

## Connection Church

### DESIGN - G - Growth Phase

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#### OPENING

- Recap: Roadmap to DESIGN — We are seeking God for a ministry **destination** that is based on HIS calling, and along the way we want our **Spiritual Gifts** to sharpen for the task, and our **experiences** to find their place in God's story. In order to do that, we need to admit where we are in our **Spiritual growth** (without feeling condemnation).
- Matthew 4:19 — follow me and I will make you fishers of men.
- Matthew 15:10-20 — Do you still not understand?
  - The Disciples were being **grown** into fishers of men. They didn't understand things sometimes. They were not self-aware at times. They acted *wrongly* on the *right* impulses sometimes ("should we call down fire??"). In the end, they were used to change the world.

**BIG IDEA:** We are in a Spiritual stage. Knowing where we are is the first step to getting to where we want to be.

The growth phases are:

- Spiritually Dead
- Spiritual Infant
- Spiritual Child
- Spiritual Young Adult
- Spiritual Parent

#### Evaluate

- What growth phase are you at?
  - What 5 descriptions/sayings would you point to as evidence?
  - Maybe have them rank the 5 most true or 5 they have said lately
- Which experiences resonate most with you for what you need?
- Who in your life do you have access to that you could lead toward becoming a Spiritual Parent?

# STAGES OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

## Key points:

- This is a tool – a language for leaders, not a way to label people.
- This is a way to assess ourselves and others.
- **People are complicated and can be in various stages at different times.**

## Stage 1: Non-Believer

People in this phase do not know Christ and have not accepted Him. They are characterized by their unbelief and rebellion. They may refuse to let anyone (including God) tell them what to do. Some may say they are not against God, but their lifestyle reveals a heart of rebellion.

## NON-BELIEVER/DEAD: Characterized by Unbelief

- Confused or numb about spiritual things
- Misguided worldview
- Living by their own understanding
- Develop a belief system through experiences
- Unresolved conflicts personally and relationally
- Anger towards God or the church
- Ignorance of the things of God
- Misinformed views concerning spiritual truths
- Self-absorbed
- Misdirected – seeking answers from the world
- Broken relationships
- A lack of real forgiveness
- A belief that they are as good or better than others in the world
- See no need to be saved

## Things they might say:

- “I don’t believe there is a God.”
- “The Bible is just a bunch of made up stories.”
- “Evolution explains away the need for God.”
- “Religion is responsible for all the wars in the world.”
- “There are many ways to get to God.”
- “I don’t need to be saved, I am a good person.”
- “There is no such thing as hell.”
- “I am a Christian because I go to church.”

## What to do:

- Practical acts of kindness
- Develop relationship
- Find ways to practically care
- Invite them to church or social events
- Have scheduled times of coffee moments
- Listen to their story

## What do they need?

### 1. SHARE God's Love

- a. They need to hear the Gospel explained.
- b. They need to see the Gospel lived out.
- c. They need answers to their questions about God.

### 2. FAITH in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

- a. They need to trust in Christ as Savior. He is their only hope, and they are in desperate need of salvation through Jesus.

## Stage 2: Spiritual Infant

This person has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, but is **not connected and is not being disciplined**. They are characterized by ignorance of God's Word. They may have a lot of confusion over what it really means to be a Christian. It is important to know that some spiritually immature people have been in church for 16 years or more. A person's physical maturity does not represent spiritual maturity.

## INFANT: Characterized by Ignorance of Truth

- Ignorance about what the Bible says about life and the purpose of a Christian
- Ignorance about or frustration towards Christians and the church
- They don't know what they need – they are ignorant about the spiritual life
- Always need someone to take care of them. No idea what they need
- Ask "why" a lot
- Says "NO" a lot; miss many good things for poor reasons
- Get disappointed easily; live by their emotions
- Act out when they don't get their way
- Struggle to put words to their feelings
- Can't think past the moment

- Cannot put words to their feelings at all
- Expectation is that those in the church make no mistakes – have unrealistic expectations
- Self centered – self ruled
- Define themselves as the culture would define them
- They have a worldly perspective – some spiritual truth
- Struggle to connect their faith to everyday life
- Their flesh is still dominant in their belief system
- Struggle to trust without a faith history
- Unresolved conflict personally and with others
- Ignorant of internal belief systems
- Beginning to do things out of obedience, not relationship
- Blaming others for thoughts, feelings, and behavior
- Run to what is comfortable and back into old coping behaviors in times of struggle.
- They resist almost anything that is good for them: healthy food, training, ending old habits/relationships, old behaviors
- Guided primarily by feelings

### **Things they might say:**

- I can do it
- Mine
- I don't like that
- I don't want to
- Ask them what's wrong: I don't know
- "I believe in Jesus."
- "I don't need anyone else, just me and Jesus."
- "I work a lot to provide for my family, I don't have time for small group."
- "I didn't know the Bible said that."
- "The church just wants my money."

### **What to do:**

- Model a surrendered life
- Teach them the Bible and apply it to their experiences
- Help them develop new habits
- Encourage them to get into relationships with more mature disciples
- Teach them foundational truths of Scripture
- Need a young adult or parent in their life to keep them on course

## **What do they need?**

### **1. SHARE their LIFE**

a. They are dependent because they cannot accomplish growth alone anymore than a baby can feed and care for itself the day it comes home from hospital. They need a spiritual parent to build a relationship with them. They need to see a more mature believer living out the discipleship lifestyle so they can imitate their behavior

### **2. SHARE new TRUTH**

a. They need someone to teach them the truths of the Bible.

### **3. SHARE new HABITS.**

a. They need help developing new habits that will become the rhythms that they will live by as disciples of Jesus. They need to learn how to develop spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, Scripture memory, etc.

## **Stage 3: Spiritual Child**

As believers, they have recognized their need for relationships with other Christians. They are connected to a relational environment for the purpose of discipleship, but it's all about them. They are characterized by self-centeredness.

## **CHILD/ADOLESCENT: Characterized by Self-Centeredness**

- Spiritual highs and lows – feelings very important
- Sometimes very aggressive – witnessing to friends
- They love the relationships they are forming and they don't want to lose them
- They will often feel like people are not caring for them enough
- They will mimic mature Christian's behaviors yet motives will be for self and praise
- They will like the club if the club is working for them
- Get excited about new teachings
- Will study the Bible themselves and have misgivings about what the Bible teaches
- Will have an incomplete view on subjects
- Will know more about what Christians say than what the Word says
- May desire for their life to improve, but still looking for the easy way
- Want to be good at something but don't want to put in the work to be good
- More focused on how things affect them than others

- Don't mind inconveniencing others to get what they want
- Blame other people for their moods and feelings
- Frustrated because they are not as far along as they desire
- Can think they are farther along than they are
- Want benefits without the responsibilities
- Me, me, me
- Fun, fun, fun
- Moods are affected by other people, "People make me..." Mood swings
- Ask if certain behaviors are right rather than wise
- Focused more on the external than the internal: looks, image, what people think about them, will they be accepted. Major on the minors but the minors are major to them.
- Many feelings, but struggle to put words to their feelings, communicate
- Exaggerate everything: Never, Always
- Comparing their situations and circumstances to their peers
- Fair
- Can appear to act like they know more than they know
- Easily tempted because still relying on self
- Struggle with trust in times of difficulty
- Struggles with surrender and sacrifice
- May serve in ministry but not still not clear about "sweet spot"
- Devotional life is rare or very inconsistent
- Are able to see faults/weaknesses in others without seeing them in themselves

### **Things they might say:**

- There is nothing to eat in this house
- I never get to do what I want
- Life's not fair
- "You are always"... "you never let me"
- I've got to have this right now, there's plenty of time to do summer reading
- "I love church!" or "I love Jesus!"
- "I love my small group, don't add anymore people to it."
- "Don't multiply my group—it is just right for me."
- "My leader isn't spending enough time with me."
- "I didn't like the music at church today, they should have played..."
- "I am not being fed, so I am going to a church that meets my needs better."

**What to do:**

- Give opportunities for monitored service
- Invite them to pray and pursue “next steps”
- Encourage them to join a Connect Group / Group One
- Begin challenging their thinking and behaviors
- Begin moving them outside their comfort zone
- Help them embrace ministry
- Encourage them to attend Close the Gap

**What do they need?**

1. CONNECT to God.
2. CONNECT to a Group (Family)
3. CONNECT to Their Purpose

## **Stage 4: Spiritual Young Adult**

A spiritual young adult is one who has moved from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. This move is becoming less aspirational and actually tangible. They are beginning to see that God shaped them for a **purpose**, and as their **priorities** begin to change, they start looking for a **place** to serve where they can use their abilities and gifts. They are characterized by service.

### **YOUNG ADULTS: Characterized by God, being others-centered, and embracing a life as an ambassador for Christ**

- They will desire to serve others for their good and the glory of God
- They will feel responsible for the outcome – possible pride if a person changes and possibly discouragement if they don't
- They won't think strategically about building others up into leadership but will desire to serve them
- Naïve about other believers
- Have experiences of God's faithfulness in their life
- Black and white about what the Bible says and won't understand why the church isn't handled differently – confrontation, etc.
- Transitioning from self to others
- Beginning to see a bigger picture
- Worldview is changing
- Accepting more responsibility
- Living by truth and less by emotions
- Gaining knowledge and wisdom, but still lack resources
- Begin to ask if certain behaviors are wise vs. right
- Becoming responsible for themselves but they are beginning to feel the consequences of their behavior
- Understanding why they think, feel, and do things; however may not be able to consistently verbalize it, but growing
- Building relationships to invest in others
- Beginning to discover their ministry "sweet spot"
- Take responsibility for their behaviors
- Devotional life is growing and more consistent

### **Things they might say:**

- "I love my group, but there are others out there that need to experience this."
- "I think I could lead a group with a little help. I have a few friends I could get to come to my group."



- “I parked 3 blocks away to find a parking spot, that’s incredible.”
- “\_\_\_\_\_ missed group last week and I called him to see if he was okay...their kids have the flu so can we make some food and take it over to the house so they don’t have to cook.”
- “In my devotions I came across something I have a question about.”
- “I noticed we don’t have enough people helping with parking...how can I help serve?”

### **What to do:**

- Equip them for ministry
- Give them more responsibility
- Guide them farther outside their comfort zone
- Encourage deeper biblical study
- Suggest books to read to continue their journey
- Continue to challenge old patterns of behavior that God is transforming
- Should begin the process of investing in someone else.

### **What do they need?**

1. A place to SERVE.
2. Someone to EQUIP them.
  - a. Draw this person in to be MAWL’d by you, or someone that does the ministry they are gifted to be in.
    - i. Model, Assist, Watch, and Leave
3. Need to be Released to do Ministry.

### **Stage 5: Spiritual Parent**

A Spiritual Young Adult is serving but they are not yet thinking in terms of reproducing. They may recruit people to help them but it will only be to complete a task that needs to be done. The reason we use the word parent rather than “adult” is because a parent is someone who has **multiplied**, meaning they are developing future leaders that will also multiply. Spiritual parents reproduce. They intentionally make other disciples who in turn **make disciples**. Spiritual Parents are characterized by **INTENTIONALITY**.

### **PARENT: Characterized by Intentionality and Strategy**

- Knowledge of God’s Word has moved from the head to the heart
- Concerned about their children
- Regularly sacrificing their needs and desires for the family

- Commitment is firm and does not waver
- Live by truth and conviction, not emotions
- Have many experiences of God's faithfulness
- Embracing their ministry "sweet spot"
- Relationships are intentional
- Investing in the lives of people
- Understanding and embracing God's will
- Open, vulnerable, and transparent
- Sacrifice and surrender are normal
- Trust Jesus through difficult times
- Understand how their actions and words affect others
- Understand the connection between their beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and can verbalize it
- People seek them out for counsel and spiritual guidance
- Understand God's Word as they read it
- Consistent devotional life.
- Helping others see their purpose, giftedness, and value to God.

### **Things they might say:**

- "I started doing a Bible study at work with a friend, please pray for me."
- "The other night we had a couple over and spent some time encouraging them and praying together; they are struggling right now."
- "I have a person in my small group who is passionate about children, I need to call our children's director and get them plugged in."
- "I met with a guy for breakfast yesterday to start developing a relationship with him...he's not a Christian."
- I can't go to the lake, golf, etc; my [insert higher priority] has an event
- Our kids can't get involved in that because it would interfere with our Kingdom commitments
- I had to have a hard conversation last night and set some boundaries
- I'm tired
- We do it because it's right, not because we feel like it

### **What to do:**

- Turn them loose
- Provide ongoing training for their ministry area
- Provide leadership development opportunities
- Affirm and encourage them often
- Ensure they are caring for themselves

## **What do they need?**

1. Leadership Roles.
2. Ongoing relationships with other disciple-makers.
3. Released to Disciple.

## **Evaluation of Stages of Maturity:**

- Read your evaluation written in your Shepherding Triad document. Is what you have written match the descriptions for your category?
- What part of the description doesn't match with your own assessment? Is your head lagging behind your heart? Etc.
- If you have not raised up leaders who are currently raising up other leaders, find yourself missing many church events, seen growth in your area of ministry, have a hard time maintaining personal disciplines, but still call yourself a Spiritual Parent, where do you think the disconnect lies?
- What is your plan to move yourself from where you are to becoming a Spiritual Parent?
- What is your plan to move your group from where they are to becoming Spiritual Parents?
- Who in your group could you invest focused attention on with a high probability of them becoming a leader?