

The Follow-up Ministry

In seeking to discover a workable biblical model for the ministry of follow-up, the example of Jesus - both with the twelve disciples and with other interested followers - needs to be closely examined. Only as we first look upon the Master's ministry of working with believers can we effectively seek to follow-up with those He has entrusted to our charge. Let's enumerate some of the outstanding principles of the Lord Jesus:

He embodied all that He taught (He was their example).

We live in a day of an ever-increasing proliferation of discipleship manuals, periodicals, standardised studies, overhead projectors, verse memorisation packets, and so on. These are tremendous tools, but they do not take the place of what has been discovered by psychologists to be the most important method to teaching/learning that the world has ever discovered - the model. Jesus did not send them off with a program or a manual - He asked them to follow Him. The bulk of his training consisted in His disciples being *with Him*. A disciple is a *follower first*. Then and only then can he be a leader of others.

Jesus allowed experience to be a very important teacher.

Whether it was His commissioning of the disciples to preach and heal (Luke 10: 1-20, Luke 12:1-6), His patience with their slowness to understand (Mark 8:17-21, Matthew 28:17), or through their failures (John 21: 15-23), Jesus understood the importance of allowing them the opportunity to learn from experience, and most of all, through their mistakes. *In short, while Jesus would not tolerate a lack of commitment, He granted them the freedom to fail.* He knew that their errors would result in immense growth if the disciple was loved and encouraged to learn from his mistakes. Hence, we must recognise the primacy of individual experience as the second greatest method of teaching/learning. Too often, our follow-up with kids is confined to a lecture-discussion relationship once a week. We must challenge them to step out into positions of genuine dependence upon God, just as Jesus did, and responsibly supervise, encourage and evaluate them before, during and after these experiences.

He focused upon the obedient and teachable ones.

We find no record of Jesus entertaining a follower who was not teachable. With all the fallacies of the disciples, from the stubbornness of Peter to the doubting of Thomas, they still listened intently to Jesus and underwent considerable sacrifices to follow Him. Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Mark 10 gives us the clear impression that He would not spend His time entertaining a spoiled disciple. He continually focused upon the importance of obedience (John 13:17, 14:21, 15:14; Luke 11:28). His emphasis upon men who were too busy for the Kingdom of God (Luke 14: 16-24) counting the cost (Luke 14:26-33), the narrowness of the door (Luke 13:23-30) and countless other situations indicate to us His clear pointing to the need to decide without reserve to follow Jesus. An internationally well-known Bible teacher once remarked, "I

wish I could recapture the lost thousands of hours that I have wasted teaching people who were never hungry." We find no Biblical precedent for force-feeding new believers.

Jesus expected reproduction from His disciples.

A natural function of a healthy body is reproduction. This principle is fundamental to the plant and animal kingdom, as well as all of human life. So often, we are surprised when a young believer leads his friends to Christ. Hence, it happens all too seldom. We should consider something wrong unless a young believer has a great desire to reproduce. The parable of the sower in Mark 4 not only warns them that not all will respond to the Gospel, but significantly concludes that "the men who hear the message and accept it ... do produce a crop - thirty, sixty, even a hundred times as much as they received."

Jesus spent a great deal of time teaching them.

Earlier I mentioned the fact that a psychological study had indicated the example was the greatest method of teaching/learning, closely followed by experience. The third greatest teacher is the didactic teaching method, whereby a teacher (Jesus) functions as an authoritative figure, but also as both a guide and a resource for students. In short, He fed them and taught them how to fish. A very important principle to note is that He kept it simple. Too often, we get carried away in waves of theological poignancy. If we can understand Jesus' simple, picturesque language in articulating basic truths, we will not only be more effective disciple-makers, we will also be more effective disciples ourselves.

Jesus articulated and exemplified the goal of every disciple: to love God.

If we cannot first grasp the primacy of loving God "with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind," (Matthew 22:37) then certainly our young converts will never understand why Jesus pointed to this as the "greatest and first commandment". It is apparent in the amount of time that Jesus took to be alone with the Father (Mark 1:35-37), that the disciples very early came to understand without a word the truth of His total dependency upon the Father. The greatest gift we can ever impart to a new Christian is to show him by our lives and our words that the greatest blessing in life is to love God. Out of the being with Him, the doing for Him will come.