

## ***Making Friends Among the Taliban***

### **Discussion Guide**

By Gordon Houser

#### **Chapter One:**

1. Share stories of your experiences of “improbable friendship” through your equivalent of tea shops.
2. Reflect on the places where you have lived. What effect has that geography had on your life?
3. Name three people—famous or otherwise—who have had a profound impact on your life. How have they influenced your choices—vocational or otherwise?
4. Dan’s family relished adventure, which made Dan a “florid dreamer.” Describe how your family influenced you in your decisions as an adult.
5. Dan learned the effectiveness of hanging out with people and what he called “positive opportunism.” What are the barriers in your life to this kind of practice?
6. The events in Afghanistan affected Dan’s life in profound ways. How have the political realities of your country affected your life?

#### **Chapter Two:**

1. Reflect on how the larger media portray events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, ignoring the presence of humanitarian workers. Imagine how the first-century Roman media might have reported (or not reported) Jesus’ death. What does this say about how media affect our viewpoints?
2. Imagine your house being bombed. Which possessions would you most hate to lose? Why?
3. Dan Terry showed no anxiety when he was captured. Why? What causes you anxiety? List three anxieties and place them in order. What might God say to you about these?
4. Dan made friends with his captor. Who are your enemies? What are some ways to make friends with them?
5. Dan set out to interact with neglected communities. What are the neglected communities in your town? What are ways you might interact with them?
6. Think of a time when you have befriended or taken the side of someone others do not like. Or think of a time you failed to do this. Reflect on how easy it is to go along with others who are criticizing someone or a group. What does God call us to do?

#### **Chapter Three:**

1. What does Dan’s term “enfranchising” mean? How might you apply this principle in your community? Your congregation? Your family?
2. An Afghan said Dan “was more Muslim than the Muslims,” noting his self-sacrificial service. Discuss the balance between evangelism and good deeds. How do we best witness to others about Christ?

3. Larson describes one of Dan's "excesses" as his "love affair with machines." Reflect on some of your excesses and how they might be used in serving the Lord.
4. Do you know anyone who is *Pagal* (crazy), a holy fool who is not afraid to go against the grain? Are we ever called to be *Pagal*? What would be considered crazy in our society?
5. Dan represents a prophetic figure, which put him at odds with his IAM colleagues. How can institutions, even congregations, include such prophetic voices as well as more administrative ones?
6. Larson points out that Dan was human, using his broken hand as a symbol of our brokenness. Discuss the danger of hero worship and the need to recognize our brokenness. Give examples.

Chapter Four:

1. Dan encountered many young men whose poverty forced them into work as miners or as gunmen at roadblocks. Have you been in poverty, or do you know people in poverty? Is your congregation—or are you—involved in ministries that help people in poverty? If so, describe their work. If not, offer ideas for what might be done.
2. Dan addressed the *shuras*, or elders' councils, in villages. Where are major decisions made in your community? In your congregation? Who has access to these? How are changes introduced?
3. For a week, keep track of the news you hear from Afghanistan in the media (TV, newspapers, Internet). Compare that with the stories you read here, for example, the changes in care for mothers and infants. Which news encourages you more? Which shows better where God is at work?
4. Afghan society is largely male-dominated. Name some examples from your context—congregation, community, workplace—where women have more limited access to influencing decisions.
5. Dan had a weakness for cinnamon rolls and did not cook well. For fun, name some of your guilty pleasures and foibles.
6. Imagine being told you had to flee your home in 72 hours. What would you take with you that would fit in a van? Why?

Chapter Five:

1. Describe a time when you felt like an outsider. Who are outsiders in your community?
2. Dan was a Christian yet was called by Muslims a Muslim. Describe your feelings about how far a Christian can participate with members of other religions in their worship or relate to them. What is going too far? What is OK for you?
3. Given his often isolated work, Dan missed worshipping with other Christians. What does worship mean for you? Can you take it or leave it, or is it essential? Why?
4. What peacemaking skills that Dan used in Afghanistan did he apply to family relationships? How might you use these in your congregation or family?
5. Describe your attitude toward play. Is play merely frivolous, or does it carry out an important function? Explain. Give examples.

6. Reflect on this Afghan proverb: "An unarmed Pashtun is more dangerous than an armed one." Compare our country's attitude toward guns to Jesus' defenselessness.

Chapter Six:

1. Dan recognized that the majority of casualties in modern warfare are civilians, and he worked to limit casualties when he could. Share ideas of how you might help limit such casualties.
2. Gary Moorehead found in Dan a mentor who helped alter the direction of his life. Name someone who has mentored you and describe how that changed you.
3. Talk about the tension between wise caution and fearless faith. How do you decide which is which? Is it different for different people? How so?
4. Discuss the assumptions we make about the Taliban and others we may label terrorists. Try to imagine being in their shoes. How might their experiences affect their choices to fight?
5. One important aspect of community development is listing the resources of a community. In churches this is often called gifts discernment. Has your congregation done this? What are your gifts? What do you think they are?
6. Why is it important in community development to hear from everyone in the community and let them come up with the goals rather than assuming what's best for them? Have you experienced either doing this to others or having it done to you? Describe that experience.

Chapter Seven:

1. As you read of the massacre of the 10 aid workers, note your feelings. Talk about how to grieve such unjust and wasteful killings.
2. Reflect on Jesus' death and the grief of his followers. What are the similarities and dissimilarities of that death and the death of the 10 aid workers?
3. What witness did Dan leave? What is the significance of who came to his funeral?
4. The deaths of others raise questions about one's own death. Discuss what plans, if any, you have made for your own burial or funeral. Is this important? Why or why not?
5. Talk about the irony and the meaning of Dan being buried in a British cemetery in Kabul that honors warriors while his gravestone reads, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love."
6. Discuss the meaning of Dan's saying, "In the end, we are all knotted into the same carpet."