

## 5 Stages of Spiritual Growth

Pastor Jim Putman has identified five stages of spiritual growth and proposes that everyone is in one of the stages. Knowing the stages can help you grow personally, help others develop in their maturity, and assist churches in creating a strategic plan for discipleship.

### Stage 1: The Seeker

In stage 1, a person is not yet alive to God; he or she has not been born again. This stage is characterized by the word 'unbelief.' God's Word says that each person starts out in life "dead in [their] trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). This means we are separated from God and will remain so for eternity unless we believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. The seeker needs a healthy relationship with a maturing believer – a picture of the real Jesus lived out in front of them – an explanation of the gospel message, and an invitation to receive Christ. Even though this person is not a believer, they can still be seeking answers to life's greatest questions: Why am I here? What happens after death? If there is a God, why does he let bad things happen to good people?

### Stage 2: The Believer

After a Seeker receives Christ and is born again, he or she immediately enters stage 2: spiritual infancy. God's Word calls them "infants" (1 Pet. 2:2) and "babies" (1 Cor. 3:1). Spiritual infants know something has changed and are usually excited about telling others about it. However, in many ways they tend to make messes. They are characterized by the word 'ignorance.' They may know many things, but they are ignorant of how to live out this new life as a follower of Christ. Some of the things a spiritual infant needs are individual attention from a mature believer (e.g. a spiritual parent, see below), an explanation of the basic truths found in the Word of God, and both an explanation and modeling of the habits of a growing believer.

### Stage 3: The Learner

As they grow, spiritual infants become spiritual children. Throughout the Bible, we see comments that refer to this childlike spiritual stage (1 John 2:12; 1 Cor. 13:11). Jim Putman describes this stage well: "They can be excited about their faith, and in many ways, they are innocent and cute. However, they still act childish and are often rebellious and self-centered in many ways. Spiritual children tend to do what they should only when they are rewarded or threatened with some kind of punishment. They may do the right thing, but it's usually to avoid an outcome they dislike or to get

something they want.” Some of the needs of a spiritual child, in order to help them continue to grow, are both instruction and modeling as to how to feed themselves, who they are in Christ, how to have fellowship with Christ and other believers, and about appropriate expectations concerning other believers.

#### **Stage 4: The Server**

As a Learner (a spiritual child) grows up, they mature into the spiritual young adult stage – the Server (1 John 2:13). At this stage, the believer has a decent grasp of God’s Word and is action/service-oriented, zealous, God-centered, and mission-minded, but they don’t often think in terms of reproducing disciples. They have a great desire to serve, help, bless, and make their life count. They want to make an impact and be used. In order to grow, a spiritual young adult requires a place to learn to serve, a spiritual parent who will debrief them about ministry experiences, ongoing relationships that offer encouragement and accountability, guidance regarding appropriate expectations of people they will serve, and help in identifying their gifts and skills for ministry.

#### **Stage 5: The Leader**

In this final stage of spiritual development, we become spiritually mature enough to reproduce disciples – we become spiritual parents – the Leader (1 Cor. 4:15, 17; 1 Thess. 2:11; 1 John 2:13-14). The difference between a spiritual young adult and a spiritual parent is the spiritual parent thinks about how to help others grow through the stages in order for the other believers to reach spiritual parenthood while the young adult simply thinks of blessing others without any consideration of helping others grow through the stages. As a spiritual parent you want to lead someone to Christ or help new believers develop in their maturity. You are intentional and strategic about this process. Some of the needs of a spiritual parent are an ongoing relationship with co-laborers, a church family, and encouragement.

Questions to consider:

- In what stage do you see yourself?
- What do you need in order to grow to the next stage?
- What is hindering your growth right now?
- How could your local church strategically and intentionally help people move through the stages?

*This handout is adapted from an article entitled “5 Stages of Spiritual Growth” by Jeff Stott (10.30.2014) and based on Real Life Discipleship by Jim Putman. <https://truthappliedjs.com/5-stages-of-spiritual-growth/>*