

A Heart for Individuals

by: Lorne Sanny

One individual helping another—what we call “one-to-one,” or what I like to call “giving individual, personal attention”—is at the very heart of the Navigator emphasis. Dawson Trotman, who founded The Navigators, epitomized it more than any person I have ever met.

I came to know the Lord in my first year of junior college in California. In that first year I remember only one person giving me any personal help in the Christian life—someone who took about five minutes to suggest that I read the Bible.

The second year I helped get a Christian group going on the campus, and the following year I went to a Bible school in Los Angeles. I was thought of as a young fellow who was getting along fairly well in his Christian life.

There in Los Angeles, through a series of events, I met Daws Trotman and got into a Bible class he held each morning at 6:15 in his office. In the meantime, unbeknown to me, the pastor of a church I had attended got me elected director of an annual summer conference. So I got the pastors’ advisory committee for the conference to approve Daws as the conference speaker.

I had never been to a conference in my life, and when it came to running one I didn’t know beans. For instance, I didn’t know how to make announcements. I made them, but no one listened. So Daws took me off to the side and gave me some help on how to make announcements.

This was a family conference, and I thought we ought to have a little discipline; so I imposed a curfew. When one cabin of kids was out till midnight, I announced the next day that they had violated the curfew. Then the whole issue blew up in my face. This conference had been held annually for about fifteen years, and the people who came had never heard of a curfew. But Daws stepped in and calmed things down, and got the reins back into my hands again.

Then one afternoon he said, “Sanny, how would you like to have prayer with me tomorrow morning?”

I said I would love to, and asked what time.

He said, “Five o’clock.”

I said, “Pardon me?”

Yep, he meant five o’clock. I was to meet him on a little sand bar down at the edge of a creek.

I got there at five. Daws was already there, and had a little fire going on the sand. We had a couple of hours together in the Word and in prayer. Then he said, “How about tomorrow morning?” I said, “Good. I’ll be here.”

After a couple of these early morning prayer meetings, Daws said, “How would you like to have a time of prayer down by the creek after the meeting tonight?” So we went down and had another time of prayer.

Down deep in my heart there were certain things plaguing me, and I wanted someone I could talk to about them. I wasn’t the kind of guy to go around opening my heart to just anybody. In fact, there had been no one whom I felt free to really talk with. But there with Daws, I thought, *Here’s a man interested enough in me to give me help, to invest his time in me—maybe here’s a man to whom I can open my heart.* And I did, and he helped me.

Later that summer I got a letter from him in which he asked me to throw in my lot with him and come to work with The Navigators. After a lot of prayer, I agreed to work with him and live in his home. This was in the fall of 1941, and for fifteen years I got that kind of help from Daws Trotman. I’ll

be forever indebted to him for his willingness to invest time in me individually and personally.

How Is He Getting Along?

Over the years, and through various experiences, my conviction on the importance of one-to-one ministry has deepened more and more—although I must say that the vision for

it does not always stay clear. It sometimes gets blurred.

Early in my life with The Navigators, I was called back to my hometown to help a friend of mine who had a high school ministry in Modesto, California. I was to be there sixteen days, helping to set up a follow-up program in his ministry.

When I arrived, to my dismay I discovered that my friend had lined up eighteen meetings for me in those sixteen days, and they were with seventeen different groups.

I said to him, “You can’t follow up people like that. You don’t just wave a magic wand. You don’t just give them one pep talk and automatically get them down to business and moving on for Christ. You’ve got the meetings scheduled, and I’ll take them. But in between times, why don’t you let me talk individually with some of your key young people?” He agreed.

The first private talk was with the student body president of a high school of 2,500 students. After we had talked for a while, I asked, “Tell me, do you read your Bible?”

“Yeah.”

“When do you read it?”

“Well, before I go to bed at night.”

“How much do you read?”

“Oh, usually a chapter.”





“Do you read it every night?”
 “Well, almost every night.”
 “You mean you miss a night now and then?”

“Well, yes.”
 “How many nights a week do you think you miss?” And we went into that a little bit.

Then I said, “Tell me about your prayer life. How much time do you spend in prayer every day?”

He said, “Do we have to go into this?”

“Yep.”
 “Well, not as much as I ought to.”
 I found out that he spent maybe a minute to a minute and a half in prayer each night before he got into bed.

Later I talked to his youth leader, Ben. “Ben, there’s your key fellow—a Christian, clean-cut guy, athlete, student body president of 2,500 students. Tell me, how is he doing in reading his Bible?”

“Oh, all right I guess.”
 “How is he doing in his prayer life?”

“Well, he’s one of my best fellows.”
 I said, “Let me tell you how he’s doing.” After I did, I said, “Look, you preach to him twice a week, but you’ve got to get some time with him individually to know how he’s getting along.”

The next young fellow I met with was the president of the youth group in a neighboring high school. Ben had given him four Scripture verse cards to memorize six months earlier. As we talked, I asked him how he was getting along on these.

“Oh,” he said, “I lost them.”
 “Why didn’t you ask for another set?”

“Well, I was—I don’t know—I was just kind of afraid to.”

“Does anybody ever ask you how you’re getting along with them?”

“No.”
 When I saw Ben, I said, “Ben, six months ago you gave this boy these four verses to memorize. Tell me, how is he getting along on them?” Ben didn’t know. I said, “You’ve got to get individual, personal time with someone if you’re going to follow him up, if he’s going to grow. The tragedy is that this guy is about seventy-five verses of Scripture behind right now. Just think, if he had kept up, right now he could have seventy-five verses of Scripture written on his heart, available to the Holy Spirit day or night. But look what you’ve robbed him of. You preached at him, but you haven’t gotten to him. He needs individual, personal attention.”

Then I talked with a young lady who was supposed to be the key Christian girl in her high school. She walked in and sat down. I said, “How are you?”

“Oh,” she said, “not too good.”

“What’s wrong?”
 “Well—my boyfriend.”
 “What’s the matter with your boyfriend?”

“Well, he goes to junior college, and he’s backslidden, and I’ve been trying to help him.”

So we talked a little bit about how much a good-looking high school girl can help a backslidden college fellow—which isn’t much in spiritual things. And after a little while I said, “How often does he come over to see you?”

“Nearly every night.” It wasn’t long before tears were streaming down her cheeks as she cried over sin that was taking place in her life.

Then she said through her tears, “I want victory, I really do! But I don’t know anyone to go to.”

Later on I got with Ben. “Ben, I found out that this girl goes to where the Bible is preached, and she goes to Sunday school, to Sunday morning service, to Sunday night youth meeting, to Sunday night service, and to Wednesday night prayer meetings; she goes to a Saturday night youth group meeting, and goes to two meetings a week where you preach. And yet the effects of all of these are being virtually nullified by the sin taking place in her life. And the first person who ever sat down and took an individual, personal interest in her was me, and so to me she poured out this tale of woe. Now, Ben, you’re a great preacher, but you didn’t get to that problem.”

After a week of this, Ben began to get the picture.

Tied To Eternity

What’s involved in having a one-to-one ministry to individuals? Most people are looking for a list of steps in a formula, but what I want to stress is far deeper than that. It’s more than a formula or outline, or a good idea that some organization happens to propagate.

The first thing you’ve got to have is *a heart for people*—a vision of the worth of every person, and a vision of the possibilities of that person as a channel for God to use.

In everyone there are certain basic drives. But underlying everything, deepest of all, is a deep desire that life should have meaning—that it should be significant. Whenever this drive is suppressed, whether in a ghetto or under communism or elsewhere, it smolders until there is a revolt and the lid blows off.





There is in each of us an inner urge and a dissatisfaction until we realize there is meaning in life, till we are tied into eternity, till we're hooked into ultimate reality. The reason for this is that God himself intends for every single life to have meaning and significance.

Do you know that everyone—you, your neighbors, your relatives—*everyone*—was made in the image of God, with personality and with moral choice, and that these capabilities go on forever?

If all other living creatures on this entire earth should suddenly disappear, it would be less of a loss than if just one human soul ceased to exist

At night when you turn out the light but can't go to sleep, do you realize that you are of great significance and worth to God? You may not feel that you are significant to anyone else, but you are significant to God. You are worth something to him. You are of value to him.

God Picked Him Out

Not only is every person of inestimable value to God, but each person has great possibilities as a channel of blessing, because of the transforming power of Christ. A lot of us forget this. We don't have a vision of what God can do with a person.

Before I met Charlie Riggs, he had worked for seven years as a roughneck in the oil fields of Pennsylvania. The social graces weren't particularly prominent in his life. He could hardly talk without stuttering. If you asked a personnel board to consider him as a trainer of counselors for, of all things, the Billy Graham Crusades, he would have been last on the list

But God picked him out. And he has trained several hundred thousand people in personal counseling all over the world through his work with the

Billy Graham team.

When Charlie first came into my home, I was disappointed. I had scheduled a Bible class for servicemen, and only one serviceman showed up—Charlie Riggs. One man! In those days I didn't realize the importance of helping just one fellow. I was forced into it.

He would come to these meetings and sit without a smile, tough-looking and rugged. We would have our Bible class, and then he would leave.

But it wasn't long before Charlie came in one night and said, "Lorrie" (he always called me Lorrie—I don't know why), "let me show you something God gave me out of the Scripture."

I also remember the night when he came and said, "Lorrie, I've been getting up to meet the Lord in the morning at six, and then a quarter to six, and then five-thirty, but it still isn't time enough. I just feel I ought to get up and start my devotions at five." Soon I found out as well that he was reviewing two or three hundred memorized verses a day.

To me it's astounding what God has done with that fellow. I would never have picked him out for it. In fact, I've quit picking out people for what God wants to do with them. But I am getting in my heart an ever-increasing vision of the possibilities of every individual as a channel of blessing under the transforming power of Christ.

What I'm talking about is not an idea or a formula. It's something that has to get hold of your head.

In Luke 18:35-43, Jesus was walking into town, and there were crowds of people around. Then a blind beggar called out to Jesus, and he stopped. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked. "Lord I want to

And Jesus healed him.

In the very next passage, Jesus saw Zacchaeus the tax collector in a tree above the crowds, and Jesus said, "Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

As someone has put it, the beggar was off the road and in the ditch; the rich man was up a tree and out on a limb. Amid the throngs of people, Jesus saw in both of them men of worth and possibilities. Jesus had a heart for people.

You and I need to get hold of this. And the only way I know to do it is to get on your knees and ask God for it.

As a young Christian, Daws Trotman heard a sermon one night about having a passion for the lost, and how the only way to get that passion is to pray for it. So after he hopped on his motorcycle to head home, he took a little detour on a country road, stopped, parked the motorcycle, went out in the woods a little ways, and got down on his knees and prayed: "God, give me a heart for the lost."

Tonight, before you go to bed, ask God to give you a heart for people, a real vision of the worth and significance of an individual.



Zero In

We need to have such a heart for individuals that we'll be willing to invest ourselves in one person—not just multitudes, but the one out of a crowd. This is the significant thing about these two accounts of Jesus. He picked one out of the crowd.

When I first came to work with The Navigators, my responsibility was to oversee about thirty-five high school Bible clubs in the Los Angeles area, and I led three or four of these clubs myself.





With one club in Pasadena, I began to take Saturdays and meet one by one with these guys, starting at about nine in the morning. I would meet with one from nine to ten, then somebody else came in from ten to eleven, and so on. There were nine boys altogether. When I singled them out like this, I could see how much faster they seemed to grow. I could get to things I couldn't get to in the group.

In the group you can give a challenge, and hope that they get the application. But individually you can see that they get the application. You can zero in on them.

H. Clay Trumbull wrote,*

After my return from the army I was again in the Sunday school missionary field, which I had left to go out as a chaplain. For ten years I addressed gatherings of persons in numbers from ten or fifteen to five or six thousand each. In this work I went from Maine to California, and from Minnesota to Florida....

Later, I have been for more than twenty-five years the editor of a religious periodical that has had a circulation of more than a hundred thousand a week during much of the time. Meanwhile I have published more than thirty different volumes.

Yet looking back upon my work, in all these years, I can see more direct results of good through my individual efforts with individuals, than I can know of through all my spoken words to thousands upon thousands of persons in religious assemblies, or all my written words on the pages of periodicals or of books....

Reaching one person at a time is the best way of reaching all the world in time.

Do you have a heart for people—enough to give time to one person? Where can you start? Who have you got to start with? Anybody at all?

We often think, *Look at that sharp guy—brains, creativity, ideas. Oh, what God could do with him! But God doesn't need that guy's brains.* He doesn't need his creativity. He doesn't need his ideas. That isn't God's problem. His problem is getting people to carry out his ideas. Sure, he can use those brains and that creativity and those ideas, if they're dedicated to him. But they can also get in the way.

Once when Jesus was walking along

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the road and was weary, he sat down by a well. A prostitute came out of the city, and Jesus talked to her and revealed who he was. She went back into town, and many others came out to ask Jesus to stay in the town so they could hear what he had to say, and many believed.

Where did he start? He didn't look for the mayor. He didn't have to have the sharp leader.

You start where you are with the people God has given you, and see what God can do.

Disturbing The Peace

Being willing to invest in one out of a crowd means we've got to be willing to get involved with people's problems.

Sometimes we Christians don't want to get involved. We don't want the phone to ring at night. We want to pull up the drawbridge around our little home so nothing disturbs the peace of our little setup. But if you're going to get involved with people, it's going to

disturb your peace. That's the price to be paid.

Getting involved with people was a big part of Daws Trotman's life. If we were driving on the Los Angeles freeway and passed a stalled car, he would risk our necks to get back there and help.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:15, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." Have you ever really suffered for anybody else? That's what it means to work with others, one to one.

Are you willing to ask God for this kind of a heart? If you have it already, then you're over the hump. You've gone the majority of the way. God will give you ideas.

As a new Christian, Daws Trotman was given a Sunday school class of six junior high boys who had driven off the two

previous teachers. So he got alone with the Lord and said, "Lord, you made junior high boys. You know how they're wired. Would you give me some ideas on how to reach them, and how to get your truth across to them?" And God gave him some ideas.

Are you asking God for ideas? But remember, the important thing to start with is not the ideas, but the *heart* for people.

Not Complicated—But Costly

If there's a key word on this subject of helping individuals, it's the word *sharing*. Don't make it complicated. Just share your life. What has God blessed you with? What has he done for you? How has he helped you? Where have you been successful? Where have you failed? Share these things.

However much time you spend with him, and whatever else you do, your



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Pg 5



time together should have in it three basic ingredients. You can mix these ingredients in different proportions and in a different order from time to time, but it seems to me that these three must be involved.

The first is *testimony*. You openly identify with Jesus Christ. You share how God has saved you, and fulfilled his promises to you, and answered your prayers. Run up the flag. That's what God wants.

Testimony is a powerful thing. It brings victory over Satan. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). Testimony should be an ingredient of our discipling ministry all the way through.

The second ingredient is *God's word*. Pep talks don't get people down to business for Christ. God's word does. There's something about sharing from

the Scriptures, sharing something fresh and vital and alive, that strikes a fire down inside. Center your time around the Scriptures.

The third ingredient is *prayer*. I've heard it said, and I believe it's true, that you haven't really shared your heart with someone till you've prayed with him.

Looking back on my life together with Daws, the things that stand out increasingly as mountain peaks in our relationship were the times we prayed together—the five o'clock morning prayer meetings, or the time we went out on a football field on a summer night, there beneath the stars, and shared from the Scriptures and prayed.

As the person you're helping begins to grow, help him start moving out into ministry. What is the ministry? It's winning the lost and building the saved—making disciples. You get him

to do what you're doing.

Engage in prayer *with* him, *for* the ministry. Unless you start here, you'll get nowhere. It isn't enough to say, "You ought to pray about it." Pray *with* him, and pray about people by name.

I know this is very simple—but that's the way we want it. It isn't complicated. It just happens to be a costly thing, that's all.

It will tear you apart. But it will also thrill you. And you'll have no greater joy than to see that person walking in the Truth—except to see him get someone else walking in the Truth. That's sweeter still.

May God give you the heart for people, and make you willing to pour out your life for another.

*From *Individual Work for Individuals*, as quoted in Charles Gallaudet Trumbull's *Taking Men Alive* (1907).

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