

RETOURNER À L'AUTEL

The procedure of the yes

What to do when a man says: "I want to give my heart to Jesus", or "I want to be baptised".

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« Un seul autel. Beaucoup de chemins pour y revenir. »

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The rule that governs everything else

We are here to walk alongside, never to impose.

Every time you hesitate, this sentence settles it. If your act **imposes** (a delay, a form, a date, a decision, a public testimony), it is bad, even if it is well intentioned. If it **walks alongside**, it is good, even if it is slow.

Second rule, which flows from the first: when someone says yes, the first thing is not a form. It is a prayer. **And it is not yours, it is his.**

The goal is not that he be baptised. The goal is that he know Jesus, that he live with him, and that he become in his turn someone who brings another. A baptised person who makes no disciple is an abandoned building site.

FIRST OF ALL: the three situations that change the procedure

Do not go any further without having checked these three things. By ignoring them, you can do real harm.

1. Is this a minor?

If he is under 18: **the parents must be informed and involved**, including if they do not believe. A baptism, or even ongoing accompaniment, behind the parents' backs, is a serious fault, legally and pastorally, and it will destroy the family's trust for years. **Never one-to-one accompaniment with a minor.** Always two adults, or an open place, or the parents in the know. This is not suspicion: it is what protects the child **and** what protects you.

2. Is this person safe at home?

A question to ask before any advice: "Can you safely say at home what you have just experienced?" If there is violence, coercive control or threat in his household, **you do not ask him to announce it.** Mark 5:19 says "Go home to your friends and tell them", but Jesus never sent anyone to be beaten. **A woman who announces her conversion that same evening to a violent husband may pay a very high price for it.** Discretion is not cowardice, it is wisdom (Matthew 10:16). In that case, his house waits. His altar, on the other hand, can begin right away, in silence.

3. Is she lucid and free?

A decision taken under the effect of alcohol or a substance, in the middle of a psychiatric crisis, or in an exaltation that is not her own, **is not a decision.** You do not refuse it, you do not judge it. **You set it down again.** "We'll talk about it again tomorrow, calmly. I'll be there." If it is true, it will still be there tomorrow.

1. The hour that follows

You stage nothing. No applause, no announcement to the group, no "look who has just said yes". His decision belongs to him: he will speak about it when he wants, to whom he wants.

You take him aside. You, and at most one other person. Not a committee. *(If it is a woman, and you are a man, a woman comes with you. Always.)*

You lead him to Jesus, not to the Church. This is not the moment to say "welcome among us". It is the moment to say: **"He is there. Speak to him."**

And it is he who prays. Not you. This is the most important point in the whole sheet. If you pray in his place, or if you make him repeat a formula, **you are the one with the relationship, not him.** He will have attended his own conversion.

Tell him exactly this:

"Do you want to tell him yourself? No one is going to pray in your place. Say it to him in your own words. Even clumsy ones. **He is not waiting for a beautiful prayer. He is waiting for you.**"

If he does not know how to do it, do not give him a text. Give him **three footholds**, then keep quiet: 1. Tell him who you are, without fixing anything up. 2. Tell him that it is **him** you want. 3. Ask him for his Spirit, for today.

Then you ask together for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Not as an extra: as the only strength by which he will hold on tomorrow. Ezekiel 36:27: **it is not he who will walk, it is the Spirit who will make him walk.**

One sentence to finish, and not one more:

"**This is not the end. It is the first day.**"

2. The seven days that follow

This is **the most decisive and the most dangerous week.** This is where he is alone, where the old world calls him back. It is also, almost always, the week when the Church sends him a file.

No paperwork that week. No registration form, no course, no date, no committee.

Careful, a crucial distinction: bureaucracy crushes, but certain records protect. Informing the pastor, noting that a minor is involved, not leaving a man-woman accompaniment without a framework: this is not administration, it is protection. **Do it, discreetly, and do not talk about it to the person concerned.**

Five things, and only those:

A daily appointment with Jesus. The exact time, in his phone, from the very first evening. This is study 9: **before doing anything whatsoever for God, being with him.**

One chapter of the Gospel of John a day. Not Genesis. Not the prophecies. **Jesus.**

Every morning, asking for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit (study 6). Without that, he will try to hold on by his willpower, he will fail, and he will conclude that he was mistaken.

One contact each day, from a single person. A message, a call. **Not an official pastoral visit.** A brother, not an institution. Always the same question: "How did God help you today?"

One name, if he safely can. "Who, in your house, must hear it from your mouth?" (Mark 5:19). **But reread the safety question above: if his house is dangerous, this step waits, and it is neither a failure nor a lack of faith.**

3. The first month: becoming a disciple

Being with him (study 9). The daily appointment holds, or nothing else will hold. **The Word** (study 3). A Gospel first. The rest afterwards. **Prayer** (study 4). Let him learn to stop, not only to ask. **The altar** (study 8). A time, a place, a duration. Short and kept is worth more than long and abandoned.

A named companion, a face, a number. But not him alone. I had written "one single person". That was a mistake: if she burns out, moves away or disappoints, the new disciple falls with her. **One main companion, and a small group.** Acts 2:42: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **The New Testament knows no solitary Christian.** You protect him from the committee, not from the body.

4. The parallel track: knowledge

As soon as he has said yes, you can offer him the teaching lessons, in parallel. Never before. Never as a condition.

Two tracks, which move forward together and do not command each other: - **The relationship:** the 12 studies of the course. It leads. - **Knowledge:** the doctrinal lessons. It follows, at the pace he chooses.

Three absolute rules: 1. **Knowledge never blocks the relationship.** No lesson is a precondition for baptism. 2. **It never moves faster than he does.** If he wants one a week, so much the better. If he wants none this month, so much the better too. 3. **We offer, we do not prescribe.** "Does that interest you?" and not "here is your programme".

The detail of the lessons, their order and their pitfalls are set out in the document "**The parallel track: the teachings**".

5. Making disciples, from the first day

He can tell his story right away. He must not lead right away.

Telling: John 9:25, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see". That is **the whole** qualification.

Leading: 1 Timothy 3:6, "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit". **Give him no responsibility,** even if he shines, even if your church is short of hands, even if he asks for it. It is when he shines that we break him.

And set the course: his journey does not end at his baptism. It ends the day when **someone else**, through him, knows Jesus.

6. Baptism: when, and how

Do not delay on principle. In Acts, people are baptised the same day. A systematic delay is not biblical prudence, it is a habit. **Do not rush out of enthusiasm.** Neither yours, nor the group's, nor a campaign's.

Three questions, spiritual, not doctrinal: 1. **Does he know who Jesus is?** Not what the Church teaches. Who **he** is. 2. **Does he want to follow him, knowing the price?** The rich young man knew everything, and he left. **Jesus let him go.** 3. **Does he know that it is not he who will hold on?** If he believes he will manage by his own strength, he will fall and he will go away. Ezekiel 36:27.

And the tension you must own, not deny. In an Adventist church, baptism carries entry into a body that has distinctives: the Sabbath, the hope of the return, a way of life. A man baptised without knowing what he is entering may feel deceived six months later. **The solution is not to delay baptism behind a course. It is to move the parallel track forward at the same time,** and to check that he **knows what he is joining**, without requiring him to master everything.

The administration will come: the pastor, the interview, the local church, the register. That is legitimate. **But it comes afterwards, and it commands nothing.**

7. What we never do

We do not announce his decision publicly without his agreement. We do not put him on display. No "here is our new convert", no photo, no applause. **We do not make him tell his past in front of the assembly.** Shame closes again what grace has just opened. **We give him no responsibility. We do not leave him alone the first week. We do not make his baptism a figure.** The day a man becomes a line in a campaign report, we have stopped loving him.

8. If he falls back the first week

It is frequent. It is not a refutation of his decision.

What you answer, and nothing else: **"Thank you for telling me."** No starting over from zero. No baptism cancelled as a sanction. No sermon. No "you see, we should have waited".

Then you bring him back to two texts, these precisely: **Jeremiah 13:23:** no, he cannot change his skin. He has just verified it. **This is not a condemnation, it is the starting point. Ezekiel 36:27:** it is not he who walks. **He does not lack willpower. He lacks the Spirit of that very day.**

And the sentence from study 1, the one he must say **especially** on that morning:

"Jesus, I come just as I am, today again."

9. Duration: where we really lose people

We do not lose new converts the first week. We lose them between the third and the twelfth month, when the emotion has subsided, when the novelty has passed, and when no one calls any more.

Month 3: the crossing of the desert. The enthusiasm is dead, the habit is not yet born. This is where everything is decided. **A weekly contact, without fail.** The question stays the same. He has the right to say "nothing this week".

Month 6: the first disappointment with the Church. Someone will have hurt him, or disappointed him, or not greeted him. **It always comes.** Prepare him in advance: "One day, someone here will disappoint you. On that day, remember that you did not come for us." **It is the main cause of departure, and almost no one anticipates it.**

Month 12: the handover. He must no longer only be accompanied. He must **accompany**. The day he carries someone else, he stands up. **That is the loop: study 12 sends you back to study 1.**

The drift detector

This sheet can become exactly what it fights: a machine. **Here is how to know that you have drifted.**

You have drifted if, in the first minutes, you spoke about the **delay**, the **form**, the **course** or the **figure** before having prayed with him. **You have drifted if** you prayed in his place. **You have drifted if** you announced his decision without his asking you to. **You have drifted if** you asked the eunuch's question in his place. **You have drifted if**, looking at him, you think about what he will bring to your church.

This sheet is not a procedure to execute. It is an order of priority to defend. And it will be attacked, not by enemies, but by well-intentioned people: the board that wants its form, the campaign that wants its figure, the group that wants to applaud, the elder who wants to hand him a class.

Your job, on that day, will be to say no to your own camp.