

## History is His Story

Our church denomination is particularly careful about doctrines, and so it rarely endorses other books and programs written by other church bodies or parachurch organizations. One exception is **Navigators Ministry** of Colorado Springs. Navpress, their publishing company, has almost universal endorsement. How did that come to be?

**Dawson Trotman** was a kid from California whose parents were divorced. He was bright—both President of his high school class and valedictorian. He also led a youth organization at Lomita Presbyterian Church but he shed his Christianity once he graduated and immersed himself in the crazy life of rebellious young adults in the Roaring Twenties. When the police picked him up for public drunkenness, his distraught mother asked her friend to pray for him. The friend called back the next day and said she had spent a night in prayer and God showed her in a dream that Daws was holding a Bible and speaking to a large crowd of people. “Don’t worry about him anymore.” Indeed two days later, Daws went to visit his old Christian youth group which was challenging the young people to a scripture memorization contest. Well, he thought, I’ll show them! But God’s word doesn’t return empty. Daws was walking to work a week later and one of the verses hit him hard. “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God, even to them who believe on His name.” (John 1:12 KJV) Here was God, a true father. Here was a faith he’d always pretended but couldn’t trust. And so he prayed a simple prayer, “O God, whatever it means to *receive* Jesus, I want to do it NOW.” Spirit granted, and Dawson Trotman became what he called an ‘awkward Christian.’

He joined a personal evangelism group. But when others began to explain how to explain the Gospel, Daws already was convinced what it took—God’s eternal Word. God’s Word is powerful and speaks to people in their hearts! Scripture memorization would shape his future and his ministry. He started a discipling group called “Minute Men”. A Navy sailor joined the group and the guy talked about how they would spend boring months at sea. It crystallized Trotman’s vision of a group he called The Navigators, spiritual Navigators, who would lead other sailors in faith. World War II was around the corner. By 1945, Navigators had a presence on 800 Navy ships. They not only were spiritual leaders, they shared the gospel. And most importantly, they developed programs for Follow-Up, the notion that one doesn’t just become a Christian in a one-off decision of faith (as Trotman’s Calvinist upbringing would suggest) but we grow in the Gospel, as Luther taught. As the war ended, thousands of those Navy men came home to attend colleges under the GI Bill. The Navs became an important, but small campus ministry. Later, Daws met Billy Graham, a young Southern Baptist evangelist who was leading crusades. But who follows up on all those people who come forward when the choir sings *Just As I Am Without One Plea*? Graham had tried to enlist local churches but only some were interested. The Navigators were challenged by the mission, often steering people to churches they had attended for worship but also doing follow-up Bible Studies with the new Christians. The key to success? It was to realize that there are 9 principle doctrines that 97% of Christian churches agree upon. These form the core of Christian doctrine all Christians share. Those 9 orthodox principles and close faithfulness to the Word were the Nav hallmarks. This is why LCMS has little trouble with Navigator materials—they are Christianity 101. Other ministries have been heavily influenced as well with the Nav philosophy. Wycliffe Bible Translators, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade for Christ are a few. If your son or daughter goes to college or military, there is no better fellowship organization to have them look up than Navigators.

Scripture memory works. Navs stress that you not only need to memorize the passage, but also the verse number (like John 3:16). They use flash cards, but you can make them yourself out of old business cards or chits of paper. Take them in the car with you or put them on a window sill or your desk to review. The beauty of memorization is that you can meditate—recall God’s Word in your idle moments—or use them to share the gospel. I had a non-Christian friend in school and we played in a band together. He joined the Navy thinking he would get into the USO. But they put him on a small ship, the *Pueblo*, as the radio operator. *Pueblo* was captured by the North Koreans who broke Steve’s legs in torture, accusing him of running a spy network from the radio. Steve came back home, a Christian. I asked how it happened. “Captain Lloyd Bucher, was an old Navigator, who had memorized 2000 Bible passages. He would write these on toilet paper scraps and we would pass them around,” Steve related. “That is how I found God and He found me.”