

# Someone in Your Church Met Jesus, Now What?

4 THINGS WE'RE LEARNING ABOUT HELPING NEW BELIEVERS

My name is Trevor Cox, I'm pastor of Discipleship for NewSpring Church. My responsibility is to help people take next steps in their walk with Jesus. Our team is responsible for Guest Services Desk (front door to discipleship), New Believer Class (set up for maturity), Membership Class (vision, volunteering), any kind of group experience, Financial Learning experiences, any kind of writing (such as group study guides, devotional material for website, etc)

I want to spend just a moment describing how we move new believers through our process, then I want to give you 4 things we're learning about discipling people, then we'll open up for question and answer.

Discipleship begins on Sunday morning. Sunday is a pretty big deal around here. The kind of teaching you just heard is not abnormal. We get that kind of teaching every week here. That is an awesome discipleship thing to say "Go to church" and learn something new to apply to your life.

In helping new believers, the first challenge is identifying them. Once or twice a month (sometimes more, sometimes less) we will have a public invitation where someone will raise their hands or stand up. We want to do everything we can to identify those people right there. What we've done is ask our volunteers to be watching for new believers during invitation time. Our volunteers will introduce themselves to a new believer and try to get them to go to the care room. We want to make a big deal about identifying those New Believers right there because we've found that it's hard to identify them once they've left your auditorium. We do the card thing but now our offering is taken up before the message, so those responding to the message have no place to put their card. In the care room, we'll give them a bible, talk about baptism, and invite them to our New Believer Class. We try to make it as simple as possible. At the New Believer Class, we talk about moving from consumer to contributor and spend a majority of time talking about prayer and bible. From there, we push those New Believers to baptism or new member class. In Membership Class we talk about the vision and values of our church and explain how they can get involved in volunteering. If someone comes in pretty fired up, we can move them through that process quickly, sometimes it takes a lot longer. We make sure that our new believer small group leaders and our membership assimilators do a good job of following up with those new believers to make sure they take that next step. We provide on-line group study material that goes along with the sermon. We will periodically offer a short-term group study for people to take a next step and get to know some people. So that's just a quick look at our process.

There are lots of decisions to be made about what to do or not to do with New Believers. What we are doing to disciple people has continued to evolve. I want to throw out the 4 things we're learning about helping disciple people that may help you as you do the same. Hopefully, we'll have plenty of time for questions, so jot them down as I go.

#1 We're learning that we have to be patient. Figuring out your process requires patience. I laughed the other day when I saw a church plant's website. It was slick. They had everything figured out and they haven't had a service yet. We're ten years in and we don't have it figured out yet. We are just beginning to solidify some of what we're doing, and we are open for changes. Our problem is that we all want nice, clean processes where we put in a pagan and pull out a pastor. Processes are clean. People are messy. They don't fit easily into boxes. That doesn't mean we don't have a process that just means that we realize processes don't change people, Jesus does. So, as you are developing your process for

helping new believers, know that it will be messy and difficult and will require patience. Some people moving fast, some moving slow. Difficult conversations. Most people don't come to a conference saying "I'm looking for a magic formula," but down deep that's what we really want. It may be a bit cliché but the reason it feels difficult is because it is.

We've already done the deal where we have visited another church and copied exactly what they were doing and thought we'd have the same results. The equivalent would be going to someone's garden and not only digging up the plants but digging up the dirt, transplanting that to your yard, and expecting the same fruit. I hope you'll glean from our field but realize that God created you unique for a reason. Copying someone strategy doesn't make sense biblically. The more we follow Jesus, the more unique we should be, not the more conformed to each other.

So, I hope you will be freed from the burden of this misconception: If I can figure out that magic formula...success will be automatic.

#2 Things we're learning about discipling people:  
We can't let church people define discipleship.

Everybody in this room is "churched". New Believers must have an advocate.

People, who are "churched," meaning they grew up in church or have been a Christ-follower a long time, will be removed from the reality of being a new believer and be the first to chime in and say, "What are we doing for new believers." Churched people will tend to do the following:

They will call for depth or knowledge at the expense of application. One of the central themes of the New Testament is about a group of well-intentioned religious people who learned god's word but stop applying it. They consequently crucified Jesus. This is why so many pastors get crucified. Our churches are filled with Pharisees. When churched people call for depth or yet another bible study, call them to serve!

Churched people will add complexity to your process. After a churched person has completed Greek 401 they want to take the next class and you feel obligated to create the class for them. It's never ending. Instead, create a process with a life giving cycle. You are never finished because you are helping others through the process.

Churched people will commit spiritual suicide by busyness. Three things on Sunday, Tuesday night visitation, wed prayer, Thursday youth group, Saturday car wash. So much activity, so little life change. We want new believers living out their faith away from the building. They are leveraged more than you are to reach lost people.

We can't let church people define discipleship. Churched people will be the first ones to say "what are you doing for new believers?" That is a genuine concern. But if you took that churched person aside and asked them "how were you discipled?" they would have a hard time telling you. A church person thinks discipleship is whatever they grew up in. The antidote for church mentality is serving.

I have to realize that I am a church person. So, I must regularly evaluate our decisions based on that lens because new believers need an advocate. That brings me to #3.

We're learning that we've got to make it simpler  
Since I have a church background it has taken me a while to embrace the idea of simplicity. When we first started something for new believers, I taught the book of John, week one topic was John 1:1-3...Jesus is God. I wish I were kidding. New Believers were not ready for the steak. My good intention was to expose them to wonderment of Jesus and God's Word. Instead I confused a lot of people.

Instead, now we offer a class that says, "this is a bible, a bible is a book with many books, books have chapters and verses, let use the table of contents to find the book of John, now turn to the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter using the chapter guide at the top of the page, now skim down and find the 6<sup>th</sup> verse, what does it say?"

We are no longer speaking to a culture that grew up in church. We have to offer simple teaching.

We have to offer simple next steps. How easy is it for a person to take a step in their walk with Jesus? That's really the reason we've pulled the GSD under discipleship for a time. We want to make sure those GSD volunteers are trained to help people take a next step, to get into their story enough to help them know what to do next. We stopped offering long term group opportunities and moved our attention to short-term experiences. As a person grows in maturity, their need for NewSpring to organize biblical community for them should decrease. We stopped offering multi-week new believer classes and now offer a one-time class each month. Simple next steps.

We need to offer simple tools. This is a profound statement. Every single thing you want to teach a new believer is found in scripture. So, simply, do what you can to get them reading it. If you say, "that's not enough," you're thinking like a church person. We are apologetically simple. Come to church, learn something new to apply to your life, read your bible every day, pray. Repeat. At every step in the game, we challenge people to be in the Word. You can go to [www.newspring.cc/study](http://www.newspring.cc/study) to see one of the tools we have offered to help people get in the word.

Simple teaching, simple next steps, simple tools.

#4 I'm learning that I must fully embrace the vision of my church.

Every time I go to a conference like this, someone always asks this question, "We've got this really cool thing happening at our church (groups, a class, whatever), I'm just really struggling to get my pastor on board with what i'm doing. Can you give me some tips on how I can get my pastor to buy in to what I'm doing?"

This probably has never happened to you...but you know people...

You put in x number of hours to make this new, fancy bible study program/project get off the ground. You've trained up a bunch of leaders to do bible study groups, you bought signs, you wrote blogs and twittered about it to all 32 of your followers. The Sunday comes to launch this new, shiny thing and you feel much like a wide receiver, standing wide-open in the end zone waving your hands. Except nobody throws you the ball. The announcement you expected never came. In your mind, you pray he just forgot about it. Then you start thinking things like, "well, if he forgot about it, then he doesn't care about it." "If we had just got that announcement from stage, we would have had four billion people in groups, we'd seen 1 million of those accept Jesus, and 250k surrender to missions." After further introspection, you start asking yourself insane questions "how can I get him to care about what I'm doing?" "What we are doing here, is great! Can't he see that?"

What I realized what that I was stupidly trying to get the senior pastor to serve my vision. Two visions is di-vision. My job is not to create vision, it is to embrace vision. If I can't embrace vision then I need to go someplace else.

So many discipleship types feel like it our job to fill in the missing parts of the vision God has given our Senior Pastor. Here's a scenario to make the point.

Think of yourself, not as a wide receiver, but as an offensive lineman. How can I help advance our vision? Are you hearing a lot about evangelism and serving from stage? Get on that train!!! Where can I make a hole for him? You are going to find it much more beneficial

to what you're doing if your senior pastor doesn't feel the need to generate momentum and make announcements for you, rather, he is able to get up and celebrate wins and tie those wins into the vision of the church.

Now here is the crazy part. I made this minute change in my attitude, deciding that I was going to do whatever I could to support what he is already talking about; we started seeing a ton of fruit our area.

It boils down to this: It's way more fun (and fruitful) to be in the middle of what's happening at your church, than being on the outside of all that is moving and shaking in your church.

Q and A

I'd like to introduce some members of the team who will be here today to answer your questions. We have a limited time for questions today. You may want to grab one of these folks and ask them some questions at any point in your stay today.

Micah Swift (writer for NewSpring. He turns Perry's messages into group study guides. That is an effective tool and he can explain how to do that)

Greg Dixon (new believer Group Leader trainer, also plays a key role in our new member assimilation)

Barron Cooley (all things discipleship. He's doing some writing for us. He helps with paper work when needed, he's our Lead membership assimilator/ interviews potential discipleship volunteers, his most important function is his ability to pour into people)

Jason and Carolyn Clayton (GSD Leadership. They have helped transform our Guest Services Desk culture from information dissemination to being the front door for discipleship)

Tori Winstead (Discipleship Coordinator - every team needs a Tori. She is the engine that makes our team work. She's one of those type people who know everything about everything; she can handle an infinite number of details, she like a supersonic jet in that she operates best at mach 2.

Tom Haren (Discipleship Pastor for Anderson - Tom is responsible for Pastoring all our discipleship volunteers. He's responsible for implementing all the crazy stuff I come up with.

1. Is it a disadvantage to do something longer than 6 weeks with a new believer?

Trevor: I started with the John Bible Study, it was too long, and so I trimmed it down to 3 weeks. Sometimes we make classes too long trying to theologize. We should just try to challenge them to read the Bible. NorthPoint Church in Atlanta does a 10 week thing called Starting Point. They have had a lot of success with that. There is nothing wrong with doing something longer, it just works better for us to be shorter, easier.

2. What's your biggest challenge now?

Trevor: Me! The hardest part of leading is leading me. We are experiencing a lot of momentum now. We struggle with the same challenges you struggle with. Just daily struggles.

Tom: Also, Groups and community, was a bit of a struggle. How to make that work. It was like Trev talked about in point 4, we felt like we were on the outside looking in with Groups. When we realized that, things started getting better.

3. How much do we give the New Believers physically?

Trevor: We give them a new Bible and a new journal and have them go to our web site, [newpring.cc/study](http://newpring.cc/study) for daily devotionals. We give them 52 Bible verses to study. We really push personal responsibility. If I had \$1,000.00 to spend on each one, I would, but we're not spending monopoly money.

4. How much training is required at Guest Services and what material do we hand out?

Jason Clayton: We have many of our Guest Services people here today. We now have a training system in place. We have Team Leaders for each session. We take new people through training one-on-one. We use our Staff as a resource. We go through a 4 week training cycle. We give them a tour of the facilities and give them an overview of all things going on. Then they shadow someone for 3 weeks. At the end of the 4 weeks we discuss the process with them and ask them if they are comfortable with this position and if not, we help them find the right spot. We want them to enjoy this responsibility. As far as materials we hand out, we try not to use paper at all, everything is online. Swing by Guest Services later and we'll show you how it works.

5. Do we run the risk of alienating new believers from the rest of the church?

Trevor: We are looking at a name change in the fall to help with this. We'd like to see more people going through the class.

Greg Dixon: We have a lot of excitement going on. We don't leave them hanging. We make them feel involved. We start with small groups. The Group Leader and assimilators are responsible for 4 to 5 people. They know that we will fellowship with them. We walk them through the process and make them feel comfortable. They get one personal phone call from us. Then we follow up in 4 weeks. Give them a chance to ask questions and ask if we can pray for them. The assimilators check up on them throughout the 4 weeks. So we try to get them assimilated into the life of the church.

6. How does a small church deal with the "older" vs. "younger" congregation? Some of us are bringing new converts into the church and the older members are resenting it.

Trevor: So what I'm hearing you say is that you have a group of on-fire younger people and the older people are pissed off that new people are coming in. You're really talking to the wrong person when you ask this question. I came from a small church. When I say "small" I don't mean there's anything wrong with a small church. Just small mindedness that keeps a church small. I didn't stay to fight the battle. I left to come to NewSpring. If I had to answer...I'd say the first thing you have to do is talk to your Pastor and ask him what his vision for the church is... there is not a place in Christendom for division! Next, talk some people who have transitioned churches. Is there anyone in here who has transitioned a traditional church. Yep, why don't you dialogue with a couple of these guys. They'd be better equipped to answer your question.

7. How do you keep the people in New Believer small groups from getting attached to the Small Group Leader?

Trevor: This does happen. Greg could probably answer this better than me.

Greg: The leader has to pour the responsibility into the small group and hold them accountable and remind them that in 4 weeks I'll have 8 new people. Get them serving and staying busy. Connect them with other volunteers.

What if the person has real issues in life?

Trevor: You have to manage the expectations among your volunteers and participants. Don't let the small group leader fall into a dependency situation. Be prepared to handle these situations delicately/firmly. We will, at times like this call on our Pastoral Care Team. We are able to stay focused because of Pastoral Care does such a good job of handling these situations.

8. What do we do if we don't have enough people for a new church planting?

We are portable, we don't have an office or the resources that NewSpring does.

Trevor: You get a bunch of Volunteers and pull them in close and build into them as much as possible, then replicate. Use volunteers as much as possible. Volunteers are wanting big responsibility.

9. Would you make any adjustments or do anything different for children or youth groups?

Trevor: Absolutely. KidSpring teaches the children on their level. We have FUSE for students. They do their best to get students into a relational connection as soon as possible. The FUSE students can attend our classes too.

10. How does your Team measure success?

Tom: Now, we look at how many people we can pull into our discipleship team and when they are able to "feed" themselves, when they are completely dependent on themselves; when we get volunteers into position to really serve God. Where do you start? Build a team; get feedback from your team.