

Telephone Follow-Up

In the past, our ecclesia did not give a great deal of thought to how the many aspects of witness activity should relate to and complement each other. We simply went to work without questioning whether the particular aspect of the work we were engaged in was as productive as it could and should have been.

We are reminded of something Br. Russell said in this regard, though this is not an exact quotation: “The approach to the Lord’s work changes. The Apostles went from village to village seeking the wheat, but we would not think of using that method today. We can accomplish much more through the printed word.”

We understand what Br. Russell’s point was. As times and circumstances change, we can change with them, or continue using outdated and unproductive approaches to the Lord’s work. The questions are, have the times and circumstances changed and, equally important, if they have changed, how does this affect our approach to the Harvest work?

Let’s take the first question. We believe times have changed since Br. Russell’s day. In his day, this country had a great deal more spirituality and reverence for God than today. This being true, we can understand why colporteur and tracting, two very important aspects of the work in his day, were engaged in to the extent that they were.

In his day, one out of every three or four homes may have been Christian. We can see that under such conditions, tracting or colporturing would have been very effective. However, contrasting that with our day, when perhaps one out of every fifteen or twenty homes would show any degree of interest in the Lord’s Word, where spirituality is close to non-existent, we can begin to appreciate why a day spent in such activities would not be as spiritually profitable as we would hope.

Now we know that we are not at this late date going to have the results that were obtained in the earlier days of the Harvest, but we believe there is still plenty of work to be done, with very rewarding results—to the laborers, to the ecclesia, and to those we find—the one here and the one there.

Addressing the second question, “How does this affect our approach to the Harvest work?” we see that time is a very limited resource that should be used as efficiently as possible in the Lord’s work. When we find some witness methods that are more effective than others, we should utilize them. We will then be working productively and not merely spinning our wheels.

With the foregoing in mind, we would like to suggest some thoughts along a line of activity in the Lord’s service that has, by the Lord’s grace, seemed to bring our class good results in the Harvest work.

The Bible Students of Southeast Michigan have been engaged in this work testify that it has added a whole new dimension to their spiritual lives, deepening their consecrations, and making the Truth more meaningful and precious. We thank the Lord for the opportunities that have opened up through this activity and for the blessed results of class growth, individual growth, and the new brethren found.

Telephone follow-up fits into an overall system of witness work. Experience has shown that there must be an orderly, planned approach to the activities of the class for the best possible results.

First of all, what is it that we want to accomplish? That's easy. We want to find the last members of the body of Christ. That's the end result. But now the difficult matter is, how do we find them? When we think about it, that's why we have "For This Cause" showings, or other public meetings, class mailings, etc. All of these activities are carried out with the hope that someone will respond and come into Present Truth.

Some indeed have come into the Truth from these activities and endeavors. But think about it for a moment...those who have come into the Truth in this way have done so because they have been strong enough spiritually to take the initiative; their spiritual senses have been keen enough to perceive the Truth and to respond. However, there is another class, in and out of Babylon, who are not so strong, with spiritual senses not so keen, who will not be able to make the journey without our help.

The Lord has shown us that public meetings and witness activities are not the end of our responsibility, but only the beginning.

We have come to realize that having fair booths, public meetings, etc., serve one purpose, and that is to enable us to come in contact with those who claim to be Christians. These are the ones we are looking for. Those who come to public meetings, respond to tracts, etc., have identified themselves as being Christians or being interested. This is the first sifting work—separating Christians from non-Christians—and these become prospects for the Truth.

The next step is to obtain the names, addresses, and phone numbers of these interested people and put them on a monthly mailing list to receive letters on different Scriptural subjects. The monthly letter serves the purpose of allowing us to give the truth to them on a frequent, regular basis, and it also gives them the opportunity of sending in for additional literature. Some respond to this positively, thus indicating greater interest in the Truth. Some don't like the message and ask to be removed from the mailing list. This is a further sifting work.

After we put the names on the mailing list, we are ready for phone follow-up. Up to this point our privileges of service have been of a more physical nature—preparing the monthly letter for mailing, arranging for public meetings, etc., but with the phone follow-up comes the real blessing of personally witnessing to the Truth.

In talking hours each week to those who question us on so many aspects of the Truth, we must be able to give Scriptural answers. This activity presses us to pick up on personal study so that we can be prepared to give a “thus saith the Lord” for our doctrinal positions. As can be imagined, the effect on the class, with the brethren studying and discussing witness opportunities, questions that have arisen, etc., is a very sanctifying one. The brethren feel closer to the Lord and to one another.

We have noticed that if we start with twenty names, after about a month perhaps ten people will not want further contact. Of the remaining ten people, perhaps we will have further conversations with seven, but those will also drop off one by one. However, a few of those original twenty names (maybe three) will rise to the top like cream.

The next step is to set up a personal meeting with them. We suggest a restaurant, which is neutral ground, so that we can get acquainted personally. At this meeting the person can get a look at us and reassure himself that we seem to be normal. This usually makes people more relaxed and receptive. We do not try to bring more than one prospect at a time to these meetings. When we have tried to bring several interested people together at one meeting to economize on our own time, there have usually been various negative results. (1) Someone feels neglected—most people need a lot of individual attention at first. (2) People outside the Truth movement generally do not mix very well with strangers. (3) If one of the prospects turns out to be opposed, he can put stumbling-blocks in the way of others.

If this personal get-together goes well, we might ask the person if he would like to have a personal study at his home or ours. We don't try to bring people out to regular class studies immediately. There is no control over what is said in the study, and if controversial subjects such as the Lord's presence, the Trinity, etc., come up, the new interest may be scared away. Having personal studies with people makes it possible to prepare them to understand more of the Truth in a way that won't choke or stumble them. It is time-consuming, especially when the Lord so arranges that we have several of these studies a week, but this is where we grow and develop. We have learned to be patient and to resist the urge to push people out to meeting too fast. When we start to feel tied down, we know it's just the flesh hurting, and it gives us an opportunity of killing it, and showing the Lord our love.

Some will take you up on the offer of a personal study, but then drop off after a while. Others will continue to have studies with you, and after four or five months you can invite them out to the class studies. Even if they begin attending class regularly, it is very beneficial to continue to have personal studies with them for quite a while until they become grounded.

To give some indication of how this has worked here, it is not uncommon for the ecclesia to have visitors regularly. There have been meetings where there have been as many as three visitors present at one time. Some merely pass through, but when one shows that he is good ground and begins to bring forth fruit, what a blessing!

In conclusion, we would say that for every person who comes into the Truth mainly on his own, with little effort being put forth by us, three more might find and appreciate the Truth if we would put forth the extra effort required to find and nurture them. At least we have found that to be true here, and if it is true here, it seems reasonable to suppose that it would be equally true elsewhere.

Tips on Phone Follow-Up

Following are some suggestions on how to approach phone follow-up:

1. Before calling, sit down and review the information you have on the person to be contacted. Plan beforehand what it is you want to accomplish. For instance, if the person has received a First Volume, your object would be to inquire if he had read it. One of two answers will be forthcoming: "Yes, I have," or "No, I haven't." In planning the call, anticipate both answers and how you will respond to either one. Additionally, try to anticipate the direction the conversation will take thereafter.

If the person has read the book, the logical question to ask would be, "What did you think of the book?" From that point on, you want to probe with well-selected questions to determine whether he briefly skimmed, or read in detail. Did he understand what he read? Does he have any questions? Etc. If the reply is that he has read the book, but disagreed or didn't like it for one reason or another, again, probe. Don't just give up. Sometimes you can redeem the situation by clarifying some point he may have misunderstood.

What we are emphasizing is to pre-plan the call. Don't just call without thinking and then become disoriented on the phone. As you become more familiar with this approach, you will become more confident and this pre-planning will become second nature. Don't get discouraged.

2. Remember that you will be talking to all kinds of people. Some of them will want you to do all the talking, and you will have to use questions to bring them out. Your questions should be of the kind that won't bring a "yes" or "no" answer. An example of a dead-end question would be, "Did you like the book?" They can merely answer "yes" or "no," and that tells you very little. You can receive much more information and generate more discussion by asking the question like this: "What did you think of the book?" Now they can't give you a "yes" or "no" answer. However, occasionally some people will simply say that they thought the book was "nice." In that case, you can press a little harder and ask, "What was it about the book that you liked?" "What did you think of the concept of the earthly kingdom?" "What did you think about the two salvations?" etc.

You want to get them to elaborate so that you can pick up on some of the things they communicate to you. In this way they have to think more deeply, and you accomplish two things: (1) You begin to understand them and how best to present the Truth to them, (2) They begin to communicate with you more freely.

Sometimes when the person hasn't read the book, it is a little hard to get a conversation going. What you can do in that case is to ask the person if he knows where the book is and suggest that he gets it while you wait.

When he comes back with the book, you can then go over some of the highlights, just as though you were placing it with him all over again. Then you can conclude by saying "Bob, why don't you start reading the book. Write down any questions that come up, and if it's OK with you, I'll call back in two or three weeks and we can talk about them."

Most people will agree. If the person doesn't have the Volume, tell him about it, how helpful it is, etc. Tell him you will send him one and get back to him after he has had a chance to read some of it.

Some people will volunteer readily, and you will have nice discussions with them. In any case, listen to what people tell you. If you are alert, you can pick up on things they say, allowing you to witness to them more effectively.

3. After the phone call, take a few minutes to reflect on it. Ask yourself, "How did I come across? Was I responsive to him? How well did I present the Truth? Did I answer his questions, or did I stumble around for answers? Was it apparent that he was talking to someone who knew the Bible?" Put yourself in his place and suppose you had just received your own call. Ask yourself what you could have done to make the call a better witness. You'll be surprised at how beneficial this will be on subsequent calls.
4. Remember that what you are trying to accomplish in phone follow-up is the identification of Christian people who are serious about their faith. When you identify one of these, your next step is to lay the groundwork for future telephone conversations. In doing this, don't tell them everything you know all at once—far better to give the person a little at a time. He will be more receptive to your next call, and you won't choke him with more spiritual food than he is capable of digesting. The idea of a steady, regular diet of spiritual food over the phone should be understood as the procedure. We have to be patient with people and realize that we are developing them and weaning them away from many errors they have been familiar with for a long time.
5. Both in your telephone conversations and if personal studies eventuate, be regular—regular—regular. If you say you will call back in a week, do so. If the studies are on Saturday, conventions, etc., will often conflict with them. Don't cancel the study for everything that comes up. They may cancel the study from

time to time, and you don't need to double the cancellations. If you do, the study will never take on any continuity and will be almost sure to die. Deny yourself; put yourself out for them. If you miss part of a convention you will be compensated for it by the spiritual reward of sharing the Truth with others not so blessed.

6. In phoning especially, and in study, be enthusiastic. We are presenting the greatest message in the world. If your enthusiasm doesn't come through, you are not giving people any reason to read your literature or to study with you.

Example

HELLO. MAY I PLEASE SPEAK TO _____. (PERSON COMES ON THE LINE.) HELLO, MY NAME IS _____, AND I REPRESENT THE BIBLE STUDENTS OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN. YOU RECENTLY REQUESTED A COPY OF _____, AND I'M CALLING TO SEE IF YOU'VE RECEIVED IT. (WAIT FOR ANSWER.)

HAVE YOU STARTED READING IT YET? (HIS ANSWER.) IF HE SAYS HE'S READ IT, ASK WHETHER HE'S READ IT IN DEPTH OR JUST SKIMMED OVER IT. THIS IS A DIRECT QUESTION TO DETERMINE FOR YOURSELF WHETHER HE UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE READ AND WHETHER HE GOT THE GENERAL MESSAGE OF THE BOOK.

TELL HIM WHAT APPROACH TO STUDY THE VOLUME TAKES (TOPICAL). EXPLAIN WHAT TOPICAL STUDY IS. USE THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS TALKING TO HIS DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS AFTER HIS RESURRECTION—"AND BEGINNING AT MOSES AND ALL THE PROPHETS, HE EXPOUNDED UNTO THEM IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES THE THINGS CONCERNING HIMSELF."—LUKE 24:27

TELL HIM HOW MUCH THIS KIND OF STUDY HAS HELPED YOU. BE ENTHUSIASTIC. LET HIM KNOW HOW MUCH YOU VALUE THE VOLUME[S] AND HOW NO CHRISTIAN LIBRARY SHOULD BE WITHOUT IT [THEM]. INFORM HIM OF THE CIRCULATION OF VOLUME I (OVER 8,000,000 IN 1916).

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING. REMEMBER, BE ENTHUSIASTIC AND FRIENDLY. GIVE HIM TIME AND PLACE OF MEETINGS. REMEMBER THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL:

1. GET HIM READING THE VOLUME.
2. OPEN THE WAY FOR A FRIENDSHIP WITH REGULAR TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS WHERE PROGRESS IN HIS READING OF THE VOLUME CAN BE ENCOURAGED AND ASCERTAINED. LET HIM KNOW WHEN YOU ARE GOING TO CALL BACK (COUPLE OF WEEKS OR A MONTH).
3. WE SHOULD ENDEAVOR TO SET UP STUDIES AFTER A WHILE WITH THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF GETTING HIM TO THE MEETINGS.

BE REGULAR AND DEPENDABLE.....DON'T LET DOWN!!!!

Nature of Personal (Extension) Studies

It is very important that we don't have long, drawn-out random discussions that might seem to be profitable, but are not nearly as beneficial as a *First Volume* or *Tabernacle Shadows* study. Usually people are not familiar with Scriptures and Bible Student terminology, so discussions nearly always confuse them or than help them. This is why a structured *Volume* or *Tabernacle Shadows* study is so beneficial. We are giving them private tutoring along lines that beautifully harmonize the Scriptures, showing an overall plan in a way they can understand. In no other way can these personal meetings be so profitable.

The *Tabernacle* study has proven to be a very stimulating study for newly-interested people, though at first we might think it would be too deep. The benefit seems to be that it immediately gets into the meat of God's Word and shows the plan of salvation.

If the *First Volume* is used, the first three chapters can be read by the person privately, and we begin the extension study with Chapter 4.

Bringing in extra Scriptures that directly relate to the study is a good idea. It makes the study more interesting and gives the person confidence that we are familiar with the Bible.