

## Discipling believers of Muslim background

*If you have little experience in discipling a Christian of Muslim background, and especially if you are in the West, please read these pages.*

Jesus Christ calls us to make disciples of people from all cultures. However, this does not mean making them western Christians. There are good and bad points in all cultures. All of us should let God's Word shine on our cultural blind spots, whether we are from the West or the East. For instance, is it more 'biblical' to wear eastern or western clothes? To eat with our hands or with a knife and fork? To pray with our hands together or with palms turned upwards? To value individualism or sharing? To focus just on our nuclear family or also to care for wider relatives? With many of these practices God welcomes cultural variety, and in some of them there are good things we can learn from believers of Muslim background.

However God's Word challenges other aspects of culture, whenever these are infected by human sinfulness. Discipleship includes learning to value honesty above honour, to forgive those who hurt us, to have a right attitude to the opposite sex, to put God first in all our decisions, etc. These and other issues arise from a mix of personal background and culture. How can you find out the relevant issues for your friend(s)? By spending time with them, listening to them and praying for them. Ask questions about their own upbringing and family life. Remember that individuals are all different. So find out by asking.

Many Muslim cultures have much in common. But remember that they vary too. Pakistanis, Iranians and Arab are not the same! Even within those cultures there is variation between different ethnic groups or socio-economic classes. So ask your friend about their cultural upbringing: what they like about their culture and what they don't like. Sometimes after receiving Christ they reject their old culture. But their long-term psychological health is better served by integrating some aspects of their old culture with the new, rather than suppressing them altogether.

Find out too about the struggles faced by 'believers of Muslim background' (BMBs). Some common issues they face after turning to Christ are:

- Leaving behind their former home, family and culture. This can lead to profound *loneliness* and a sense of *losing their identity*.
- Active persecution by family members. This can lead to a striking sense of *rejection*.
- *Shame* imposed by their former community.
- *Lack of structure* in the Christian faith, compared with Islam which gives people a clear framework to follow.
- *Lack of community* among Christ's followers compared with what they are used to.

Because of these issues, the *Come Follow Me* course has been developed around 1 Peter, with a special focus on questions of identity. It teaches that we are 'God's chosen people', precious to him and bonded to each other in Christ.

BMBs in the West often have more freedom in relation to their Muslim communities, and less persecution, than they would in Muslim lands. On the other hand, they face different challenges, especially if they have fairly recently arrived in the West. These challenges include, for example:

- How to cope with 'freedom of choice' and make decisions wisely;
- How to budget their finances;
- How to adjust to the mindset and cultures of western Christians;

- How to handle relationships with the opposite sex;
- How to negotiate bureaucracy, form-filling, asylum procedures and job-hunting;
- How to integrate the different parts of their identity.

It would be good for additional lessons to be developed on such topics, as *Come Follow Me* was not originally written for BMBs in the West.

Understanding people's stories is key to the success of this course. It will enable you as the Advisor to understand many of the joys and difficulties that former Muslims face in following Jesus. It will also help you to make a link between the course material and the lives of the learner(s) you are discipling. In addition it will allow you to understand why the material covers the topics it does with its focus on topics like persecution, which do not often feature in other discipleship courses. A meal/refreshment time before or after the discussion can really help build up your friendship and trust with the learner(s) in order that they will feel able to share their story.

Finally, it's all about caring. Love makes the biggest impact. Love covers a multitude of cultural blunders! Love means being available to your friend when they are confused and hurting. It means giving hospitality when they are missing their family. It means keeping in touch with them by phone and text, not just in the formal ways of emails and meetings. One BMB said, "*I gave up my family in order to follow Jesus, and all I got in return was meetings!*"

From 2014 onwards, it is hoped that more materials and training will gradually become available to help equip Christians to care for and disciple believers of Muslim background. These would mostly be relevant in other Western contexts too. Please email [comefollowmecourse@gmail.com](mailto:comefollowmecourse@gmail.com) for information on this.