MORE ABOUT COME FOLLOW ME

A HISTORY OF COME FOLLOW ME

THE CONTEXT

In the country of 'Watan' (not its real name), Islam is applied strictly and there are very few followers of Christ. If believers witness openly they will probably be driven away from their communities or maybe even killed, so most of them are secret or semi-secret believers. They disclose themselves only to those they can trust. Thus it is hard for them to build a trusting community among themselves. Yet if they meet for fellowship with foreigners, they will be viewed with suspicion by their watching Muslim neighbours.

There are other barriers too. The national believers have little Bible knowledge and little formal education; many live in grinding poverty. They come from different ethnic groups which have fought each other for decades. Their old mindset was moulded by a mix of Islamic law and tribal tradition, affecting attitudes to revenge, to women, etc.

THE NEED

In such a situation, how will believers grow as Christ's disciples and build healthy church, right where they live without extracting them from their context?

That challenge was taken up in a consultation:

- Participants agreed on the need for national believers to disciple each other, not depending on foreigners
- This would need simple discipleship methods fulfilling seven key criteria
- It must happen in a low key way without institutional structures
- The curriculum would have two tracks, for oral and literate believers

THE AUTHOR

Dr Tim Green was asked to write a foundational course for the literate track. His friendships with believers of Muslim background (BMBs) stretch back over forty years in many countries. He has walked with them, seen their struggles and learned much from them. His PhD was on the identity issues they face. How do they establish their new identity in Christ, with a gradual transformation of their old mindset and habits? How do they navigate between Muslim and Christian communities, and what religious labels are thrust upon them?

He began this work in 2006. He based the course on a thorough study of 1 Peter, integrated with the issues of Watani believers. He included concrete examples as a springboard for reflection. Drafts of the course were field-tested with about forty BMBs and experienced disciplers, leading to successive revisions. BMBs of different nationalities said the course was relevant to them as well as in Watan. This includes believers of Muslim background living in the West, even though their setting is so different.

PUBLICATION OF COME FOLLOW ME

The English international edition of Come Follow Me was published in 2013, with revision in 2017 and since then many translations have been completed.

The Come Follow Me course has two parts:

- the Study Book for the learner which can be purchased through the Word of Life Shop
- the Advisor Guide which can be downloaded from the Word of Life website or purchased through our shop

A DIGITAL VERSION ON GROWSPACE

With the number of displaced peoples around the world, we realised that it wasn't always practical for a believer moving between refugee camps to have a physical Study Book. We also receive enquiries from people working in countries where it is dangerous to own Christian resources. In 2019-20 we created an e-learning platform for smartphones and other devices called GrowSpace. We use it to publish Come Follow Me in a digital, secure, multilingual, interactive format for group and 1-2-1 discipleship.

The platform works in the same way as the book - a believer is given access by their advisor, and they complete the lessons by typing into the pages before meeting together face to face (or on a video call) to complete the discussion.

WHAT MAKES COME FOLLOW ME UNIQUE?

Come Follow Me is unusual because:

- it was written for believers of Muslim background, not adapted from elsewhere
- it tackles particular worldview issues and practical challenges faced by these believers
- it integrates a detailed study of one book (1 Peter) with a wide range of topics
- it combines personal preparation with interactive discussion and application
- it uses stories, case studies and pictures to help learners connect teaching with daily life
- it is available in many languages so that believers can study in their mother tongue
- it is designed to be studied only in relationship with other believers not in isolation

DEEP LEVEL DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS WHEN OUR WORLDVIEW IS TRANSFORMED.

This course opens up common worldview issues for new believers. For example:

I have prayed for many years for God to give me a child. But I am still childless! Therefore I will go to the 'holy man', maybe his prayers will be answered because he is closer to God than me.

What advice would you give to this anxious believer?

After getting married who comes first, your mother or your wife?

How can we resolve our disputes instead of turning our backs to each other?

Another big issue is shariah, which in Islam means a whole way of life. Fulfilling one's religious duty is very important, so when a new believer finds 'freedom in Christ', how can they combine it with a new framework of committed daily discipleship? Come Follow Me helps connect this question to different aspects of the believer's life in Christ.

COURSE DESIGN AND METHOD

The Watan consultation agreed 7 guiding principles, that courses should be:

relevant	• to local context
rooted	• in the Bible
rounded	• integrating knowledge, character and abilities
relational	• for studying with other believers
responsive	• using participative learning,
regular	• with scheduled meetings and application
reproducible	• so learners can equip others in turn

1. relevant to the local context. The training should relate to the religious, social and educational background of local believers of Muslim background (BMBs), using idioms, parables and stories in ways which make them feel 'this is written for us'. Teaching should be relevant to their daily lives and the issues they face.

2. rooted in Scripture. Teaching should be faithful to the Bible, not merely using proof-texts to support topics, but equipping believers to understand scripture chronologically and to study it inductively. Content should be evangelical but without denominational bias.

3. rounded. It should seek all-round growth in knowledge, character and abilities. Measurable objectives should be specified for what students should know, be and be able to do as a result of completing the course.

4. relational. Neither books nor electronic media can make disciples. Only disciples can make disciples, for "one oil lamp lights another" (Urdu proverb). So any training course must involve interaction with a human mentor, either 1:1 or in a group.

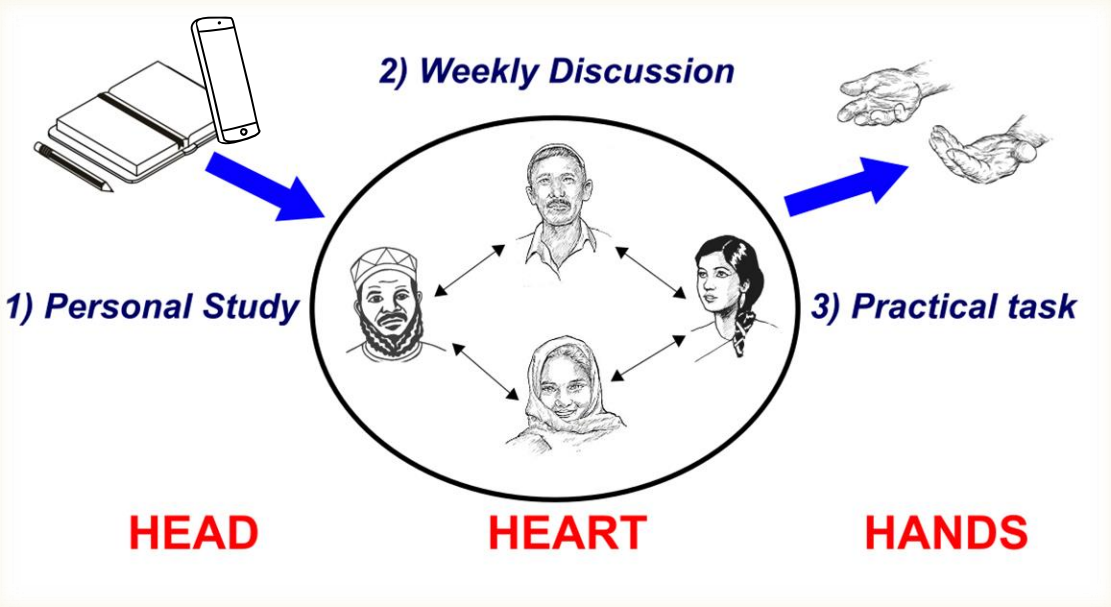
5. responsive. Learners should not be bombarded with one-way information (whether written or oral) but should constantly interact with it, demonstrating their understanding and applying it to their own lives. Courses should be user-friendly, interesting, and short enough to be managed by busy adults.

6. regular. While at the early stages discipling is frequently informal and irregular, more consistent growth will occur when learners take part in a regular programme including scheduled meetings and practical assignments.

7. reproducible. The programme should equip believers with tools and training by which they themselves can equip others, who will equip others in turn. Any training scheme which depends on a foreign expert will stop at the first generation.

COME FOLLOW ME METHOD

The specific design of Come Follow Me uses the Study-Discuss-Apply method which has been tried and tested over many years within the TEE movement. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Christians worldwide take part in learning groups using this method.



For several reasons, this style of group learning is suitable for new believers in Muslim contexts:

- the SDA method combines Biblical study with shared reflection and practical application
- the teaching is in the course book so the facilitator need not be a Bible expert
- members stay embedded in daily life; they do not leave their jobs or go away to Bible college
- groups meet in homes so they attract less hostile attention than in a church building
- the cost is very low so groups can multiply in a sustainable way

The digital version of the course, on the GrowSpace platform, works in the same way. A believer is given access by their advisor, and they complete the lessons by completing the lesson on their device before meeting together face to face (or on a video call) to complete the discussion.

FAQS

We get many enquiries about Come Follow Me each year. Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions

CAN SOMEONE STUDY COME FOLLOW ME ON THEIR OWN?

No. This is because books don't make disciples on their own. Disciples make disciples, with the help of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Come Follow Me is designed as a tool to bring disciples together in relationship, to learn from each other and be guided by the Lord.

CAN I DOWNLOAD THE STUDY BOOK FROM THE INTERNET?

The course is not for study in isolation, as explained above, and the course requires the learner to write down answers, not skim-read through it. Writing helps a learner interact with the teaching, absorb it and reflect on it. He or she then has to connect it with daily life.

You can order the Study Book in most countries. If this is impossible in your country, please contact us so we can help you. The Advisor's Guide is downloadable from anywhere.

We realise that printed books aren't always available or safe, so to help with accessibility of the course worldwide we have published Come Follow Me on our GrowSpace platform in a digital, secure, multilingual, interactive format for group and 1-2-1 discipleship.

WHY DOES THE COURSE LOOK SO SIMPLE?

It was originally written for a context where few people have the opportunity for higher education. Therefore it uses easy-to-read text, with concrete examples and pictures. But this does not mean the contents are simple. Personal study of these lessons provides a springboard for the discussion time leading to in-depth reflection, transformed worldview and practical discipleship. Concrete examples make discussion and application easier than if it was just abstract teaching. Also, a person discipled through this course has an easy tool to disciple others. This makes the discipling more reproducible.

WHY IS IT BASED ON 1 PETER?

Topical studies tend to take proof texts from different parts of the Bible. But to go right through one Bible book develops good habits of inductive study and allows God's Word to speak to us on its own terms. The different discipleship topics can then be woven into this study of 1 Peter, bringing in some other Bible passages as appropriate. 1 Peter is suitable because it touches on many such topics that are relevant for believers of Muslim background. It was written for believers under pressure, as they are.

CAN I TRANSLATE IT INTO A NEW LANGUAGE?

We currently have many languages available or in translation, but if a language you need is not available or not yet in the translation process, and you might be able to help organise a translation, please contact us explaining your situation and we may be able to start a discussion about a new language translation. All our translations are made in partnership with different organisations around the world.