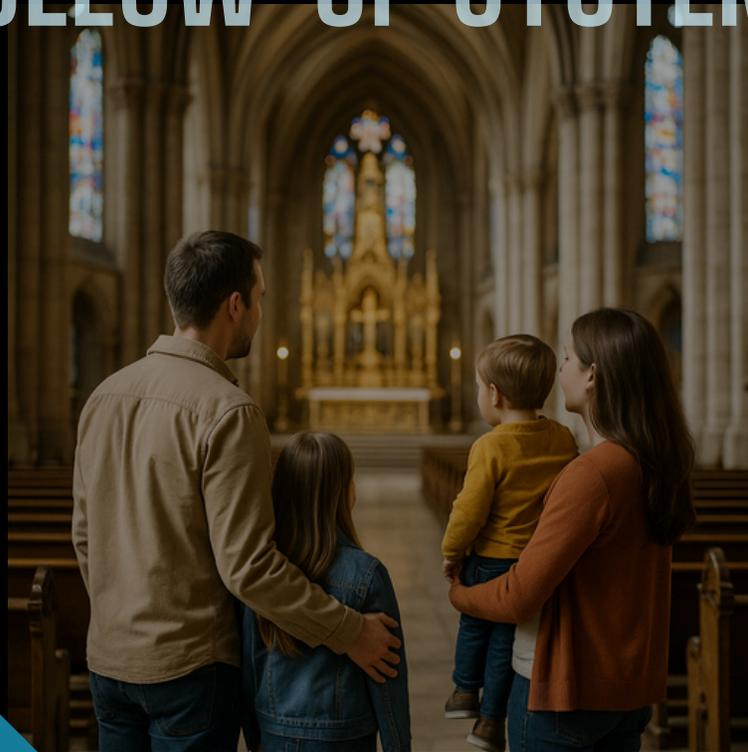


The Pastor's

# FIRST-TIME TO FAITHFUL

## THE COMPLETE VISITOR FOLLOW-UP SYSTEM



Turn First-Time Guests into Faithful  
Members Who Stick, Serve, and Grow



# First-Time

To Faithful

If your follow-up strategy is little more than a “thanks for coming” email, you’re losing the people God is sending your way.

This workbook outlines the system that’s helped hundreds of churches increase their return rate from a dismal 6% to over 50%, and even up to 82% in some churches. It’s practical. It’s proven. And it works ... if you work it.

Each of the following sections matches a short video training. We’ve included a brief summary of the video’s teaching, followed by an in-depth explanation, strategy, and action steps.

You don’t need another church growth theory. You need a follow-up system that actually delivers.

Let’s go.

*Bill T-B*

# Session

## *The Real Reason Your Visitors Aren't Coming Back*

1



### **Video Description:**

This session addresses a painful truth: most first-time guests don't return. It's not because of the preaching, but because of what happens before and after the service. We highlight the invisible barriers guests face and how poor hospitality and weak follow-up create exit doors, not front doors.

Let's get honest. It's probably not your sermon that's driving people away. Yes, preaching matters: LifeWay research confirms guests are more likely to return after a biblically-based, life-relevant sermon. But if they're gone before the benediction ends, the message never had a chance.

Guests are slipping through the cracks in your lobby, your welcome, your greeter's awkward nod, or the total absence of human interaction. Most guests don't feel seen. They don't feel known. They don't feel invited back.

And your follow-up? If it's a stale email or a "hope to see you again" postcard that arrives next Thursday, it's not helping. In fact, weak follow-up may actually reinforce their decision not to come back.

You don't need gimmicks. You need a strategy that makes guests feel like people, not projects.

# WORKSHEET

PUT IT TO WORK



**Action Steps:**

- Take a fresh look at your Sunday guest experience. Where is the friction?
- Ask a neutral visitor – preferably someone who’s unchurched – to attend and give unfiltered feedback.
- Review your current follow-up system. How long does it take to connect? How personal is it?

**What assumptions are you making about what guests feel?**

**What's the most impersonal part of your current follow-up process?**

**What would it take to make every guest feel noticed and valued before they ever hear your sermon?**

# Session

## 2

### *Create a Sunday “Wow” Moment That Sticks*

#### **Video Description:**

In this session, we reveal the one moment that has the power to make or break a return visit. It's not in the sanctuary – it's in the lobby. Learn how to build real connection and avoid the hospitality fails that make first-timers disappear.

You could have the best sermon series and the most talented worship team in town, but if nobody speaks to your guests in a meaningful way before or after the service, they won't care.

Hospitality starts with conversation. And not just “welcome to church” or “good to see you.” The real connection begins with eye contact, curiosity, and what we call the Connection Conversation:

1. Hi, I'm [Name]. I don't think we've met.
2. How long have you been coming here?
3. What keeps you busy during the week?

Those three lines can turn a stranger into a person. They open the door to relationship. And they let the guest know they're seen.

Equally important? Knowing when to keep it short. Sometimes people want space. The “wow” moment can also be helping someone find a seat and leaving them alone. But it's always intentional.





SESSION 2

# WORKSHEET

PUT IT TO WORK

**Action Steps:**

- Train your hospitality team on the Connection Conversation.
- Role-play with staff and key volunteers on what to say and when to step back.
- Walk through your lobby and parking lot with “first-time guest” eyes — is it clear where to go and who to talk to?

**When was the last time you had a meaningful conversation with a guest?**

**Are you teaching your team to read social cues and respond accordingly?**

**What does your body language say to first-time visitors?**

# Session

## 3

### *The One Follow-Up Tool Every Pastor Needs to Use*



#### **Video Description:**

In this session, we unpack why timing trumps polish when it comes to follow-up. You'll learn why the first four hours after a guest visits are critical, and how showing up in person with the right gift can dramatically change return rates.

When it comes to guest follow-up, most churches are already behind.

Old research used to say that if you followed up within 24 hours, you doubled your return rate. That's outdated. Now, you've got about four hours to make a meaningful impression. And no, a text doesn't count.

The most impactful follow-up tool you have is still the in-person drop-off. It's unexpected. It's personal. And it's powerful. Showing up at their home (briefly!) with a small, thoughtful, non-edible, non-mug gift demonstrates care.

People don't feel stalked. They feel honored.

We've seen this done with honey pots, coffee table books, plants with "Come Grow With Us" tags – things that are memorable, visible, and tied back to the church. Don't forget to include a business card or small insert and a church brochure with your church's website or social info.

This is the moment that sets you apart from nearly every other church in your community.

# WORKSHEET

PUT IT TO WORK



**Action Steps:**

- Choose a follow-up gift that aligns with your church culture and audience.
- Block off time each Sunday afternoon or Monday morning for in-person guest visits.
- Create a short doorstep script that communicates warmth and appreciation.

**When is your follow-up window currently happening ... and how can you shorten it?**

**What gift would represent your church well and stand out from the usual?**

**Who else in your congregation could be trained to help with guest visits?**

# Session

## 4

### *Texts, Calls, Cards: What Actually Works (and What Doesn't)*



#### **Video Description:**

This session outlines the proven 3-touch system for effective follow-up. You'll learn how to balance persistence with relevance, using multiple formats (without sounding desperate) to build familiarity, trust, and traction with guests.

Following up is more than sending a card and hoping for the best. It's about building a consistent, layered communication plan that gives your guests a reason to come back – and the sense that they matter.

The best follow-up plans don't rely on a single contact. They use **at least** three meaningful touches:

1. **A handwritten note** – warm, personal, and unexpected.
2. **A digital touch** – a friendly email or text inviting them back this weekend.
3. **A mid-week value message** – a newsletter or video that shows your church has more to offer.

It's about creating a rhythm of gentle presence. Not pressure. Not hype. Just real, human connection that invites people to take the next step ... at their own pace.

# WORKSHEET

PUT IT TO WORK



**Action Steps:**

- Write a sample handwritten follow-up note and train your team on how to personalize it.
- Schedule a Monday or Tuesday follow-up rhythm using text and email templates.
- Audit your newsletter or update email: Is it written with guests in mind?

**Are you connecting in ways that feel real — or rehearsed?**

**What part of your current system feels robotic, and how can you fix it?**

**How can you automate the process without losing the human touch?**

# Session

# 5

## *Building a Hospitality Team That Delivers a 5-Star Experience*

### **Video Description:**

This session highlights how to create a hospitality culture that delivers real connection, not just polite smiles. Learn how to move from random greetings to intentional zone-based care, and how to equip the right people with the right responsibility.

Too many churches confuse friendliness with hospitality. Just because someone smiles and says "welcome" doesn't mean a guest feels noticed, much less wanted.

Hospitality is intentional. It's structured. It's a strategy.

That starts with your team: and it needs to be a team. Not just a handful of volunteers who happen to be in the building early. You need trained, consistent people who understand how to read body language, have genuine conversations, and know when to engage or back off.

Zone coverage matters. Every part of your property, from the parking lot to the pew, should be owned by someone on your hospitality team. Nobody should walk 15 feet without being greeted or acknowledged.

And don't forget the pastor's role. The best place for you on Sunday morning? Not hiding in your office, but on the front lines shaking hands, making introductions, and setting the tone.



# WORKSHEET

## PUT IT TO WORK

### Action Steps:

- Map your facility and assign hospitality zones: parking, entrance, lobby, worship center, bathrooms.
- Appoint a team leader who can recruit, train, and replace greeters as needed.
- Establish a standard for how guests are greeted and guided from car to connection.

**Is your current hospitality team consistent and reliable?**

**Are there "cold zones" in your church that no one owns?**

**Who in your church has the relational warmth and leadership chops to lead hospitality?**



# Session

## 6

### *Meals Matter*

#### **Video Description:**

In this session, we reveal the single most effective strategy for guest retention: the post-visit meal. Learn how to extend a next-week invitation that locks in return visits, and how to scale it as your guest count grows.



Want guests to come back? Feed them.

One of the most effective tools we've seen for turning first-time visitors into returners is a lunch invitation. Not this week ... next week. Here's the move: when you meet a guest at the back door, don't try to squeeze lunch into an already packed Sunday. Instead, say: "Hey, I'd love to take you to lunch and hear more of your story. I can't this week — I've already got something booked, but could we meet next week?"

Most people say yes. And when they do, they almost always come back that second Sunday — and that's a win.

When you sit down with them spend your time listening. Ask them about their aspirations. Ask them about what keeps them up at night. Hear their stories. When people feel heard, they feel accepted. And when they feel accepted, they come back again. And again.

When guest volume increases, build a Lunch Bunch — a handful of members trained to make that same offer and follow through.

# WORKSHEET

## PUT IT TO WORK



### Action Steps:

- Block a recurring 90-minute window each week for guest meals.
- Write a simple lunch invitation script for yourself and future Lunch Bunch volunteers.
- Train 2–3 members to carry this ministry forward with consistency and care.

**What percentage of your first-time guests are currently being invited to lunch?**

**How many return guests have you personally sat down with in the last 60 days?**

**Who in your church could help shoulder the relational load and extend hospitality through meals?**

# Session

## *The 30-Day Visitor Nurture Campaign*



### **Video Description:**

This session breaks down how to nurture a guest over time, without pestering them. Discover how to create a follow-up rhythm that keeps your church top-of-mind and creates multiple return opportunities.

Not every first-time guest will return the next week. And that's okay. Life happens. But if they never hear from you again, don't be surprised when they ghost your church completely.

The best churches don't just follow up once ... they nurture.

That means building a 30-day communication plan with layered touchpoints:

- Week 1: in-person gift drop + handwritten note
- Week 2: a friendly email about your new series + an invitation to coffee
- Week 3: brief text message and newsletter
- Week 4: another text or email, plus a call or note from a layperson

Sprinkle in one big invitation like a special event or ministry opportunity that fits their interests.

Then keep nurturing quarterly. Send a handwritten card at Easter. A Christmas Card during Advent. Keep the door open.

The more consistent your nurture, the more likely they are to return when life pushes them to look for hope.

BTW, about that Week 2 Coffee Meet-up: When you sit down with them, **let them talk**. Ask about their background. Ask about their life. And then ask the spiritual enrollment questions:

- What would you like to accomplish spiritually in the next 12 months?
- What's likely to get in your way?

Then point them to a ministry in your church that can help. No pressure. Just a suggestion.



SESSION 7

# WORKSHEET

PUT IT TO WORK

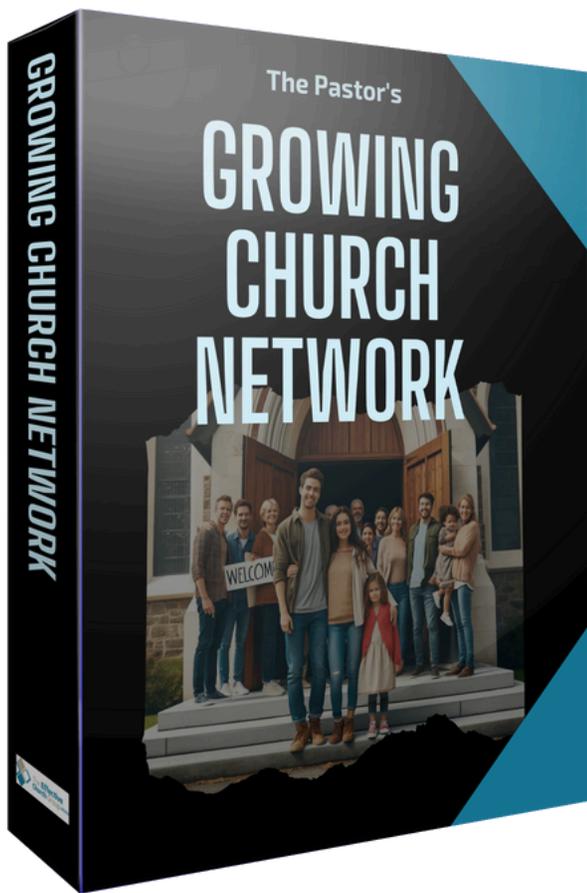
**Action Steps:**

- Build a 30-day communication calendar for first-time guests.
- Develop or repurpose an evergreen newsletter that's guest-friendly.
- Train a lay team to help with quarterly touchpoints (cards, calls, etc.).

**How many of your past 90-day visitors are still receiving care?**

**What parts of your nurture plan feel forced or ineffective?**

**What would it take to make nurture a natural extension of your discipleship process?**



You now have a complete, scalable system for turning visitors into returners, and returners into faithful disciples.

But that's just the beginning.

Because follow-up is just one piece of the larger puzzle. Our Growing Church Network equips pastors with field-tested systems to turn stagnant churches into growing ones, and growing churches into thriving disciple-making movements.

**[Click Here to Schedule Your  
Get Growing Conversation](#)**