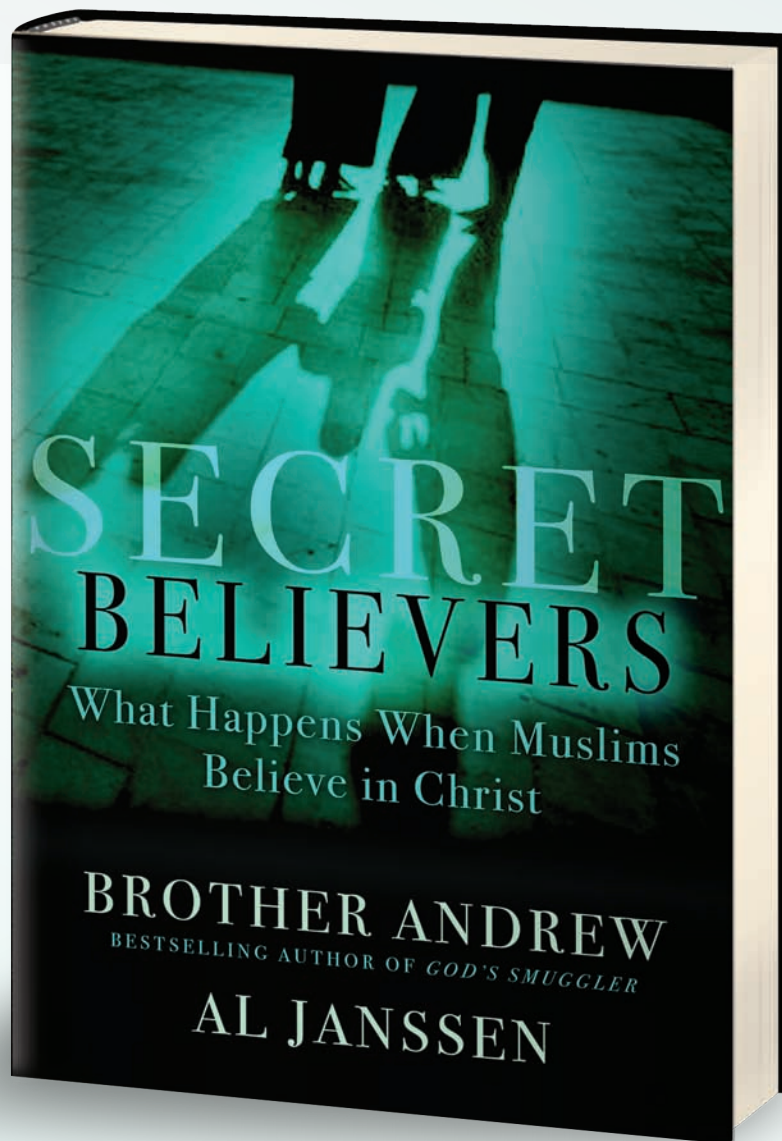


A discussion guide for

SECRET BELIEVERS

*What Happens When
Muslims Believe in Christ*



By Brother Andrew and Al Janssen

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Introduction

Right now 200 million of your brothers and sisters suffer persecution because of their Christian faith. Wouldn't it be good for you and your church to encourage and support the persecuted church around the world?

In 2 Timothy 4:7, Paul says, "I have fought the good fight." In the Arabic translation those last three words are rendered "the good jihad." Whether we want to be or not, we are engaged in this fight. But it is not the same fight we see on the news. It is a spiritual battle, and we in the West have a crucial part to play in the good fight.

This guide will teach you how you can join in the good jihad, starting with a discussion of the book *Secret Believers*. First you will get a glimpse into the lives of courageous, persecuted believers living in the Middle East. You'll meet people like . . .

- Ahmed, a young Muslim terrified by nightmares until he is introduced to Jesus,
- Mustafa, a former leader in a fundamentalist Muslim movement that persecuted Christians, and
- Salima, a privileged young Muslim woman who is held captive by her family when they find a Bible in her possession.

You will also meet other members of the Church in the Middle East who are suffering—even dying—for their faith. Then you will receive four specific challenges to help the persecuted church in the Muslim world. In the end, you will know what it means to join a new kind of jihad—one of love, radical forgiveness, and unyielding prayer.

This discussion guide presents a special opportunity for small groups and Sunday school classes to engage in dialogue about the challenges presented in *Secret Believers*. It mirrors the format of the book, with two discussion tracks provided: The Narrative Discussion Track includes questions about the story in Part I of *Secret Believers*, while the Challenges Discussion Track encourages conversation about the challenges presented in Part II.

We encourage you to pursue both discussions—either divided into two separate sessions or combined for a lengthier one. A small group setting is recommended to encourage participation by everyone.

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Tips for Leading a Discussion

Here are a few ideas to keep your discussions rolling in a meaningful way:

- **Prepare.** Make sure you've read through and are familiar with each part of the book.
- **Be yourself.** Thank your participants for sharing their thoughts and opinions, but don't feel that you need to agree with every one. Be honest about the lessons you've learned—even if they may not be what people want to hear.
- **Encourage people to go deeper.** When someone gives a simple response, ask them follow-up questions, such as “Why do you feel that way?” “What do you mean by that?” “Tell us more.”
- **Allow for silence.** Remember, the participants haven't read the questions ahead of time and may need some time to process a response. Allow for about 7–10 seconds of silence before saying anything further, even when it makes you feel uncomfortable. If necessary, you can reword the question or move on to another one.
- **Include everyone in the discussion.** If it seems like the same two or three people are responding to every question, look for ways to bring others into the conversation. Some people may need a little encouragement to share their thoughts and opinions. So invite them to talk by saying something like “Lisa, I'm curious what you think about this too” or “Sara, I'd love to hear what you have to say about that.” Be sensitive to their feelings, though: If a person has nothing to say or looks extremely uncomfortable, give them an “out” by moving on to someone else.
- **Be a good listener.** The goal is to have a true discussion, not just a “talk” from the group leader. Avoid putting words in peoples' mouths or overreacting to comments that you may not agree with. Try asking “mirror” questions that challenge people to clarify or affirm what you've heard. For example, say “What I hear you saying is this. Is that what you mean?” or “So what you seem to be saying is this. Would you agree?”
- **Bring God into it.** Pray for the group before and after the discussion. Ask God to direct your time together and be open to the Spirit's leading. It may be that he takes you in an unexpected direction, so don't get too hung up on “the plan.” If the group is genuinely interested and engaged in a healthy side topic, let the conversation go, saying a silent prayer for God to be working on their hearts as you go.

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***Secret Believers* Narrative Discussion Track**

You may find that people in your group come with enough questions to fuel an hour's worth of conversation. Or you may want to rely on the questions provided here to keep the discussion rolling. How you use these questions is up to you. Just remember: the goal is to generate healthy discussion—not to simply “get through” the provided list of questions.

1. What were some of your initial perceptions of Islamic nations before reading *Secret Believers*? Were any of those perceptions changed as a result of reading this book? Why or why not?
2. Were you aware of the distinction between “natural born” Christians and Muslim converts before you read *Secret Believers*?
3. “The work of the church is not survival. She exists to fulfill the Great Commission. Her work is making disciples of all nations” (p. 22). Based on the stories presented in *Secret Believers*, do you think the Church in Islamic countries is more focused on survival or discipleship? Why? What challenges make it especially difficult for the Church to fulfill the Great Commission in the Muslim world?
4. How did Abuna Alexander’s role as a Christian leader develop throughout the story? In what ways did his faith change? How might his personal faith journey serve as a model for the Church in Islamic nations?
5. What motivated the conversions of Ahmed, Hassan, Mustafa, and Salima? What did they see in Christianity that they could not find in Islam?
6. What were some of the practical challenges faced by the Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in this story? Do you think the Church effectively helped them face these challenges? What might have made their transition to Christianity smoother?
7. How did Butros attempt to integrate Islamic culture into the new Christian beliefs of Ahmed, Hassan, and Mustafa? What aspects of their Islamic background did he encourage them to rethink as they embraced their new faith?
8. What was Professor Kamal’s perspective on the relationship between Christianity and Islam? Why do you think that some Islamic nations have fallen toward intolerant fundamentalist practices rather than the open-minded ideals of Muslims like Professor Kamal?
9. What was your reaction to Layla’s kidnapping? How did you feel about Abuna Alexander’s response of prayer and forgiveness? In what ways does the concept of forgiveness hold the potential to win Muslims to Christ? Do you see those of us who are Christians demonstrating forgiveness to those around us?
10. In what ways did this book help you to better understand the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity? In general, do you think that the cultural aspects of Islam can be compatible with a Christian lifestyle? Why or Why not?
11. What were your feelings as you finished Part I of *Secret Believers*? Did the stories of Muslim-background believers impact your own faith in any way? If so, how?

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***Secret Believers* Challenges Discussion Track**

1. How are Muslims generally viewed by your Christian community? Are they viewed primarily as enemies or as a mission field—or are they given any thought at all?
2. In what ways have current events—and the media’s portrayal of them—contributed to our attitude toward Muslims? What contemporary stereotypes have made it difficult for Christians to view Muslims as potential believers in Christ?
3. What are some proactive steps you could take to encourage a Christ-like love for Muslims in your church? In your community?
4. What are the key differences between the Islamic and Christian answers to the question “Who is God?” Why is the concept of forgiveness so crucial in a Christian apologetic to the Islamic world?
5. Would you say that the Church in the West has demonstrated an attitude of forgiveness in the face of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorist attacks? Why or why not?
6. Is it possible for Christians to believe and demonstrate forgiveness on a spiritual level while simultaneously supporting retaliation at the political level? Why or why not?
7. In *Secret Believers*, we read, “It won’t help to preach the gospel to [Muslims] if they can’t hear us because of what they see and hear from our culture” (p. 243). What are the predominant messages and images Muslims are seeing from the Western world? To what extent are they a fair representation of our culture?
8. How much have the values of the Western world shaped our Christianity? Are there areas where biblical values have been compromised and if so, what can be done to return to true Christian living? On a more personal note, are there areas in your own life in which a compromise has taken place? (*This may be a question that is silently reflected on only, unless someone chooses to share.*)
9. What is the difference between praying *for* Muslim believers and praying *with* them? What are practical steps we can take to show our solidarity with Muslim-Background Believers?
10. What kinds of personal sacrifices might be needed in order for Western Christians to effectively reach out to the Islamic world? What sacrifices would you be willing to make in order to bring Christ’s kingdom to this part of the world?

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Resources

Discussion leaders, as well as other group members, may find the following resources helpful as they prepare to participate in a *Secret Believers* discussion:

- The **Selected Bibliography** (found on pp. 263–65 of *Secret Believers*) provides a list of books offering helpful insight into the world of Islam.
- <http://www.od.org>—The website of Open Doors International offers information about the history and vision of the organization, as well as current trends in Christian persecution around the world.
- <http://www.secretbelievers.org>—This website, started in conjunction with the release of *Secret Believers*, provides information about specific countries and the needs of Muslim-Background Believers within them. The site also offers material to help you reach Muslims in your own neighborhood and city.

About the Authors of *Secret Believers*



Brother Andrew began taking Bibles to Christians behind the Iron Curtain in 1955. That work has since developed into Open Doors International. He is the author and coauthor of numerous books, including *God's Smuggler*. Brother Andrew makes his home in the Netherlands.

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