



# *EQUIPPING THE SAINTS*

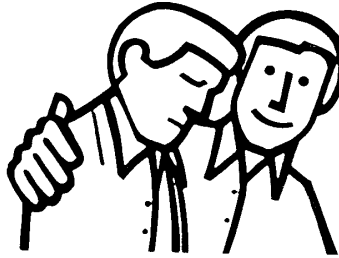
## **THE PRINCIPLE OF FOLLOW-UP**

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### **Introduction**

We have defined **Follow-up** as:

“That process of training which brings spiritual children to maturity in their walk with the Lord and in their service to the Body of Christ.”



Many of us know Christians who have made genuine professions of faith, but have never grown in the Christian life. Time has passed—years and sometimes decades—but they are as much spiritual infants today as they were when they came to Christ.

Why didn't they grow?

Why do some Christians go on to maturity while others do not?

These are not easy questions to answer. In every situation the reason would differ with the individual. However, we must recognize that there are certain basic needs which every new believer has, and we must labor to see that these needs are met. As we are faithful to provide these things for new Christians, we will see more and more people begin to grow and fewer fall by the wayside. While fewer will fall, we must always remember that God's objective for every Christian is that they “arrive at real maturity—the measure of development which is meant by the ‘fullness of Christ.’”

What are the basic elements necessary in “*the care and feeding*” of young Christians? Let us examine them briefly.

### **Ensure Proper Parental Care**

In the last session we saw the way that God provided spiritual helpers or *parents* for both Paul and Cornelius. God provided Ananias for Paul and Peter for Cornelius. These *spiritual fathers* spent time with their *new babes in Christ* to ensure that they would begin to grow spiritually.

The Bible shows Ananias as Paul's spiritual father like this:

*And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*

*(Acts 9:17-19)*

The Bible shows Peter as Cornelius' spiritual father:

*And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*

*(Acts 10:48)*

Notice that in the above incidents Ananias and Peter did not simply have a word of prayer with their convert and then hurry off. On the contrary, they spent several days with their new brothers in Christ to encourage and establish them in the Christian life.

### **Absence of Parenting**

If every church of the Twentieth Century would follow the Scriptural examples of the First Century Church in follow-up, Christianity would be mushrooming on all fronts. Yet sadly, many evangelical churches are nearly stagnant in their growth rate because they fail at this point. In my experience, nearly every church that is successful, dynamic, and growing can be found to have a carefully developed nurture program with equipped men and women who can provide the proper care for new Christians.

### **Provision of Parenting**

Several years ago I was privileged to be the coordinator for the counseling and follow-up for a large Billy Graham Crusade. The Graham organization has well learned the importance of follow-up, and for ten months prior to the five-day crusade we were involved in a massive training program to equip Christians in the city as counselors and nurture group leaders. Of the 8,000 who took the counselor training, 5,000 were qualified and equipped to lead people to Christ at the crusade. These counselors were also prepared to help the inquirers to assurance of salvation and were responsible to contact the new converts within the first days following their decisions. Of the 2,200 who were trained as nurture group leaders, 1,800 led small Bible study groups for the converts for a period of eight weeks to a year

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following the crusade. As a result of this massive emphasis on follow-up, a large percentage of those who found Christ at the crusade were successfully integrated into the life of the Church. A great side benefit, of course, was that churches all over the city began to realize the importance of follow-up, and through the ten months of training given to church members, many became equipped to both lead another to Christ and to establish their new convert in the faith.

## Ensure Proper Protection

The Scripture clearly tells us that we are engaged in a great spiritual battle for the souls of men and women.

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

*(Ephesians 6:10-12)*

Satan has great power and authority over all who do not know Christ.

*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

*(Ephesians 2:2)*

When a person comes to Christ he rejects the authority of Satan and makes Jesus his new King and Lord.

*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:*

*(Colossians 1:13)*

Of course, when this change takes place, Satan is enraged. Although he has now forever lost one of his captives, he will continue to try to stunt the Christian growth of that one who now belongs to Christ. Since all of us have been under his dominion at one time, he knows every weakness we have and will forever try to tempt us into a life of sin which will make us ineffective for Christ.

Every person engaged in follow-up must understand Satan's tactics and warn the new Christian about the attacks he is likely to face. Many times the new convert is ashamed to share the struggles, doubts, and defeats that he is going through. The new convert simply cannot imagine that *good Christian people* have these problems. Not wanting to be rejected by his Christian friends, he struggles on alone.

## Satan's Chief Tactic is to—

**Separate** ➡ **Isolate** ➡ **Destroy**

It is very important, therefore, that the person doing the follow-up be honest and transparent—sharing his own “open nerves” and struggles with his young Christian friend. He must warn the new Christian that Satan is very real and very present and teach him how to appropriate Christ's strength in overcoming the enemy.

If you are unaware of how Satan works, C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* gives a delightfully accurate satire of the enemy's tactics.

One of the follow-up discipleship plans first objectives is to get the person into the warm fellowship of the Church family which provides strength and protection from Satan. Christian friendship is a strong deterrent to many of Satan's attacks. God's Word says that:

*Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.*

*(Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)*

Since this fellowship is so vital to the new believer, Satan will do everything possible to see that he does not make it to church. The new Christian will find many excuses:

- **He has to work overtime or hold two jobs.**
- **The kids get sick.**
- **Company arrives unexpectedly.**
- **He oversleeps.**
- **A conflicting opportunity arises.**
- **The car breaks down on the way.**
- **The “Game of the Week” is scheduled during church hour.**
- **His spouse doesn't want to go.**

If all of these things do not stop the believer from getting to church, Satan will use the immaturity of some Christians to offend him so that he will not want to come back. Perhaps one of the most effective things we can do to protect young believers from Satan's attack is to pray defensively in their behalf. Through our prayers we can “bind” Satan through Christ's power, preventing him from plundering the new believer's life.

*Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and*

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*then he will spoil his house.*

*(Matthew 12:29)*

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Remember—Satan is a *dirty* fighter and will stop at nothing to immobilize his former subjects. Be prepared for him as you follow-up.

## **Ensure a Proper Diet**

Jesus told us that a person needs more than physical food to survive in the Christian life. The Bible is the essential spiritual food for the soul.

*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

*(Matthew 4:4)*

Peter reminds us that the Word of God is necessary for spiritual growth.

*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*

*(1 Peter 2:2)*

When a baby is born, he is completely dependent upon his parents for food. He doesn't know where the food is kept or how to prepare it. All of the preparation must be done by his parents. The baby simply ingests it. In the early days of life, the baby must eat simple foods in small portions, and he must eat frequently. Sometimes parents are up several times a night to see that the child receives his food.

Spiritual babes are very much the same. If they are not fed, they do not grow. They need a parent who understands their needs and gives them simple, basic food from the Word of God. The spiritual parent must show them how to read and study the Bible for themselves. This way they can eat daily rather than only once or twice a week in church.

Most children, if left to choose their own diet, would probably exist on sweets. However, the wise parent will see that his child gets a balanced diet of meat, vegetables, fruit, and milk, with some sweets. Spiritual children also try to eat a diet of only the pleasant part of the Scripture. They like to hear about God's love and grace, and they all love the warm fellowship of the Church. But this is not all God wants them to know. They must also learn about Lordship and personal discipline. The wise spiritual parent will ensure that his babe receives a *balanced diet* of spiritual intake and activities. We have already learned that there are five ways of getting the Word of God into our

own personal lives. As spiritual parents, we also must make sure our children learn to be effective in each of the five areas by—

- **Meditating,**
- **Memorizing,**
- **Studying,**
- **Reading, &**
- **Hearing the  
Word of God.**

## **Ensure Love and Acceptance**

The new Christian needs to be aware of God's unchanging and unconditional love for him.

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

*(1 John 3:1)*

Though God hates sin, He does love sinners and longs to set them free from sin's hold on their lives. That is why He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for sin so that once again we could have fellowship with God. The young believer needs to hear this story again and again and realize that because of Christ's sacrifice, he is fully forgiven and accepted by God.

One of the ways a spiritual babe learns about God's love is by seeing it and experiencing it through the Church family. Christ commanded that those who name His name should be channels of His love to one another.

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

*(John 13:34-35)*

The Church family which obeys this command and loves one another is bound to grow. They will consistently put the needs of each other before their own, and they will see people not as problems, but as opportunities to demonstrate God's love. In a world which knows nothing of real love, the true Christian fellowship shines like a light. Young Christians should be able to find the same redemptive, non-condemning, helping love within the Church that they read about in the Bible.

*So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

*(1 Thessalonians 2:8)*

## **Ensure Personal Accountability to God**

Paul tells us:

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

*(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

As we become new creatures in Christ, we notice a change in our lifestyle. The things we did when we served the prince of darkness must now be replaced by obedience to God's commands. An essential part of follow-up is to teach young believers exactly what God expects of them since He is now their sovereign. Jesus instructed the eleven:

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

*(Matthew 28:20)*

As any parent knows, growing children need growing responsibilities so that they will become responsible adults. This involves years of careful teaching and training by the parents. If the parents are successful, the children will grow up to realize that they must live responsibly under the laws of society in order to receive its blessings.

Similarly, spiritual parents need to train their children to be responsible and accountable to God for the things they do. Young Christians must realize that only when they obey God's Word can they expect to grow and prosper. When they sin, they must be aware that while they may fool everyone else, God still knows, and they must give account to Him. As responsible spiritual parents, we must implant the truth of these spiritual laws:

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

*(Galatians 6:7)*

*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

*(John 14:21)*

*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

*(John 8:32)*

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## How to Implement These Principles

- **Someone must assume a parenting or shepherding role**

Almost any layman can be trained to be effective in follow-up, but someone must be willing to take a personal responsibility for another. Follow-up is *not* a program only; it involves people. It is only through a personal relationship between spiritual parent and spiritual child that effective and lasting growth can take place.

- **Teach young Christians to have a relationship with Christ**

Each individual must have his own personal relationship with Christ and be able to maintain and grow in that relationship. No one can live off someone else's relationship—no matter how dynamic it may be. Each new Christian must learn to read and study the Bible for himself and to spend time with God in prayer and fellowship. Initially, it is good to encourage a convert to read through one of the Gospels (like Mark or John) several times before going on to other books. This allows the Holy Spirit to introduce the person to Jesus Christ in an intimate way, which teaches him who He is, what He did, and why He is the Source of eternal life. As the person gets to know Christ in this way, the Spirit can minister to the deepest needs of his heart—needs of which no other may even be aware. A vertical relationship with God must be established between God and each believer if he is to grow and be healthy in the Christian life. Jesus described it like this:

*I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

*(John 15:5)*

In helping a person get started with his devotional life, you may want to have a quiet time with him for several days to show him how to do it. The booklet "Appointment with God" is of great help in teaching this.



• **Teach Scripture Memory**

Hiding God’s Word in the heart is one of the most effective ways a person can protect himself from Satan’s attacks. The Word of God is the “sword of the Spirit,” and with it available and ready in our hearts and minds, the Spirit can use it to defeat Satan.

The Bible promises victory to those who do discipline themselves to memorize Scripture.

*The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.*

*(Psalms 37:31)*

In our *ETS* Follow-Up Guide for a new convert, we used the first five verses from the Navigator follow-up material called *Beginning With Christ*. These five verses deal with certain assurances important for a new convert’s growth. We also use the Topical Memory System which consists of sixty Bible verses. These verses provide a balanced diet to the Christian life. These and other verses are all a part of the *ETS* Convert Guide.

• **Involve young Christians in a warm church fellowship**

Each Christian must not only have a vertical relationship with God, but horizontal relationships to others. A warm, loving, Bible-believing church fellowship is essential for Christian growth.

*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

*(Hebrews 10:25)*

Principles of Follow-Up	Principles of Implementation
Ensure Proper Parental Care Ensure Proper Protection Ensure a Proper Diet Ensure Love and Acceptance Ensure Personal Accountability to God	These principles are to be used by the disciple who is helping a new convert grow toward maturity and become a disciple of Jesus Christ.