I See that Hand

Mike Davies 13 September 2018



In our meetings, we can often see responses to a gospel call, but we sometimes don't see these people become active disciples of the Lord Jesus. Whilst it will always be the case that not everyone will become part of our congregation after such a response, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to care for those who are 'spiritual newborn babies' and to faithfully disciple new believers into maturity.

> As fishermen, they had to ensure their nets were in good condition, so that the fish they caught didn't escape and render their work fruitless.

We read of the call of the disciples in Matt 4:18-22,' While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.'

As fishermen, they had to ensure their nets were in good condition, so that the fish they caught didn't escape and render their work fruitless. Likewise, when we 'throw out the net' in our meetings and people respond, we must ensure that our 'nets' are well prepared. We are the nets, so we should attempt to faithfully follow-up with everyone who has responded and bring them into the family.

How To Faithfully Disciple New Believers

Here are some helpful guidelines to ensure that we will be those found faithful in making disciples. Here we will focus on responses in our meetings, but we must never forget that evangelism is the responsibility of every believer and shouldn't be confined to preachers in corporate gatherings.

1. Be On The Lookout

a. **Before the meeting:** welcome visitors. Don't just spend time with your friends, but rather use this time to reach out to those who are on the outskirts. Don't leave this to a 'welcoming team'. Show genuine interest, love and concern for visitors. People are more likely to respond to the message if they feel they are in a safe, welcoming place where they are loved and not judged. Then, if they do respond, there is already something of a relational connection with them.

b. **During the meeting:** be aware of the threads of the preach and any prophetic words etc. This will help in understanding why a person may have responded.

c. **After the meeting:** look not just for those who may have raised their hands or stood in response to the invitation, but also those looking like they are responding internally. Some people may not have the courage to respond publicly, but may well do so to a private invitation.

2. Spend Time with Those Who Respond

a. **One-on-one**, even if the preacher has prayed with the responder, counselling them through the decision they have just made and helping them towards the next steps.

b. **Put them at ease**. Introduce yourself, if they don't already know you, etc. Use appropriate tone, body language and avoid 'Christianese'- jargon that will confuse rather than bring clarity. Non-churched people can find Christian language very confusing!

c. **Choose an appropriate location** where there is not too much noise or interruptions, and

where there is a degree of privacy. The person is likely feeling very self-conscious and perhaps quite emotional at this point.

d. **If they were brought by friends or family**, it can be good to include one of them in such a conversation, as they are most likely to be involved in further discipleship etc. If the friends are not involved, assure the responder that such friends and family will be happy to wait for them so that they are not anxious about time.

3. Discover More About Them

a. **Ask their name** and **where they are from** as an obvious start.

b. **Have they been in church before?** Was it a church like ours? This will help determine the language you can use, what you need to explain, what needs to be clarified, etc.

c. **Who invited them?** This will help you to ensure they are effectively discipled going forward.

d. **Why have they responded?** Is this a first-time response or a re-commitment to Christ? Is there an issue of assurance of salvation or misunderstanding of the gospel? Was there a particular issue that they have responded to? Maybe they responded for a prayer need rather than to surrender their life to Christ. Knowing why they responded will help you to know how to proceed.

e. **Get their contact details** so you can follow up with them. Do this in a manner that is non-threatening and casual, rather than formal – don't ask them to fill in a form! Ask for the details and fill in the form yourself if necessary. Ask like you would ask a friend how to get in touch, not as though they are entering some kind of process.

4. Recap the Message

a. The gospel is rarely preached in full in one sermon. It is often necessary then to **explain what is happening and what it means** to become a follower of Jesus.

b. **Present a concise explanation of the gospel.** If you are not confident in this, it is something worth practicing with friends. Can you share the gospel accurately, quickly and in a way that is understandable even to an unchurched person? The gospel message should include the following aspects:

i) God created man for relationship and His glory.

ii) Man chose His own way (sin).
iii) This separated mankind from God and we couldn't bridge the gap.
iv) Jesus died to pay the price we couldn't pay.
v) We should respond in repentance, faith and obedience in order to be reconciled with God, forgiven and given eternal life.

c. **Ground this explanation in concepts from the sermon**, which is usually what caused the person to respond.

5. Ask for a Response

a. **Confirm that the person understands** and wishes to become a disciple of Jesus.

b. **Pray for and with them.** It is always good to encourage the person to pray themselves.

c. **Ask them to repent** of anything specific of which they are aware.

d. **Pray over them**, confirming God's forgiveness, mercy, new life, new start, etc.

e. **Be excited and celebratory**. Rebirth is a miraculous work of the Spirit, so we must be excited about it and let them know it's Ok for them to be excited too.

6. Point Them Forward

a. **Giving them a Bible, devotional or leaflet** explaining what has just happened can be great. Otherwise, pointing them to the right resources and where to get them would be necessary – just don't overwhelm them!

b. **Encourage them to testify** to family and friends. Sharing what has happened is a very important next step.

c. **Emphasise the importance of church**/community/family for health and growth.

d. **Introduce them** to someone who will connect naturally with them. Find somebody with similar interests and/or personality who will easily befriend them and include them in church life (rather than just meetings).

e. **Invite them to a home.** We need to welcome people into our lives, not just our meetings. Even if the invitation is to a 'home group', it is preferable to say something like 'a few of us are getting together at ____' rather than saying 'join us for our home group meeting'. The former is a lot

less intimidating. Remember how scary it is to join an existing friendship group. An invite alone may not be sufficient – offer to pick them up, to take them along, etc. so they are not faced with the daunting prospect of knocking on a stranger's door.

f. **Warn them of coming enemy strategy.** The enemy is going to try and rob them of the seed sown: with fear, with doubt, with confusion and accusation. Prepare them for this. I have even found it useful to suggest that the next meeting they hope to come to will probably be preceded by a 'bad day', 'exhaustion' etc. as the devil attempts to keep them from gathering with other believers. Forewarned is forearmed!

7. Be Responsible – Look After Them

a. **Invite them immediately** for lunch or coffee or supper. This will help to connect them relationally. If this is intimidating for you, ask someone else to join you as well. There really is no substitute for genuinely loving people.

b. **Follow up with them within 48 hours** to see how they are. Use this opportunity to invite them into the life of the church once more.

c. One wouldn't leave a newborn baby to fend for itself and we shouldn't leave new believers without help either. You may not be the person to walk with and disciple this person for the rest of their lives, but you need to **be responsible until you know they are definitely being looked after by someone** and have been added to the family.

This isn't an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but hopefully it will help us to see more long-term fruit. I honestly believe that every single person who responds to the gospel in our meetings should be connected and counselled by a believer before they leave.

I hope this proves helpful in giving us all the confidence to do just that, and that we will see many added to us by the Lord as we prove faithful in ensuring our 'nets' are in good order.