

Caring for a new Christian—‘follow-up’

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Follow up is a commercial term familiar to sales people. You make a contact, then make it again to advance your purpose.

Dawson Trotman borrowed it from the commercial old and applied it to a practice he had rediscovered from the Bible. Later, the Church adopted the practice and the term, after Trotman and Sanny, his understudy, introduced it to the Billy Graham crusades. It survives today as the “Christian Life and Witness Classes” for believers, and some initial counselling of enquirers.

In The Navigators we see ministry expansion in four phases—evangelism, establishing, equipping and sending. Follow up sits in the second.

Instead of talking about follow up and exegeting the term, let’s **start with the Bible** and identify what happened as the gospel spread throughout the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ preached the gospel, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand . . . believe the gospel.” Great crowds followed him. He challenged people to follow him and when he knew they were serious **he gave them something to hold on to**, something they could lean on, and which would maintain their belief. “If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31, 32). He also said, “I have spoken to you so that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.” Jesus also set behavioural standards, the most important of which was, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.” **The welfare of Jesus’ disciples is based on the word of God itself—nothing less.**

Further, the Lord Jesus prayed for the immediate disciples (John 17) and those who would come to believe in him through their word. By doing this **he set the pattern** for all that were responsible for bringing new believers into the world.

The new church followed the pattern of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:42) continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine (the word of God), and prayers.

Paul—Perhaps the most obvious practitioner of prayer for new believers was Paul. Not only did he commend the Church at Ephesus to the word of God, “which is able to build you up” but he also wrestled in prayer for them all, collectively and individually. A typical prayer is found in Ephesians 1:15-23:

1. To know Christ better (v17)
2. To know their future and present hope
3. To know their inheritance
4. To know Christ’s mighty power.

We could do much worse to **pray through this passage for each new believer** that we are responsible for—and for older ones, and even for ourselves.

Here are some of **Paul’s other prayers for new converts and others:**

Romans: — constantly remembering them in prayer, keen to visit them to build them up (1:9-10). Prayer in the letter for grace and peace.

First Corinthians — always thanking God for them and the gifts God's grace has given them, gifts that have enriched them in every way (booklet: *Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gift*). Grace and peace.

Galatians—grace and peace. That is all. He is annoyed at the Galatians.

Ephesians—as dealt with above. (Paul always supplied the doctrinal basis for his expectations.) Further, he prayed that God would give them:

1. Inner strength
2. That Christ would occupy the core of their being by their faith
3. That they would understand the love of Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God, through being established in love. (And where do they learn about love, but from their discipler's loving care of them!)

Finally, he prayed for peace, love and grace.

Philippians—grace and peace. He prayed that:

1. Their love might about with knowledge and insight.
2. They would be able consequently to distinguish the best, and be fruitfully righteous
3. They would love God and each other and become godly.

Colossians—grace and peace

1:9-12

For God to reveal his will so that they might live good lives, please God, bear fruit in every good work, grow in the knowledge of God, be strengthened, gain endurance and joyfully give thanks to God. This is not so much a list as a progression, one thing leading to the next.

1 Thessalonians—told of his constant prayer for them (1:2-3). It is a prayer of thanks for God's work already achieved. Asked the Lord to increase their love all round and strengthen them to be blameless (2:12, 13). Grace 5:28.

2 Thessalonians—A prayer of thanks for their growing faith and love (2:3, 4). That God would count them worthy of his calling and fulfil all their good plans (2:11). Asks for God to encourage them and strengthen them in every good deed and word (2:6, 7). Peace and grace (3:16, 18).

All the letters, including Revelation, but not including Timothy and Titus are follow-up letters, full of the necessities for new and growing Christians. Peter and James are practical and full of commands, and have specific issues in mind. John is a different sort. His reasons for writing his first letter are:

1. To make his readers' joy complete (1:4)
2. To discourage them from sinning (2:1)
3. To encourage them to love their brothers and sisters in the faith (2:9)
4. To enable them to overcome the evil one (2:13, 14)
5. To counter the influence of those who would lead the converts astray (2:26)
6. To help them be sure that they have eternal life (5:11-13)
7. To give them confidence that God answers prayer (5:14)

More . . .

A summary of the apostles' teaching to new believers

1. To be certain of their forgiveness and eternal life
2. To refrain from sinning
3. To know God better and better
4. To love one another
5. To be credible witnesses for Christ

The way it was done:

- In groups, by preaching and teaching
- By visits
- By letter
- By individual help
- By good relationships
- By prayer

Today, we have all the apostles' letters and are truly blessed because we can use all of them with new believers as we encourage them in their faith.

What to do in practice

Follow up must be based on a relationship

If you have been the person to bring your friend to faith in Christ you are in a good position. They will respect what you are telling them and what you represent. Paul said:

'Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel' (1 Corinthians 4:15).

In my opinion, the best follow-up is done between a spiritual parent and their new believer.

Nevertheless, you can help another who has become a believer another route. The same relationship can exist, if you work at it:

'For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory' (1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

And there is **follow up in a nutshell**, 'encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God.'

As you meet, the Bible must be central (remember Jesus) in all our follow-up fellowship.

'If you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.' (Free from sin.)

The Bible is the means of coming to faith (Romans 10:9, 10, 1 Peter 1:23)

And the means of growing in faith (1 Peter 2:2)

The word must rule over experience.

The word must rule the heart.

The word must rule the mind.

Immediately someone becomes a new believer you should:

1. Help them think through on what they have done, and confirm their commitment by sharing Scripture verses, such as: John 5:24, 1 John 5:11-13.
2. Start them memorising these key statements, and check to see if they have done this next time you meet. Share your own current memory verses too so that they will see your example. Paul said, 'Therefore I urge you to imitate me' (1 Corinthians 4:16).
3. Start them off in a plan of reading the Bible, praying on the basis of what they have read, and expecting God to answer. (It always surprises me how God answers seemingly crazy requests of a new believer, probably just to encourage them.)
4. Pray together, *simply* and about basic issues, such as their new life, overcoming sin, their needs, and anything else they might think important.
5. Make another appointment for another friendly meeting, possibly with a meal.
6. Pray for the new Christian regularly and urgently.

Later you can:

7. Plan together some leisure activity that you would both enjoy. Later, you might work together on a worthy project. These build your relationship.
8. Provide fellowship with other Christians—perhaps a Bible study fellowship that you are running.
9. Encourage them to speak about their new faith. Help them to present their story succinctly, using Acts 26 as a model.

Hospitality is an important part of follow up. It shows you care for the person, especially if you do it more than once. Giving hospitality is a part of Christian living anyway (Romans 12:13).

Depending on the new Christian's background, you might have to be prepared to answer a host of **questions** about every issue under the sun. Do your best at the time, but if you don't have an immediate answer, admit it, and say, 'I'll do some study and give you the answer next time.'

In this regard, we found our Bible study group got really excited when they asked if we could study **Genesis**. This, even after we had been through the Gospel of John and Romans.

Hillman Buckingham, Commissioner of the Salvation Army in New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, was quoted in *Creation* magazine recently (June-August 1999) as saying, 'I had always been a believer in Genesis—it is part of being converted.'

When I was converted I realised that Genesis was foundational, and I began immediately to read it, uncovering problems and discovering answers. Most of the problems are now solved. Today, evolution is a basic philosophy that permeates almost all of modern thinking and underpins science, religion and government. The fact is, however, you can't have evolution and God—they are opposed, and you need to be able to handle this question. I cover this whole issue in another seminar, *'Evangelism for 2000 and Beyond.'*

More . . .

Other things Paul said about his shepherding relationships

- ❑ He talked about his holy behaviour (2 Corinthians 1:12).
- ❑ He wrote nothing they could not read or understand (2 Corinthians 1:13).
- ❑ He did not lord it over them, but worked with them for their joy (2 Corinthians 2:14).
- ❑ He was a servant to them for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5).
- ❑ He showed how much he wanted to be with them (2 Corinthians 12:4-5).
- ❑ He didn't want their money, but their hearts—their affections (2 Corinthians 12:4-5).
- ❑ He longed for the new believers' maturity. He prayed frequently for this and was confident that God would mature them. This is a key verse on follow up (Philippians 1:6-8, especially verse 6).
- ❑ He was glad to have suffered for the Colossians. He became their servant, and worked hard to present them mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28-29).
- ❑ He noted that the Thessalonians received the word from Paul as coming from God, and became imitators of Paul and his team. He told them that they had become a model for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia in the area of evangelism (1 Thessalonians 1:4-8).
- ❑ He said that he and his team were gentle, dealing with the believers as a father would with his children, or a mother her children.

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