

The Nabla Initiative in Egypt: Accountability, Fundraising, and Generosity

How Adel Azmi is unlocking the potential of the Egyptian Church to reach communities for Christ, through the three points of Nabla: accountability, fundraising, and generosity.

Introduction

Rob: Welcome to today's podcast, sponsored by the book, [When Money goes on Mission: Fundraising and Giving in the 21st Century](#).

I'm here today with Adel Azmi, an Egyptian businessman and elder in the Christian Church in Egypt, who I first met seven, eight years ago?

Adel: 10 years ago.

Rob: 10 years ago, is it now? And you were leading a ministry, the Alexandria Youth Commission, as a volunteer.

Adel: Mm-hmm.

Rob: One of the largest and best run youth ministries in that part of the world.

And we just started interacting back then. You were a perfume, well, not a perfume salesman. You had a perfume business, right?

Adel: I was in the sales part in an English company.

Rob: Yes. And I just always thought, the sweet fragrance of God.

Today we're going to talk about the work that you're doing now, known as Nabla, a word that has very intriguing meaning.

Why don't we just begin with a description of what [Nabla](#) is, and then we'll talk about the listeners and what they can do about it.



What is Nabla?

Adel: Thanks, Rob. Nabla is an inverted triangle in the Greek language.

So this is Delta, this is Nabla, the inverted one.

And we chose the name because we're focusing on three main areas:
accountability, fundraising, and generosity.

Rob: For Egyptian ministries and Egyptian churches.

Adel: For Egyptian and for the wider Middle East and North Africa region.

Rob: Right.

Adel: But we want to start to have some kind of roots or a defined model that then we can take this model outside Egypt in the very, very near future.

Rob: So let's talk about the three points of the inverted triangle.



First Point of Nabla: Accountability

Adel: Okay. So I think the secret of having the three working together, because when I started being part of AYC 20 plus years ago, I found a major problem that since we in our church, that we don't talk about money.

So each one has his own theology.

Rob: Not just your church. You're talking about the church in general.

Adel: The big "C". Yeah.

Rob: Yeah.

Adel: The church of the Middle East, not just in Egypt either, the whole region. Because it's kind of a shame culture.

So if the pastor or the leaders talk about it, they will be perceived that they want it for themselves, which is much easier not to communicate or not to say anything about it, than to be misunderstood from the people.

So which has lead to something that everybody has his own theology of giving or where to give.

You cannot find any unified teaching about that since no people is teaching about it. So when I started, I wanted-

Rob: Meaning it's a taboo-

Adel: It's a taboo.

Rob: Subject. Nonetheless, the churches are supported by the individuals in the church.

Adel: Definitely, definitely. So I'm not saying people are not giving-

Rob: Or not generous.

Adel: Or not generous.

But on the other hand, they are very picky in their giving, and it's limited to two or three things.

So it gives us Bibles for evangelism and discipleship for support. And besides these three main areas, they don't give.

Not because they don't want to, but, for their theology, this is the places you should give to, the church and these basic needs.

And otherwise than that, "Why should I give? This is not the areas I would love to, or my parents or my grandparents used to give, so why should I change?"

Rob: So they haven't developed a philanthropic tradition yet.

Adel: Not yet.

Rob: and/or a tradition of fundraising.

Adel: I think, yes, true.

Rob: Okay.



Second Point of Nabla: Fundraising

Adel: So, when we face this challenge of people not giving the basic thing to overcome the challenge, would be just to talk about why people not giving.

But when we thought about it in more of a wider or integrated area, we thought about that we need to do more things besides helping the fundraiser raise funds.

Because in my understanding over the years, that regardless how good you are as a fundraiser, unless you teach your congregation to be generous givers, nothing will happen.

We won't change. We won't give.

So, besides the area of how to equip the fundraisers to be good fundraisers and having the why, not just the how of doing the fund, and it's a ministry.

It's not something you do because you are not good at preaching and teaching, so let's give him this administrative, lousy job of fundraising.

But it is a ministry, and it's not just because I say this or someone said, because it's the Bible says so.

So if you have this kind of theology of fundraising and it's clear and communicated, and people doing the fundraising are relaxed and know that exactly, this is what God wants them to do.

Besides this, if they didn't do this ministry, we cannot see any ministry because there will be no fund, no money and there will be no mission.

But on the other side, if you don't talk about money, and we don't teach our congregations, the whole congregation, not just the affluent or the 1% of the church, the whole church to be a generous church, we are facing trouble.

And lately, we find that-

Rob: You've got a lack of discipleship.

Adel: It's a lack of discipleship, that's exactly it.

So we find also that these two areas, if we compliment it with the area of accountability and stewardship, stewardship on the personal level, accountability on the corporate level, meaning that if the leader knew exactly that he's a steward, you're not just a leader or a manager or someone, he already has the authority to do whatever you want to do, but he is entrusted with this authority, or money, or whatever, and he's accountable.

And then if this understanding is clear, you've got to take it to the corporate level.

If you're leading a church or a ministry that they are complying with specific standards that everybody is aware of from the outside, not just inside the church or as a ministry.

And if I want to give and I don't know whether these people are doing something good or bad, there's some kind of measurement or standards that if these people are compliant with, "I'm relaxed to give to these people, or I'm more happy to do that, than people I never know about them."

And again, people give in Egypt, and I think in many parts of the world, on a very much of a relational part.

So if I don't have a relation with the senior leader or one of the key leaders in this place, I don't give.



The ECFA Model in Egypt

Rob: Right. So what you're speaking of here and in the accountability part of the Nabla triangle for those readers and listeners of this podcast, familiar with the [Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability](#) in the United States, ECFA, well-established 40 years ago by Billy Graham and John Stott, well not

John Stott, but Billy Graham, Bill Bright and other leaders of the American missions movement.

The whole idea behind it was Congress was beginning to investigate these corrupt ministries that were taking money from people and not using it for what they were saying they were doing with it.

In fact, many of these prosperity gospel teachers were building empires with the money, buying private airplanes and building big homes for themselves and literally stealing from the small givers that were following them on television or in their churches.

And, as a result, Billy Graham and the others said to Congress, "No, we'll create a system to self-regulate," and that system became ECFA.

And now ECFA is going around and has become international. And in a number of places, it's beginning to start up to go after the same corruption that was going on here in the American church.

And, Adel, you're leading this movement, you're calling it [Nabla](#), but you're also part of the global movement known as the [Global Trust Partnership](#), which is certifying the-

Adel: Organizations.

Rob: The various national organizations that are doing this. So one leg of the triangle is to teach fundraising.

One leg of the triangle is to set accountability standards so that when someone gives, they see that the accounting is going to be transparent, that the board of directors is independent from the executive director in that they hold the executive director accountable, and that regular accounting practices are followed.

Adel: Exactly. Yeah, this, for us, is something very new because in our culture we don't follow standards in anything.

So, it's a weird, long way that we establish this ECFA model in Egypt and the region.

But at least we started, and last December, we certified the first six founding members for this Nabla movement.

It's a great joy to find people willing and able to be certified and really have other people on the pipeline. We wish to be certified in the very near future.



Third Point of Nabla: Generosity

Rob: Yes, and the third part of the triangle is generosity.

Adel: Yes, and generosity, when I start focusing or talking about it, I didn't wish to follow many people past because most people, when they start, they start with the 1%, with the affluent Christians in the church or the ministry or the major givers.

But I thought that the best way to start, to start by the whole church. Because if the whole church doesn't have the message of generosity, it won't happen.

Later on, simultaneously, we definitely, as a people entrusted with much, need to be, not treated differently, but you need some special way to talk about generosity for them because they are trusted with much, but we cannot neglect the whole church needs to hear this message and on a constant way, not just one time.

Rob: Right. And the value of the smallest giver in terms of dollars, in terms of-

Adel: Pounds.

Rob: Pounds, in Egypt is as valuable as the gift of the larger.

Adel: Definitely. But this is not what people or what the leaders talk about. Because if I'm a leader, I will focus on only on the major givers.

Rob: So if I'm watching this or listening to this, what was it like getting started? What did that... you've talked about the challenges.

You've talked about what it is. You've talked now that you've already got some people started. So tell us some stories of your success.

And what was it like getting started?

Adel: Okay. It's all stuff. So when we started, we tried to define the why of everything before talking about the how of doing it.

So we started by a conference to talk about the three biblical perspectives of the fundraising, accountability and generosity.

And then we had, in each conference after that, the three other conferences focusing on one topic.

And when we focus at this topic, we focus on the why, because if the why is missing, nothing is important after that. So talk about why people have to follow standards.

Why is the why of fundraising and the why of generosity? It's not something you have to do just because you have to do it, but because there's a lot of biblical teaching and theology on that.

And since it's not communicated, it doesn't mean it's not set, it's not existing. When you start something like that, we have made medicine, we're lacking medicine, we're like we don't have any materials and teaching about that, we don't have any translated books because not everybody can read English as a second language.

We don't have any stories about generosity, people are giving. The people could be inspired from local generosity stories.

So we try to focus on developing the why of the things, translate some materials to be available, that when people attend our conferences, you have some things that you can take out.

And the way back, I'll try to implement it. Like for instance, last December, when there's a conference couple of months ago, three months ago now, we translated the overflow book and it's amazing.

Six weeks Bible study was six stories, and we supplied the stories. And any church, even those as 30 or 50 people can take the book and do it for their congregation.

And they can see, immediately, the shift happens with people's hearts and minds. So it's a long process where we cannot, or I already skewed it for me is that we're not going to reap the fruits of that immediately.

But Sangha, that we started, at Sangha there's a lot of people became early adapters and a very encouraging story for these people.

I can share one story about a very small church in Tanta.

Rob: Tanta?

Adel: Tanta is in Delta midway between Alex and Cairo.

And the pastor has a very small church and he attended the conference and he was inspired by the message of generosity, and he would love his church to be generous.

He bought 50 books for the whole congregation he had. And he was doing a conference last month in February.

And he had taken half of the time of the conference to teach about how his church should be generous.

And he shows the videos of the six, small study groups and the feedback on the story he keeps telling of the people very young in age how this message transforms their life.

And he just keeps sharing with other pastors beside his church, encouraging them.

So before I came by a couple of weeks, he bought another 70 books to distribute it to these other two small churches beside them, because he said, "It just happened to me. It should happen to other people beside me."

And this is very inspiring for me because it's not a big mega church, have every thing in place.

He's just struggling with everything he has. But he thought this is something you need to start.



Closing Thoughts

Rob: And our readers and viewers should keep in mind, this is all happening in Egypt, in a time of great turmoil and challenge.

The Egyptian economy is in tatters. The political system is volatile. The circumstances for the Christian Church is difficult at best.

I know I've been on calls with you where you've had to be very circumspect because you're being watched, and Christians are treated with some hostility in your country.

Yet, nonetheless, the message of generosity and the discipleship and the growth of the ministries and the development of local funding is going on, even in the midst of those circumstances.

Adel: Yes. Praise God. So, God give us this vision, and He's trustworthy to trust Him and to follow His lead.

And thanks for many people who mentored and helped me and you, definitely, are one of the early people who believed in that and who mentored me all of this almost 10 years.

So, thank you.

Rob: Oh, Adel. It's been my privilege. You're one of my heroes.

Adel: Thank you.

Rob: Thank you for being with us today.

Adel: My pleasure. Thanks.