

Discipleship Series
50+ Class – All Saints Presbyterian Church
Fall 2020 – October 18, 2020
Week Six: Spiritual Pediatrics
—Helping Someone Take Their First Steps with Jesus—

A question to start the conversation...

- When you became a Christian, was there someone to help you take your first few faith steps?

“For new Christians, all the world is new. They have before them a grand new life with all its potentialities for blessing and profit and use. They can either fall into a nominal Christian existence and be of little help—or an actual hindrance—to the cause of Christ, or they can move victoriously into a life of fruitfulness and glory to the Lord. ...The patient, tender care of those able to instruct and equip men and women for the Christian walk—this is the embodiment of what we commonly term ‘follow-up.’ ... [A]re the new Christians to be encouraged to start daily habits of prayer and Bible study merely by being told? No, they must be shown.... You are in the greatest business on earth—that of bringing men and women into fellowship with Christ and to the place of greatest usefulness in God’s marvelous plan.”

—Dawson Trotman, Founder of The Navigators

1. Begin with Christ

From “Growing Strong in God’s Family”, *The Navigators 2:7 Series* (Book 1) (emphasis added)—

“The Bible says that ‘if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved’ (Romans 10:9-10). Coupled with this wonderful truth is the statement in His Word that ‘to all who receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’ (John 1:12).

“According to these Scriptures, if you have to the best of your knowledge received Jesus Christ (trusted Him as your own Savior), you have become a child of God in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

“Many people make the mistake of measuring the certainty of their salvation by their feelings. Don’t make this tragic mistake. Believe God. Take Him at His Word: ‘I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life’ (1 John 5:13)

“You have become a child of God; you have been born into His family as a spiritual babe. This is a strategic moment in your life. The following basic truths will strengthen you for the battle ahead and keep you safe from the onslaughts of Satan.

“In 1 Peter 2:2 we read, ‘Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.’ In Acts 20:32 we read, ‘Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up.’ The bible serves as our spiritual food and will build us up in the faith. In this course, you are given suggestions for how to read your Bible. It is important that you have time set aside, preferably in the morning, to read the Word of God and pray.

“Now let’s be more specific with regard to your intake of the Word of God. In Psalm 119, it says, ‘How can a young man keep his way pure?’ (verse 9), and then the psalmist speaks to the Lord, saying ‘I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you’ (verse 11). So we hide His Word in our heart by memorizing key passages....

“Let us consider for a moment the spiritual Enemy you face. Before you trusted Christ, Satan may not have bothered you particularly, but now he has seen you make the step that angers him more than any one thing in all the world: You have left his crowd and joined the ranks of those who believe and trust the Son of God. You are no longer in Satan’s domain; you now belong to the One who has bought and paid for you with a price, the price of His own blood, shed on the cross. You may be sure that Satan will attempt to trouble you. His attacks assume many forms. These memory verses will help you deal with some of the most common satanic attacks and give you help on how to resist him successfully.

“You can overcome him only as you use the weapons God has provided. Paul says, ‘*Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*’ (Ephesians 6:17). The Bible, then, is the primary weapon against these attacks.

“Consider that Jesus Christ was tempted by Satan in three specific ways, and He defeated him each time with Scripture, saying, ‘*It is written*’ (see Matthew 4). If Christ deemed it necessary to meet Satan this way, how much more do we need this mighty weapon, the Word of God? How much more do we need to be prepared to say to Satan, ‘It is written’ or ‘Thus said the Lord’....”

A. 5 Assurances—5 Verses to Memorize

a. Assurance of Salvation—1 John 5:11-12

“The most important promise a new believer should cling to is that of eternal life as a gift to those who believe in Christ. One source from God’s word for this promise of salvation is 1 John 5:9-12. John the apostle speaks of “*the testimony God has given about his Son,*” a testimony which lives in the heart of “*anyone who believes in the Son of God.*” Verses 11-12 clearly state the promise: ‘And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.’

“There will be days when the new believer just won’t feel like they’re a Christian, and their confidence in the Lord will fade. This first testing is the best time for him to learn to base his faith on statements in the Scriptures rather than on his feelings. There is no subject more important to be well-grounded in. One who doubts—merely because of his feelings—the salvation won for him by the blood of Christ is ignoring God’s foremost proof of his love. Yet this is a doubt many young Christians experience, pointedly demonstrating their need for understanding and believing scriptural truth.

“Approaching this issue with a new believer can be as simple as reading the verse together and asking him, “Where is Jesus Christ now in relation to your life?” If they understand that they indeed have Christ in their life because of their faith, then ask, “How do you know you have eternal life?” Help them see from 1 John 5:11-12 that having Christ and having eternal life are one and the same. Use other passages too as you talk about this promise from God—such as John 1:12, John 5:24, John 10:27-30, and 1 John 5:13.”

b. Assurance of Answered Prayer—John 16:24

“It was the night before Jesus’ death. Yet as he spoke to his disciples he was preparing them not so much for this tragic separation just hours away, but for the later time when he would ascend triumphantly into heaven, and the disciples, empowered by the Spirit of truth, would remain on earth. He spoke to them in new ways about prayer—prayer in which they would be intimately involved with him even though he would physically leave them and return to heaven. In John 16:23 he said, “*I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*” They had not previously prayed this way, as he reminded them in the following verse, and now he invited them to gladly do so: ‘Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete’ (John 16:24).

“It’s an invitation each new believer can accept. And you can help him by simply praying with him, opening your hearts together before God. But first discuss the meaning of praying in Jesus’ name—recognizing that God hears our prayers when we ask them *in Christ’s authority and on Christ’s merit*. Other verses on prayer you may want to review together include Matthew 7:7-8, John 15:7, Philippians 4:5-6; and 1 John 5:14-15.”

c. Assurance of Victory—1 Corinthians 10:13

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

“New Christians express relief and excitement when they first experience release from the sins that had such a stronghold on their life before. But they may later be wearily disappointed that many sins don’t leave so easily. God wants us to carefully learn how to appropriate his power in overcoming sin. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Paul issued a warning by citing grim examples from Israel’s history about sin and its consequences. But then he reminded the Corinthians that the all too familiar pattern of temptation leading to sin can be broken because of God’s faithful provision. These are words every Christian should have ready in his heart and mind when those certain temptations come. God is faithful. He will provide a way out. You can stand up under any temptation. Talk together with a new Christian about the temptations each of you frequently face and think about the ways of escape God can provide in these situations. Other good verses on this topic include Prov 22:3, 2 Thes 3:3, Hebrews 2:18, Psalm 119:9-11; and James 4:7.”

d. Assurance of Forgiveness—1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“God is perfectly sinless. As John put it in his first epistle, “God is light: in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). And though we are sinners, John wrote that through Jesus Christ we can live in God’s light and have fellowship with him, because “the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:7). How do we experience this purification? The absolutely wrong thing to do is to hide sin. By doing so, Jesus said, we deceive ourselves and, in effect, make God out to be a liar. No, the right thing to do—because of God’s character—is confess. Help a new Christian realize the shameful of hiding sin, and the foolishness of it—since God so completely forgives and cleanses us when we confess what we and God know already. It may hurt to be honest, but in the end, it results in our good. Pray together and confess any sins that God brings to your minds. Other passages you may want to look over are Psalm 32:5, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 10:22 & Psalm 32:5 and James 5:16.”

e. Assurance of Guidance—Proverbs 3:5-6

“We have all known uncertainty and, to some extent, anxiety, and fear about the future. But these are feelings God wants us to totally abandon: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”* (Proverbs 3:5-6) The Scriptures abound with promises like this. God will guide the one whose heart is this. Other verses that show this are Psalm 23:3, Romans 12:2, and Jude 24. Major decisions and difficult circumstances await all of us in life, and the new Christian you are helping is no exception. Perhaps a first step in overcoming any anxiety he may have is for you to have him list any current decisions to be made and problems to be solved in his life. Ask him to list anything at all that causes him major concern. Make the list as complete as possible. God may want him to take some specific action on some of things he lists. On other things there may be no action he can take—except to pray acknowledging reliance on God and trust in his goodness and power. These are things he can be sure of, no matter how uncertain the future looks. Other verses on assurance of guidance: Psalm 5:8 & Proverb 16:3.”

2. Memorize God's Word

- A. **Read** the context of each verse you memorize.
- B. **Gain** a clear understanding of what each verse actually means. Read the verse in other Bible translations or paraphrases.
- C. **Read** the verse through several times, aloud or in a whisper. This will help you grasp the verse as a whole. Each time you read it, say the topic, reference, verse, and then the reference again.
- D. **Learn** the topic and reference, then learn the first phrase of the verse. Once you have learned the topic, reference and the first phrase and have repeated them several times, continue adding more phrases after you can quote correctly what you have already learned.
- E. **Pray** over each verse and think about how it applies to your daily life.

3. Help to Start a Quiet Time

A. 7 Minutes with God

Do you have seven minutes a day to prime your spiritual life? Want a deeper relationship with God? Start with seven minutes a day and see what happens! Most Christians believe in the importance of spending daily, regular time in God's Word and in prayer. Yet so many of us struggle to do this consistently. Perhaps that's because we think this time with God has to be a monumental, mystical experience. In fact, you can begin developing this spiritual discipline in as little as seven minutes a day. Eventually you will discover that it is impossible to spend only seven minutes with the Lord. An amazing thing happens—seven minutes become 20, and it's not long before you're spending 30 precious minutes with Him.

Do it for the right reason. Become devoted to the Savior, not the habit. Do it not because other people are doing it—not as a spiritless duty every morning, not merely as an end in itself, but because God has granted the priceless privilege of fellowship with Himself.

Prepare Your Heart (*½ minute*)

Invest the first 30 seconds preparing your heart. You might pray, "Lord, cleanse my heart so You can speak to me through the Scriptures. Make my mind alert, my soul active, and my heart responsive. Surround me with Your presence during this time."

Listen to God thru Scripture Reading (*4 minutes*)

Take the next four minutes to read the Bible. Your greatest need is to hear a word from God. Allow the Word to strike fire in your heart. Meet the Author!

Talk to God thru Prayer (*2½ minutes*)

After God has spoken through His Book, then speak to Him in prayer. One method is to incorporate four areas of prayer that you can remember with the acronym **ACTS**.

A – ADORATION. This is the purest kind of prayer because it's all for God. Tell the Lord that you love Him. Reflect on His greatness.

C – CONFESSION. Having seen Him, you now want to be sure every sin is cleansed and forsaken. "Confession" comes from a root word meaning "to agree together with." When we apply this to prayer, it means we agree with God's estimation of what we've done.

T – THANKSGIVING. Think of several specific things to thank Him for: your family, your business, your church—even thank Him for hardships.

S – SUPPLICATION. This means to "ask for, earnestly and humbly." Ask for others, then ask for yourself. Include people around the world, missionaries, friends, etc.

B. 5 R's of a Quiet Time

Read the passage, making what comes alive for you (not necessarily the key ideas or the most important ideas—just those that are applicable for you today).

Reflect on one idea that you marked. *What do you hear God saying to you today?*

Respond to God in prayer. Make it a two-way conversation!

Record the conversation in a notebook or journal—and if you miss a day, don't worry about it. Just keep going.

Retain. At the end of each week, pick out one verse to retain (memorize!). Write it on a card and review it daily.

C. A Quiet Time Journal

Day & Date _____ Passage read today _____

Best thing I marked today (Reference) _____

Key Thought _____

How it impressed me (reflect) _____

My response to God _____

D. SPEAK

1 Samuel 3:9 (NIV)—Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

S – Sin to confess...

P – Promise to claim; prayer to pray and praise...

E – Example to follow; error to avoid...

A – Attitude to change; action to take...

K – Knowledge of Christ or His Word to retain...

4. FAQs About a Quiet Time

From Jean Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* (1999)—

When?

"Start now. As with most things in life, there never seems to be a good time to institute a new habit.... The temptation is to delay, to wait for a more convenient time to begin to have a quiet time. But the ideal time may never come. Most worthwhile practices become part of our lives only if we make real effort under less than perfect conditions...."

"Forming a beneficial habit can be hard work, but it's worth the trouble. The sooner you establish the practice of quiet time, the sooner the habit can serve you.... Begin with a wholehearted, rigorous commitment. Boldly say, 'Lord, I want to keep an appointment with You every day for the rest of my life. I will start meeting with You today, and I plan to meet with You tomorrow and the next day and the day after that.'

"Although I encourage you to set apart time with God as early in your day as possible, when it comes right down to it, any time is a good time." (p. 29)

Where?

"[Y]ou might choose a majestic cathedral, a mountain top, or a leather chair by a crackling fire for your appointment with God, but this isn't an ideal world. Men and women have met with God in dark prison cells and from beds of pain. Suzanna Wesley, mother of nineteen children, flipped her apron over her head and prayed in the midst of her busy household. My husband, Roger, met with God in the latrine during Army boot camp.... Throughout your life you may meet with the Lord in many various places determined by your circumstances." (p. 32-33)

How Long?

"How long you spend in quiet time is to a large extent a matter of your spiritual appetite. Start small—try ten minutes a day—but be consistent. Consistency is more important than the length of time. The goal is not to read through the Bible in a year or to spend an hour a day in prayer. You are coming to your quiet time to meet with your Lord, to give Him your undivided attention because He loves you and you love Him. Keep in mind that you are cultivating a practice for a spiritual purpose: God desires your friendship; you want to know and love God; the world desperately needs to see Christ in you." (p. 33)

How?

"There aren't set rules for quiet time. This is a time to cultivate a relationship with God, and relationships are personal and ever-changing. My times with God will look different from yours, and my times with God will look different at various periods on my life. Personality, circumstances, stage of life, spiritual maturity, and appetite all affect our life with Christ." (p. 33)

Basic Elements? – God's Word and Prayer

"There aren't set rules for quiet time, but there are basic elements. Communication is critical to any relationship. In your times alone with God, He speaks to you and you speak to Him. God has revealed Himself most fully through the Bible. In it He tells who He is; what He is like; and what He thinks, values and hates. God tells you what He is doing in the world and how you fit into His plans. God details in the Bible the riches that are yours because you belong to Christ, and He makes plain how He wants you to live. The Bible is a love letter written to you from a God who is always making ways for you to draw near to Him. Reading God's Word is essential."

"Conversations are two-sided: give and take. God speaks to you through His Word and by His Spirit, and you respond to Him through prayer. Sometimes you initiate the subject and then listen to hear what He will say to you. Sometimes God initiates the subject as you read from the Bible, and you respond to Him in prayer." (p. 34)

What's the Plan?

"Quiet time has no set rules, but you do need a plan. Without some kind of a blueprint, you will tend to wander aimlessly through your quiet time. Your plan grows out of your purpose: to keep company with God and to get to know Him, to worship and obey Him, and to be changed by Him." (p. 35)

What are the Benefits? (p 41-52)—

A Quiet Time is your place for ... "extricating" ... "renewing" ... "setting" ... "identity-shaping" ... "remembering" ... your "reason to exist" ... "knowing God" ... "intimacy with God" ... "beholding and molding" ... "putting off and putting on" ... "food and fellowship" ... "listening" ... "refocusing" ... "repenting and rejoicing" ... "healing" ... "peace and perspective" ... "hope-reviving" ... your "only sure relationship" ... "question-asking".

“Quiet time helps spiritual aliens keep their gaze sharply focused on Christ and His kingdom so that they may live between two worlds, serving the kingdom of God on earth. These pilgrims need continual, intense contact with their true, though unseen, life to keep the sand from building up around their ankles. Greatest delight is found in consistent meetings with God. This...is what we aliens were made for.” (p 52)

5. Victory Over Obstacles—Secrets to Consistency

From Jean Fleming, *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* (1999) (emphasis added)—

“Anyone who makes quiet time a consistent part of life’s journey will find obstacles in the path. But by putting into practice a few ideas that have helped others meet regularly with the Lord, you can face these challenges with steadily increasing success. ...Obstacles come in many forms. Some are exterior (time pressures, circumstances,), others are interior (blockages of the heart, mind, and will). Perhaps you pray, or try to, but the time seems forced or distracted. Or maybe you read the Bible but come away more confused than blessed. Perhaps your mind wanders or you feel groggy when you read or pray. Whatever shape your obstacle takes, you are not alone.” (p. 67)

“Think of your relationship with God as a plant affected by a multitude of forces: climate, soil conditions, temperature, moisture, sunshine, disease. In **Luke 8**, Jesus tells a parable about a farmer who sows his seed (God’s Word) into a variety of spoils. Jesus says the soil of some lives I shared, compacted like a well-trod path. Nothing penetrates that ground. Others gladly hear the Word, but the soil of their lives is like shallow pockets of dirt sifted on rock with no place for roots to take hold. The plants living in this soil wither under scorching sun and gusting wind. The third soil Jesus mentions is soft enough and deep enough, but it is infested with weeds. Thorns encircle the tender plants, soak up precious nutrients, and choke out life, preventing health and maturity. The weeds God mentions surprise me: life’s worries, riches, and pleasures. At first glance they seem innocuous. Respectable, even. But these ‘weeds’ and others like them keep us from connecting with God the way we want to.... The first, ‘word-choking weed’ that Jesus mentions is life’s worries. Everyday life can strangle the Word of God. Nothing big, perhaps, just the normal demands, concerns, and pressures we all face. Merely living can consume all our physical, mental, and emotional energy and asphyxiate tender spiritual sprouts.” (p. 68)

- Riches: “While money is not bad in itself, it can draw our hearts and eyes away from the Lord”
- Pleasures: “...can divide our loyalties and divert our attention away from God. The pleasures may be innocent in themselves, but they become dangerous when they are in competition with God.”
- Busyness: (Quoting Charles Hummel) “Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important.’ A frantic life is not conducive to the life of the Spirit.”
- Absence of Awe: “Tell God you’re sorry for being insensitive to His glory. Ask for an increased [and] growing sense of who He is and who we are as created beings.”
- Procrastination or Laziness: “Many of us put things off—important things, critical things. We let our days ooze away in lesser pursuits and never quite get around to giving God our attention.”
- Fatigue, Depression, or Grief: Hard times in life.
- Little Spiritual Appetite or Desire: “Could you be lacking an appetite for time with God because you have not been ‘eating’ regularly? Spiritual appetite, like physical appetite, is stimulated by good food, regular exercise, and invigorating company. If your hunger for God and His Word is at low tide, these ideas may get you back into deeper water. Start with a small, but tasty morsel.

Have your quiet time in Phil 4:6-7 every day for this week. Copy the verses in your notebook. List your current concerns. Pray about your concerns one by one. Ask God to work on your behalf. Thank God that He hears. Thank Him that He wants to use each of these situations to draw you to Himself in deeper trust and to give you a history of experiences with Him.”

- Crazy Schedules or Peculiar Situations: “If your schedule is unusual, you may have to experiment...to find the best time. Don’t give up! Keep working at it. The challenge can be met with creativity—and perhaps, if necessary, sacrifice.”
- Legalism, Guilt, People-Pleasing or Performance-Oriented: “...God is not looking down from heaven with a clipboard in His lap, handing out gold stars if we have a quiet time and flat tires if we don’t. Misconceptions about God can put us into performance mode. We make checklists for ourselves. A perfect record obligates God to bless us; a few blank spaces on the chart defeat us and cause us to withdraw from God. But that’s not how it works—God does not love us more because we have a quiet time.”
- Wandering Mind or Sleepiness: Walk as you pray. Pray out loud. If a persistent thought keeps reoccurring, make a note of it, and then return to your quiet time. Offer the thought to the Lord. Pray about your prayer time.
- Unholy Thoughts. Thank God that you have been delivered from that past life. Share the issue with a trusted Christian friend and ask for prayer and support. Reject impure thoughts and cultivate a taste for what is true, noble, pure, and lovely (Phil 4:8).
- Unrealistic Expectations: At different stages of life we will have different quiet time habits. A mother with young children cannot make the same time commitment as a single student.

Tips for Being Consistent

- Remember Why. “Clarify...why you believe it is worth effort to carve out time alone with God.”
- Recognize and Respond. “Acknowledge that any desire you have to meet with the Lord is the Holy Spirit’s gracious work in you. Respond to it.”
- Don’t Let Fear of “Legalism” Derail You. “Some might argue that it’s legalistic to meet with the Lord every day just because you know you should. But because you know why it is important to have a quiet time, it’s not legalistic to spend time with God—even on days you don’t feel like it.”
- Keep Plodding. “As with most things in life, success comes to those who move steadily in the direction of their goal. ...Be diligent to meet with God.”
- Exercise Discipline. “If you are going to get up in time to have a quiet time in the morning you must go to bed on time at night. Both decisions require discipline.”
- Follow a Plan. “No one who meets with the Lord haphazardly [or] opens his or her Bible randomly and reads here or there before snapping the Bible shut, continues long or with much satisfaction. A plan gives continuity, making each day another link in an ongoing history with God.”
- Engage and Enrich. “The more fully you involve yourself in your time with God, the more likely you will consistently keep your date with Him. One of the best ways to do this is to learn how to meditate on God’s Word.” (p. 77-81)

6. Invite Friends to Read the Bible—How to get started

“One of the most effective ways to reach friends with the truth of the gospel is to read and talk about the Bible with them. Doing so allows them to discover truth for themselves.”

- A. **Set the Atmosphere.** Choose a comfortable, normal meeting place, like a home or coffee shop. If you decide to meet in a home, rotate between homes. Songs, prayers, and religious language are not part of this type of Bible discussion. Keep it simple.
- B. **Small is Beautiful.** Participants can number from two to ten at the most. If it gets bigger than that, true discussion becomes difficult.
- C. **Timing.** Don't be late and don't go over time. Stop talking before people stop listening. The schedule should be predictable so that people can plan accordingly.
- D. **Stick with the Bible,** even if people are unfamiliar with it. Explain that there are two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. Explain the numbering for chapters and verses. Don't assume that people have any prior knowledge.
- E. **Subject Matter.** There are several good options as starting points, such as the meaning of work, child rearing, or whatever constitutes an open need for your friends. But all roads eventually lead to the single question: *Who is Jesus?* Help people get a fresh look at Him. The Gospel of John is a great book to start with for that.
- F. **Prepare for a Session with Questions,** to help dig deeper into the passage. Keep sessions interactive. Don't preach. Encourage people to read ahead, but don't expect them to prepare. Create an environment in which questions can flourish. Everyone will be wondering: *Is it safe to ask my real questions around here?* Make sure it is.

7. **Follow Up—Being a “Spiritual Parent” (the privilege of God using you in another’s life)**

Waldron Scott, “Follow-Up—Being a Spiritual Parent.” *Discipleship Journal* (Jan/Feb 1981), p. 36-38—

“Parents watch in amazement as their sons and daughters grow. Babies turn into children and children into adults as the intricate processes of maturity unfold... Follow-up—that is, being a spiritual parent—is like this too. It is watching in fascination as God uses you to help a believer who is young in his faith to grow... In a special way, follow-up is as challenging and rewarding as being a physical parent. Good follow-up includes meeting a new Christian’s many needs and helping him learn to meet his needs on his own. A new Christian needs personal, individual attention. Your main tool is the Bible. Your goal for the new believer is Christlike maturity that bears up under the strain of everyday life. Good follow-up will cost you something in time and prayer.

“[I]n certain respects all children are alike. As babies your children all needed their diapers changed, and they all needed milk. They slept a lot, and as they grew they learned to exercise and play... Your children do have common, basic needs which you have met in more or less the same way for each one ... So it is in spiritual follow-up. There are basic things every new believer in Christ needs. You don't have to worry about whether he should read the Bible. You don't have to determine whether he needs the support and acceptance of other believers, or whether he should pray. To really mature he needs all of these, no matter who he is.

“But he will also have distinctly individual needs that must be met in distinctive ways. ... As Sam Shoemaker reminded us, disciples are hand-tooled, not mass-produced... Paul was a diligent, effective workman in follow-up, and the Scriptures reveal the patterns of his efforts. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). In this work of follow-up Paul knew that God is the chief laborer. God himself completes the work in a soul that begins when his Spirit causes a new birth there.

“But in his work God uses people. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-13 of a dynamic process in which those with such gifts as evangelism and pastoring are to prepare God’s people for service, with the

end result of their service being Christlike maturity for all believers. So this process of maturing, which we call follow-up, actually involves all Christians. The whole church with its leadership and laity has a part... It would be unwise for parents to raise children in isolation.

“But along with fellowship of believers, a new Christian also needs personal, one-to-one attention. He needs help from someone. The heart of follow-up is one person working with another. Paul told the Colossians that his goal was to help believers attain perfect maturity in Christ. ‘To this end I labor,’ he said, ‘struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:28-29). How did Paul expend the energy God gave him? To what were his efforts directed? According to his own testimony he toiled not simply to win converts, but to help them reach maturity in Christ.

“Paul reminded the Corinthians of his personal care for them: ‘[T]hough 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 Cor 4:15). Paul was their one spiritual father. Who can have this privilege of being a spiritual parent? It can be yours. Follow-up is not accomplished by programs but by people. As E.M. Bounds put it, ‘Men are God’s method.’ In follow-up we [labor] with God in the ministry of developing better people.

“[S]tart...with yourself. Are you growing in Christ? Do you desire to follow Christ and to mature in him, and [does your] life reflect this desire? ... [I]t takes a disciple to make a disciple. ...Paul wrote, ‘Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ’ (1 Cor 11:1). We are called to live the kind of life that encourages those around us to strain a little harder to follow Christ more closely.

“You will need a tool in follow-up—the Scriptures. A new believer who quickly learns the value of the Bible will have discovered the key to his spiritual growth. Paul knew this, and told the Thessalonians that he thanked God continually because they had accepted God’s word ‘not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe’ (1 Thes 2:13).

“If you not only teach young Christians from the Scriptures, but also teach them to consistently get into the Bible for themselves, you will have made the greatest single contribution to their lives that you can make. They must learn to read and study the Bible intelligently, to memorize and meditated on it, and to apply it in their lives daily.... Your goal for their growth is spiritual maturity, and the measure of this maturity is Christlikeness. Paul told the Galatians that he was ‘again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you’ (Gal 4:19). To the Ephesians he described maturity as ‘attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). [Christlikeness] in a sinner’s life should be the aim of all follow-up.

“God’s steadfast, unwavering purpose is that every Christian be conformed to Christ.... John [said:] when Christ appears, ‘we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2). Paul said that ‘those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son’ (Rom 8:29).

“But Christlikeness does not mean conformity to a certain pattern of behavior you may think of as being Christian. Being Christlike does not mean memorizing verses or having a daily quiet time or attending church. These maybe involved in the process of becoming Christlike, but they are not the end. The real test of Christlikeness comes in the stresses and strains of everyday life.

“Spiritual reproduction is a third mark of maturity. Jesus intended his first followers to spread his gospel so that others would believe, as we see in his prayer for the disciples in John 17. ‘My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.’ Jesus commanded the apostles to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ (Mt 28:19). Disciples making disciples is God’s planned pattern for disseminating his presence in the world. This work requires mature Christians who can reproduce their own faith in Christ in the lives of others... Bringing someone to this level of spiritual maturity is costly, just as being a good physical parent is. Follow-up is hard work because it requires you to give your life to someone. It takes time and energy. And it means opening yourself to close observation by a young believer.”