

7.1 How can we follow up and encourage new believers in Christ?

When a person puts their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, that person becomes a Christian. He is saved, but the work of the teacher has not ended. It has only begun. This is one of the reasons you wrote down the names and addresses of the converts. These believers are just little babies in their Christian lives. They need much teaching, much help, and much patience on the part of the teacher to help them grown to become strong believers. When a baby is born into our families, we understand that he will grow very slowly. It will be many years before he will become an adult. We don't expect that in only a few days or weeks or even months, the baby will be as strong and mature as an adult. If it is this way regarding our natural families, why should we think it would be different with our spiritual families?

It is helpful to visit each convert in his home. By visiting with his family, you will better understand how to help him. Your visit is also an expression of good will. Many times it will be the beginning of a friendship with the whole family.

HOW TO TALK WITH THE CHILD AND HIS FAMILY DURING A HOME VISIT

It is best to visit the family right away in the week following his profession of faith. Remember that Satan is always looking for an occasion to get in, and one of his favorite times is following a person's decision to follow Christ. He wants to eat up the Gospel seed that has been planted like a bird pecking at seed planted in a field. His goal is that the convert never become a strong believer (Matthew 13:4, 19). Do not give the enemy time to take away the seed of faith that has begun to sprout! Go quickly to visit the convert and his family.

Your goal is to become a friend of the family if possible. This friendship may lead them all to Jesus Christ, or, if they are already believers, it may help strengthen their faith. Do not go to fight and argue or to tell them about all the faults, errors and problems of their religion, if they happen to follow another faith. As God to help you establish a friendship with them.

1. Let them know how happy you were to have their child in Sunday school. Try to find something good to say about the child. Is he smart? Courageous? A good listener? Has a happy face? Is obedient? Kind to the other kids? Quick to respond? Showed good understanding in an answer he gave? Be sure to share these positive points with the parents.
2. Let the child know how happy you are with his decision to follow Jesus Christ. Give him a verse of assurance from the Bible that can help assure his heart that he is truly saved. Choose one of these verses: Hebrews 13:5b, John 3:15, John 1:12, John 6:37b, or another similar verse. Remind the child how he decided for Jesus, and ask him what Jesus has promised him. It's best if he himself confesses that Jesus has promised him eternal life, forgiveness of sins, salvation, etc. You should not tell him directly, "You are saved," but use verses that will help him to confess this for himself. You may give the child a small certificate or memento to keep in his Bible that tells the day and place he received Jesus. **DO NOT DISCUSS ISSUES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP OR BAPTISM** on this first visit.
3. Ask the child's parents if you may pray God's blessing on them and their family. If they agree, briefly ask God to bless them. You may ask Him to help them know Jesus very well, but don't say anything about church or baptism in your prayer, or anything that may cause them to turn against you.
4. You may ask any questions you need to know in order to follow up this child effectively. Are they members of another religion? (Don't respond negatively or look shocked.) Just say, "God bless you." Does the child live at home with them all the time, or spend part of his time elsewhere? Is this their child, or a relatives'? Does the child go to school? Where? In what grade? Does he have special health needs? Many times you will already know these things, especially if you are teaching in your home area. However, if you don't know all you need to, be sure to ask.

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AFTER THE FIRST HOME VISIT

Amongst the children who receive Jesus in Sunday school, you will find some who are from your own church families, or from families of another church of similar Biblical doctrine. You will find others from families who do not worship anywhere. You will find still others from families that follow non-biblical religions. Some will also be visitors from other villages or neighborhoods.

1. CHILDREN FROM YOUR OWN CHURCH OR OTHER BIBLE-BELIEVING CHURCHES

These children are not hard to follow up. They are close by and you probably already know them well. Their parents will welcome their decision. Even baptism and church membership will not be a problem. You can:

- A. Encourage the family to sign their child up for baptismal classes (in their own church in they are members of another biblical church)
- B. Look for a special time each week to teach the child the basics of beginning the Christian life (suggestions at the end of this chapter). If there are other converts, try to have them agree on a time to teach all of them together. If only one child is converted, you can come to his home and give him the teaching that will help him. The teaching will also strengthen his family. You might be able to finish the teaching in three visits or so.
- C. Even though the family is Christian, consider carefully whether deliverance (commanding evil spirits to leave) may be needed. If they or their ancestors were involved in sorcery or other occult activities, if they have worn fetishes or had them in their home, if they used to follow a non-biblical form of worship, if they have committed adultery or other unfaithfulness, if they have cursed God or others, it may be possible that evil spirits have attached themselves to them or their home. You can ask the family whether they feel that evil spirits have been harassing them. You can also ask God to show you any problem areas. If you do find deliverance needed, don't try it alone. Take along another strong believer, and set aside a special time of prayer beforehand.

2. CHILDREN FROM FAMILIES WHO DO NOT WORSHIP ANYWHERE

These children are the second easiest group to follow up. However, sometimes their families may be involved in secret lodges or occult activity that is not readily apparent. You can try following the same procedure as for church families, but be patient. Teach more slowly and make sure they understand. Do not press the issue of baptism if they find it problematic. Be very careful when considering issues related to sorcery. You may have to give extra teaching on this. If you find resistance, secret involvement in the occult is likely the problem. Try leading the parents and the entire family to Christ. Then slowly, patiently teach them the basics of the Christian life and the dangers of occult involvement. They should know that Jesus has won the victory over Satan and that He is stronger than any evil spirits. They should realize that they as believers have authority over evil spirits. Support your efforts with constant prayer.

3. CHILDREN WHO ARE MEMBERS OF NON-BIBLICAL RELIGIONS

The hardest group to help are children whose families follow a non-biblical religion. We should still do all we can to help these children, but we need to be very wise in the way we do it. We need to be patient and to work slowly and with much prayer. In some places, teachers try to expel these children from Sunday school if they cannot or will not follow the teachings of our church entirely. I think this is a mistake. God is the one who has brought these children to us and given us the opportunity to teach them. They may not have any other opportunity to hear the truth. We must seek to help them in a friendly, patient manner, teaching them little by little as a mother feeds a sick baby from a spoon.

Ultimately, every family must choose or decide whether they will allow their children to follow the Lord and to be baptized in a Biblical manner. Some families will allow the child to make up his own mind. Others will not allow him to do this, but the teaching the child receives in childhood will come to fruition later on in adulthood when he is able to make his own decisions. Some will refuse to the very end. God has given families the power of choice for their children, and we need to respect that.

We can be constantly praying that the parents will understand the truth, but we cannot force them. The church cannot baptize children whose families do not approve. However, we find that in many cases, the children have come under the influence of our teaching BECAUSE GOD WANTS TO WORK IN THEIR FAMILIES! Yet we

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are the very ones who are quick to push them out of the church. We are the very ones who spend our time arguing with them as if they were our enemies. This does not help the work of God. We should befriend these families, we should draw them in gently, not push them out, we should be praying fervently for them, and then we should let them decide for their families.

It will not be wise or helpful to try to get these children into the baptismal class. We can, however, give them other teachings that will help them begin to grow in their faith. We can even give this teaching in their home in the presence of the family, if the parents agree. It's best to go slowly, review often, and let the teachings sink in deeply. We could teach one or two short lessons each week. Amongst the teachings to give new converts is teaching about baptism. You can give this matter-of-factly, that is, showing them what the Bible teaches without overtly urging them to respond. Maybe they will show interest or ask questions and you will have an opportunity to talk further about it. If not, go on to other teachings. Maybe the little seed you have planted will grow so that you will later have an opportunity to discuss it again.

4. CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN OTHER VILLAGES OR NEIGHBORHOODS

The Sunday school teacher can do four things to help these children. First, he can make good use of the time the child is in his area to give him all the teaching he can. The child should usually take actual baptismal teaching in his own village, but he can see its importance and decide to sign up while he is away. The second thing the teacher can do is to write to the church in the child's village or neighborhood, informing them of the child's decision to follow Christ, and urging them to continue the follow up. The third thing the teacher can do is to give the child literature or a list of Bible verses for further study after he returns to his home area. Finally, the teacher can encourage the child with an occasional letter whenever there is opportunity to send one.

TEACHING FOR NEW BELIEVERS

As we saw in Chapter Two, every teacher should get to know whether new believers are in his class. If there are many of them, he should gear many of his lessons toward them. He could also set aside a few minutes each week to present one of the steps of Christian growth given at the close of this chapter. If there are not many, he could arrange a time to meet with the new believers during the week, or teach them individually in their homes.

CLUBS CAN HELP

Clubs are groups that meet at another time than Sunday, often outside the church. They may meet in homes or in schools. They often attract children from other religious backgrounds that could not come on Sunday. They are usually geared for evangelism and for helping new believers. They may utilize other activities like sports, sewing, music and dancing, games, or art and craft activities to gain the interest of the youth. Then a Bible lesson is taught much as in Sunday school.

TEACHING "STEPS TO CHRISTIAN GROWTH"

Here is an outline of some "Steps to Christian Growth"—mini-lessons that can help children and others grow spiritually after they have come to faith in Christ. Some situations and audiences lend themselves to teaching these points rapidly, several at a time. Other situations and audiences lend themselves to teaching them slowly, one point each week. These could also be starting points for developing your own lessons for new Christians in greater depth. Ask God for wisdom in how to use them.

LET'S REVIEW

Complete these sentences:

It is good to follow up new converts by visiting them in their _____ the week after their decision for Christ.

When a teacher visits the home of a new convert, he hopes to establish a _____ with them. He may ask permission to pray for God's _____ on their home.

He may give the newly converted child a verse of _____ to help understand that he is saved.

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If the child is a member of your church or another Biblical church, you will visit him a second time to talk about _____ and encourage his family to sign him up for the baptismal class. If he belongs to another church, he should take his baptismal class in _____ church.

If a child is visiting from another village, you can

- 1. _____ 2. _____
- 3. _____ 4. _____

In what cases might a child or a family need deliverance after they have come to Christ?

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What is the value of a club in teaching and encouraging new converts?

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