egypt Church of God in new and exciting ways.

Materials Needed:

Bible

pen

A copy of "Egypt Information Quiz" (on Page 25) for each participant

A copy of Worship Reflections (on Page 27) for each participant

One print-out of each testimony (on Page 28 and 29) (Give to two women in advance to tell it as their own.)

Immerse:

As people come in, have them complete the "Egypt Information Quiz."

KEY THOUGHT: God actively seeks to prepare us for His plans even in the midst of obstacles.

The Lord has a purpose and plan for our lives. In Jeremiah 29:11 we read, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord" (NIV). This is not only true for groups, but for individuals. It is often difficult to know that purpose or how to fulfill that purpose. There are often obstacles in our path that prevent us from seeing and seizing the opportunities. Whether as a group or as an individual, we can be sure that God is faithfully shaping us through the circumstances of our lives to

Engage:

1. Sing or listen to recordings of the songs from the worship reflection sheets and discuss the questions listed on those sheets.

2. Reflect in silence on the following questions:

- What difficulties are you facing today?
- Who are others facing similar difficulties?
- How might you serve Him through these difficulties?

3. Read Genesis 41:41-57

- God has positioned Joseph to fulfill his purpose. Did Joseph realize it? Why or why not?
- How many years had passed since Joseph told his brothers about his dream until his promotion as number two in Egypt? (Genesis 37:2, 41:46)

make us fully prepared to fulfill His plans for us. In our study today, we will learn about how the Oldham family is trusting God in preparing their children for the purpose He has for each of them, and we will learn how the Church of God in Egypt is discovering and moving with new purpose as a group. *1

Personal Purpose:

Read: Genesis 37:1-11

Joseph had a dream, and though he may not have fully understood it at seventeen years of age, it was a dream of God's plan for him. What was Joseph's response to the dream? What about his family? We often want to interpret our understanding of God's purpose for our lives through our present circumstances; but God has to prepare us first.

In the rest of Genesis 37 Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. Though this separation from his family and his home may have been an obstacle to God's purpose in Joseph's mind, it actually provided the very opportunities for God to shape Joseph's life to fulfill the purpose God had for him.

Each of these *opportunities* may have appeared as *obstacles* at the time:

In Potiphar's house – (Genesis 39) As you read verses 2-6, what opportunities does Joseph have to grow and develop personally? Rev. Diana Swoope teaches, "With every new level, there's a new devil." While in Potiphar's house, though Joseph has grown, he is also facing greater temptation; yet Joseph remains faithful and it leads to his next "opportunity."

In Prison – (Genesis 39:20b-23, Chapter 40) Joseph meets two people, both former servants of Pharaoh. It is through his service to them that he eventually ends up in service to Pharaoh. During difficult circumstances, we can overlook our opportunities to serve people near us in similar circumstances – had Joseph overlooked the cupbearer and baker, his purpose may have gone unfulfilled. *2

In service to Pharaoh/Egypt – (Genesis 41:1-40) Joseph interprets the prophetic dream of Pharaoh. *3

Revelation – (Genesis 42:1-7) More than seven years have passed before Joseph sees his brothers bowing before him. What emotions and thoughts may Joseph have experienced at that moment – not just toward his brothers, but toward God?

They say, "Hindsight is 20/20" – this is never truer than in the *obstacles* and *opportunities* we have faced in our lives. Our faithful, all-knowing God is able to use every circumstance we face to pre-

pare us for the *purpose* He has for us. Joseph eventually realized this, and would tell his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Genesis 50:20)

Have someone share the Oldham family testimony.

Obstacles and Opportunities for the Church of God in Egypt:

The Church of God in Egypt, as with all Christians in the Middle East, faces a variety of obstacles.

In Egypt, people are born under a religious classification based on the religion of the father; about 90% of the population of Egypt is Muslim and about 10% are Christian. Though Egypt is unique in the Middle East by recognizing the three “celestial religions”: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity; there is not religious freedom in terms of conversion – except from other religions to Islam. Though that leaves a smaller population of people to serve and to preach, there are approximately 90,000,000 people in Egypt. With nearly nine million people born into Christianity there is still a large community to reach with the gospel because no matter the government record of their religious classification, “you must be born again” (John 3:7). *4

One constant obstacle for the Church of God in Egypt (and all churches in Egypt) is that they cannot rebuild or make significant changes to their church buildings without government permission. There are several congregations with pressing structural needs that cannot gain permission even though the buildings around them have been completely rebuilt, often illegally! Yet the patience and perseverance of the Church of God in Egypt is a witness and testimony, not only to their members, but also to their communities. In an era of quick protests and demonstrations for greater rights, the Church of God in Egypt is setting a peaceful example. *5

Historically, Egyptian Christians have been born under the Orthodox or Catholic churches; the growth of the Evangelical Protestant churches in Egypt has created divides between the Evangelical congregations (like the Church of God) and the Orthodox. Recently, this division has become more obvious in some areas of Egypt, creating new obstacles for the Church of God in Egypt. These “higher traditions” of the faith often sink to low levels of competition with all Evangelical churches in Egypt. Though there had been a brief period of greater cooperation, competition tactics are on the rise. Some examples:

One Orthodox priest came to a Church of God congregation’s day care program during the dismissal of the students to announce their new day care program at a lower cost.

Engage:

4. Read and discuss:

John 3:1-21

- Why did Nicodemus think he was one of God’s people?
- How did Jesus challenge his thinking?
- What does it mean to be born again?

5. Read and discuss:

Romans 13:1-7

- Which laws or governing authorities are hard for you to submit to? Why?
- What examples in scripture do we have of God using even unjust leaders/authorities?
- Why is it important to respect even unjust leaders?

Engage:

6. Read and discuss:

Philippians 1:12-18

- How have you seen a congregation/ministry inspired by the examples of another?
- In what ways have you seen congregations compete with each other?
- What can we learn from Paul's attitude even while others sought his harm?

7. Discussion Questions:

- What is something new you have learned about Egypt?
- What is one way you feel led to pray?
- How will understanding the role of obstacles change your perspective on your personal purpose or your church's purpose?

In another community, the Catholic Church regularly schedules services to compete with any program of an Evangelical church. The greater blow came with the establishment of a school. Families could get free or reduced tuition depending upon their attendance at the Catholic services. This was especially attractive due to the poor education opportunities in Egyptian schools and many families left Evangelical churches for the sake of their children. *6

NOTE: These examples of division are not based on universal practices by Orthodox Christians in Egypt. The Oldham family works weekly with many Orthodox Christian families that have a great love and appreciation for Christians of all backgrounds. These examples are not shared to disparage the Orthodox or Catholic groups in Egypt or anywhere else.

Have someone tell the Testimony of the Church of God in Egypt.

*7

Egypt Information Quiz

- 1) Egypt is closest in size (land mass) to which US state?
a) Texas b) Florida c) Alaska
- 2) What is the approximate population of Egypt?
a) 1,000,000 b) 35,000,000 c) 90,000,000
- 3) How many people per square mile are in the city of Cairo?
a) 144,000 b) 6,500 c) 34,500
- 4) What percentage of people in Egypt are Muslim?
a) 90% b) 99% c) 50%
- 5) What are the officially recognized/legal religions in Egypt?
a) Islam only b) Islam, Christianity, Judaism c) All religions
- 6) Which of these statements are true in Egypt?
a) Muslims can convert to Christianity
b) Christians can convert to Islam
c) Muslims can witness to Christians
d) Christians can witness to Muslims
- 7) What year did the Church of God make contact with Egyptian Christians?
a) 1932 b) 1897 c) 1955
- 8) How many Church of God congregations currently exist in Egypt?
a) 1 b) 5 c) 12
- 9) What percentage of women report to have been sexually harassed in 2013?
(*A study was conducted this year*)
a) 42.3% b) 99.6% c) 76.8%
- 10) How many nationalities are represented in our children's school?
a) 55 b) 2 c) 18

Egypt Quiz Answer Key

- 1) **C**–Egypt is 622,272 square miles. Alaska is 586,412 square miles, which is over twice the size of Texas—and Egypt is larger!
- 2) **C**–90,000,000
- 3) **A**–144,000. Though Egypt is very large, most of the population lives in metropolitan areas along the Nile River as the rest of the country is desert.
- 4) **A**–90% of the people in Egypt are documented as Muslim; however, all religion is based upon your father’s religion. So whether you are considered Muslim, Christian, or anything else—you are born into that religion.
- 5) **B**–Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are all legal religions in Egypt—the “celestial” or “Abrahamic” religions.
- 6) **B and C**–It is illegal for Muslims to convert to Christianity (or any other religion) and it is illegal to proselytize a Muslim.
- 7) **B**–This beginning connection to Egyptian Christians is documented in *Into All the World* by Crose, Barton, and Johnson, Warner Press © 2009. Gorham Tufts, Jr. was a Church of God missionary on his way back to the States from India when his boat docked at the Suez Canal—he ventured off to see what Christians he could find and gave them Gospel Trumpet literature. This led to written requests for additional Gospel Trumpet literature and eventually the requests for leadership to come help teach, establish churches, and so forth.
- 8) **C**–There are twelve churches in Egypt—Two congregations in/near Cairo, five in the north near Alexandria, and five in Upper (southern) Egypt.
- 9) **B**–99.6% of women in Egypt report having been sexually harassed. This harassment ranges from verbal and groping (as Keli and Grace have experienced) all the way to rape. The government is currently working to control this problem.
- 10) **A**–A unique opportunity for our family has been the international community in Cairo. Not only are we here to serve Egyptians—but also families from all over the world!

Worship Reflection (1)

Sing or listen to/watch the video for the song below. You can find this song on YouTube by searching the title and author of the song.

God of Justice

Tim Hughes

© 2004 Thankyou Music

God of Justice, Savior to all
 Came to rescue the weak and the poor.
 Chose to serve and not be served.
 Jesus, You have called us.
 Freely we've received, now freely we will give.

*We must go,
 Live to feed the hungry,
 Stand beside the broken.
 We must go, stepping forward
 Keep us from just singing,
 Move us into action, we must go.*

To act justly every day,
 Loving mercy in every way.
 Walking humbly before You, God.
 You have shown us what You require.
 Freely we received, now freely we will give.

Fill us up and send us out,
 Fill us up and send us out,
 Fill us up and send us out, Lord. (repeat x 4)

Discussion Questions:

What does this song say/teach about purpose?

What scriptures does this song bring to your thoughts?

How do you live out these ideas of purpose?

Worship Reflection (2)

Sing or listen to/watch the video for the song below. You can find this song on YouTube by searching the title and author of the song.

Consecration

Mildred E. Howard, 1907

Public Domain

Since Jesus gave His life for me,
 Should I not give Him mine?
 I'm consecrated, Lord, to Thee,
 I shall be wholly Thine.
 I care not where my Lord directs,
 His purpose I'll fulfill;
 I know He everyone protects
 Who does His holy will.
 Though He may call across the sea,
 With Jesus I will go;
 And tell the lost of love so free,
 Till all His pow'r may know.
 My home and friends are dear to me,
 Yet He is dearer still;
 In my affections first He'll be,
 And first His righteous will.
 My all, O Lord, to Thee I'll give,
 Accept it as Thine own;
 For Thee alone I'll ever live,
 My heart shall be Thy throne.

Refrain:

My life, O Lord, I give to Thee,
 My talents, time, and all;
 I'll serve Thee, Lord, Thine own to be,
 I'll hear Thy faintest call.

Discussion questions:

What does this song say/teach about purpose?

What scriptures does this song bring to your thoughts?

How do you live out these ideas of purpose?

Oldham Family Testimony

In January 2011 when friends and family saw the news of millions of people demonstrating in Cairo days after the Church of God Ministries announcement of our appointment, many thought we wouldn't dare go. Yet, we were convinced it was "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14) that God called us to serve. Many were concerned, even criticized us for willingly taking our three children into such a place, at such a time. Yet again, we were convinced that if God was calling us, even with these events, then He also had a plan for our children.

We have been sent to raise up young leaders in Europe and the Middle East. We believe that God will do that through us; and, we also believe that God will be raising up the three young leaders we took with us.

Despite those beliefs, we know and realize every day the obstacles that face our children. They do not speak the language. They look different and attract attention as a result. These are desperate times in Egypt and there is ever a need for vigilance. In such an environment, they cannot enjoy some simple things as easily as they would have in the US such as riding bikes and going out with friends. They are confronted by severe needs and poverty, and daunting wealth at the same time. They cannot help everyone who asks and they cannot compare in wealth to those near them.

Their international school is much more challenging academically. Socially, they are constantly saying goodbye to friends who enter and exit the community with families on two year assignments. They are aware of threats posed by political uncertainties and militant extremists leading to a lack of certainty in day-to-day life. Our sixteen-year-old daughter deals with a society where 99.6% of women report being sexually harassed.

Yet, through all of these obstacles, they are also presented with additional opportunities. They are exposed to culture and languages on a daily basis, not just on the Egyptian streets and stores, but also from the fifty-five nationalities represented in their school. They are given opportunities to hear and respect multiple perspectives on culture, politics, history, and the arts. They have the opportunity to make friends with students from all over the world, and they are learning to interact and connect with new people quickly due to the frequency of transition. They are wrestling with issues of poverty, injustice, and harassment. They see the effects on individuals and society, how those things affect daily life as well as what are the best ways to respond. They are not only meeting people from around the world, they are able to see many different places and have a greater appreciation for the beauty and diversity of our world.

Remember our key thought: God actively seeks to prepare us for His plans, even in the midst of obstacles.

As God prepared a young Joseph in Egypt, we pray that God is preparing our young children for the plans He has for them.

Testimony: New Generation Leadership and Vision in the Church of God in Egypt

The Church of God in Egypt has its obstacles, but it is also beginning to seize the opportunities. Over the last several years a group of young pastors provided a plan to honor and provide retirement for several older pastors. This was an important move because most pastors stayed in service until death to maintain their livelihood, even if they couldn't keep up with the demands of ministry.

Then the younger pastors began to review and make correct records and reports of all ministries. Led by Dr. Latif, an Alexandria pastor who was a former pharmacist and successful businessman, a greater level of accountability and transparency was beginning to be created.

One of the ministries reviewed was the Children of Promise program. Children of Promise is a Church of God program providing education, nutrition, and medical help to children in need. The young pastors saw how the program chapters were poorly managed and often just served children of the church. The new young pastors envisioned the growth of this program and the growth of their churches by using it as an outreach tool—to serve poorer families in their communities.

The program integrity was reestablished. Training of workers and pastors on the program requirements was conducted. The original program chapters were improved and all churches were encouraged to prepare to participate. New families are being reached by the Church of God and many more are waiting as additional child sponsors are sought.

Learn more about Children of Promise at www.echildrenofpromise.org