

# Stages of Growth and Discipleship Plan

## Suggested Discipleship Strategy

A disciple is a person who hears the voice of the Lord and does what he says. Additionally, a disciple makes disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple grows spiritually much like a person grows and matures physically. Here's one way to think about spiritual growth.

### Disciple "Growth Chart"

#### (Stage 1) – "Infant" (typically new believer)

Must have "food" put in his or her mouth

- Needs to read the Word with a mature believer and have it explained/taught
- Highly dependent upon other teachers, sermons, podcasts, one-on-one discipleship, fellowship groups, study Bibles, books, study plans, charts, etc (See Nehemiah 8 for example)
- Critical that a mature believer check up with the new believer often and walk very closely in the new believer's life
- No knowledge or maturity should be assumed of a believer in Stage 1
- This believer will need a great deal of grace, patience, and care

#### (Stages 2-4) – "Child"

Learning to self-feed

- Still needs someone walking alongside, but allowing more freedom to explore, succeed, and fail
- Can open the Bible and get something from it correctly
- Learning to allow the Bible to critically analyze his or her own life and apply what he or she is learning
- Learning to hear the Word of the Lord and do what He says
- Starting to see how various theological ideas are interconnected throughout the Bible and sees the larger themes and the meta-narrative of the story of redemption
- Still needs one-on-one discipleship, podcasts, study Bibles, podcasts, sermons, etc., but not as heavily dependent upon a mentor
- Learning the ability to think critically of man-made resources by measuring them against the Word of God
- Is actively praying about mentoring someone else and might even be going through the Bible with a Christian in Stage 1
- Is actively sharing the Gospel with lost people
- Is regularly praying in community and on his or her own

(Stages) 5 & 6 – “Adult”

Feeds Babies and Children, Christians in Stage 1-4.

- Sermons, podcasts, book, study Bibles, etc. are nice but are not absolutely necessary for devotional time, worship, and personal study of God's Word
- Understands proper critical thinking regarding man-made resources by measuring them against the Word of God
- Holds a biblical understanding of various theological ideas and knows how these ideas are interconnected throughout the Bible
- Sees the larger themes and the meta-narrative of the story of redemption and can articulate them to Christians in Stages 1-4
- Is actively mentoring Christians in Stages 1-4
- Recognizes the need for continual growth in Christ and can articulate this need
- Regularly shares the Gospel and has the ability to teach others to do the same
- Prays regularly and often and has the ability to teach others to do the same

Because spiritual growth happens in seasons or stages, it's helpful to think of discipleship in terms of seasons or stages. Here are some potential milestones that may help you in thinking about how to minister for someone you are discipling, depending on which stage he or she may be in.

### **Stages of Discipleship** (Post Salvation)

Stage 1: Reads the Word and Prays

- a. Learning to hear from and speak to God
  - i. Is in a one-on-one discipleship
  - ii. Is in a fellowship or other small group
  - iii. Attends Sunday service

Stage 2: Hears from God

- a. Is experiencing biblical conviction
- b. Seems to “get it” when he or she reads the Word
- c. Able to articulate biblical understanding from the Word

Stage 3: Does Something (based on understanding from Stage 2)

- a. Observable evidence of hearing from the Lord (faith is seen by his or her “works”):
  - i. Action
    1. Doing or abstaining from something based on Stage 2
  - ii. Growth
    2. Able to articulate a change in thought and emotions based on Stage 2
    3. Observable movement toward biblical habits and spiritual formation

Stage 4: Making Disciples: Bringing Someone Else into Stage 1

- b. Inviting others to know Christ, pray, read the Bible, and/or attend a gathering of believers
- c. Leads one or more one-on-one discipleship group(s)

Stage 5: Growing Disciples

- a. Is a regular and active part of the life and growth of one or more believers in Stages 2-4
- b. Shows perseverance in training up believers in Stages 2-4
- c. Is encouraging his or her disciple(s) to move through the Stages of 2-4 into greater maturity

Stage 6: Proven Disciple Maker

- a. His or her disciple(s) has moved through Stages 2-4 and has reached Stage 5.
- b. Has formed a continual lifestyle of disciple making.

Just as there are as many different parenting methods in rearing children as there are different personalities in children, there are many different ways to disciple. It’s extremely important that you, as a disciple of Jesus called to disciple others, trust the leading of the Holy Spirit as you disciple others. Some people are more receptive to different methods and tools of discipleship so go with what will be the most helpful in teaching others to hear from the Lord and follow him. Here’s but one suggested plan to help you think through the process.

### **Suggested One-on-One Discipleship Plan**

The primary goal:

To lead a person to hear from the Lord and do what he says, growing into a mature “adult” in Christ at or beyond Stage 5.

The entire process (in most cases) should not take more than about a year if the disciple is serious about growing. During this time, the disciple maker should commit to praying often and fervently for and with the disciple(s). In addition, the disciple-maker must him or herself maintain a vibrant Christian walk, remaining a good model for the disciple(s) to follow. Paul said, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” The disciple maker should be able to say the same thing. Eventually, the disciple(s) should be able to transition from following the disciple maker to successfully following Jesus. In addition, the disciple should reach a point where he or she becomes a disciple-maker and can say, “Follow me as I follow Christ.”

One of the best places to start is the Commands of Christ. Use the Discipleship Essentials Bookmark and the Commands of Christ Guide to walk through each topic until the person follows that topic. Don’t move on until action is taken. Once the Commands of Christ plan is completed, move on to biblical books, using the Bible Study Essentials Bookmark and Discipleship Essentials Bookmark. This would also be a good time to walk through “The 411” handout with the disciple (included in the Commands of Christ Handout).

Start working through books of the Bible together. Here’s a suggestion:

1. Book of John
  - a. Work through a chapter or day (or less)
  - b. Allow the disciple to ask questions rather than simply trying to teach the disciple
  - c. Prayerfully seek to hear from the Lord
  - d. Use the Bible Study Essentials methods by Howard Hendricks or a question guide that includes observation, timeless principles, and application questions.
2. Book of Luke
  - a. The disciple-maker should start to ask less and seek to see observations from the disciple
  - b. If using a recourse like the Serendipity Study Bible, allow the disciple to ask the questions from time to time.
  - c. At this point, the disciple should be encouraged to go through the book of John with someone else.
3. Book of Acts
  - a. The disciple-maker should be even less involved in the “teaching” as the disciple should be lead to discover more and more
  - b. Practical application should be far more natural now.
  - c. Be sure to review the application each week to remain accountable to follow Jesus

At this point the disciple should be encouraged to read a biblical book on his or her own. When the disciple and disciple-maker meet, they should begin going through other extra-biblical books and contrasting them against Biblical teaching.

1. A Book on Prayer
  - a. Suggestion: *Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders* by Dave Earely
    - i. The last chapter has good application. Practice the application as you go.
  - b. The disciple-maker should have times when he is not available, allowing the disciple to work on his or her own, to see how it goes.
  - c. Larger gaps between meeting times allows opportunity for success and failure
  - d. Evidence of growth should be present in the disciple

2. A Book on Basic Gospel Sharing
  - a. Suggestion:
    - i. *Concentric Circles of Concern* by Oscar Thompson
    - ii. The disciple should go through the list-exercise for identifying every lost person he or she knows
  - b. The disciple should be doing evangelism with the disciple-maker
  - c. The disciple should be trying to do evangelism with one or more persons he or she is discipling
  
3. A Book on Discipleship
  - a. Suggestion:
    - i. *Discipleship UnComplicated* by Warren Haynes
    - ii. The disciple should fill in the blanks, complete the name list, try the tips, and take on the challenges.
  - b. The disciple should be starting a discipleship relationship
  - c. The disciple should be receiving coaching from his or her disciple-maker about discipling others.
  - d. The disciple should be using this guide with the person he or she has starting discipling with.
  - e. The Disciple should use the Christian Growth and Development Assessment with his or her disciple.

Now the disciple and disciple-maker should meet for coaching as the disciple is making one or more disciples. The process ends when the first disciple has completed the books with the second-generation person he or she is discipling.