

growing disciples





G r o w i n g D i s c i p l e s

is a collaborative initiative by the Ministries Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It is designed as a whole-church endeavor, based on the biblical view that the person who accepts Christ as Savior is called to a Christ-like life of spiritual, mental, physical, and relational growth. *Growing Disciples* (a work in progress) will help church ministry leaders at every level of church organization to better undertake the complex, multi-faceted process of discipling—that of enabling people to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ within the fellowship of the church, His body.



Growing Disciples Curriculum Framework

This framework is organized thematically according to the cyclical processes of discipleship—

Connecting:

Growing in relationship with God, others, and oneself;

Understanding:

Growing in knowledge of Jesus and His teachings;

Equipping:

Growing in the skills of one's giftedness and application of God's Word to life; and

Ministering:

Growing in participation in God's mission of revelation and reconciliation.

On the chart on the next page, goals for the growing Christian are articulated for each of these themes. The completed framework will outline the discipling objectives of the church's ministries according to the goals listed on the chart. Developmental messages, appropriate for children, youth, young adults and new converts as well as maturing members will be organized under each objective.

Growing Disciples Curriculum Concepts

THEMES

Connecting

Growing in relationship with God, others, and oneself.

Understanding

Growing in knowledge of Jesus and His teachings.

Equipping

Growing in the skills of one's giftedness and application of God's Word to life.

Ministering

Growing in participation in God's mission of reconciliation.

GOALS

The growing Christian will:

- Develop an individual identity that is complete in Christ through the process of on-going spiritual formation both individually and in community
- Develop a dynamic, deepening relationship with God
- Develop Christ-centered family relationships
- Develop positive relationships in the local church as a member of the body of Christ
- Develop a strong connection to the world church family
- Develop a relationship with those outside the church to fulfill the Gospel commission
- *Develop maturing relationships for friendship, fellowship, support and accountability*

The growing Christian will:

- Develop an understanding of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
- Develop an understanding of the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of humanity as created in God's image
- Develop an understanding of the plan of salvation and their role in it
- Develop an understanding of the church as the body and bride of Christ
- Develop an understanding of the Christian life as one of joyful worship and obedience to God and fellowship in the community of believers
- Develop an understanding of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan and its implications for end times
- *Develop an understanding of biblical teachings in terms of how they illustrate the character and mission of Christ*

The growing Christian will:

- Learn to embrace a transformative personal devotional life
- Become skilled in living a contagious, practical Christian life
- Discover spiritual gifts and personal giftedness
- Learn how to use spiritual gifts in fulfilling a personal call to ministry in the local church
- Learn how to use spiritual gifts in fulfilling a personal call to ministry in the world church
- Learn how to use spiritual gifts in fulfilling a personal call of mission to the world
- *Learn to apply biblical models to make decisions that are in harmony with spiritual beliefs, goals, and values*

The growing Christian will:

- Seek opportunities in all daily activities to minister to others
- Recognize and respond to the needs of God's suffering children in the local community and around the world
- Share their story of Jesus with community members, friends, and co-workers
- Invest themselves in the discipleship of others
- Support the ministries of the local and global church with personal resources
- Embrace the evangelistic mission of the church to tell the world the story of Jesus
- *Accept Christ's call to a life of ministry through His gifting and enabling*



A Biblical Discipleship

God Reveals Himself

God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is the embodiment of love.¹ Even before Creation, God expressed love for humankind by working out the plan of salvation. Since the entrance of sin, however, humanity is separated from God and, on their own, cannot understand this kind of love. Therefore, God takes the initiative in self-revelation, wanting to restore the relationship with humanity and to save them from sin and its penalty.²

God's self-revelation is manifest through: (a) nature;³ (b) prophecy;⁴ (c) the life, death and resurrection of Jesus;⁵ (d) the Holy Spirit;⁶ (e) providential workings;⁷ (f) miracles and other acts;⁸ and (g) the Word.⁹ God will continue to be revealed to those who obey His commands out of love.¹⁰ In turn, the saved ones will be empowered to help reveal God's nature to others.¹¹

God Solves the Sin Problem

Humanity was created in the image of God, capable of love and fellowship with the Godhead and others, and with moral freedom to choose whether to obey and follow the Creator.¹² Adam and Eve were enjoying a daily relationship with God until sin (a distrust of God and obedience to the temptation of Satan) separated them from God and one another.¹³ They exchanged their godly dignity and the truth about their Creator for the lies of a created being who has brought devastation and shame to all humanity.¹⁴ Through Christ, God reconciled Himself with humanity and provided the way by which humanity could be restored to relationship with Himself and their fellow human beings.¹⁵ Jesus revealed the deceptive, self-absorbed nature of Satan and all who follow him, while showing Himself to be a shepherd-Savior who died for His sheep to provide them with reconciliation and abundant life.¹⁶

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him and Abide in Him

Like sheep following a trusted voice, believers know the voice of their Shepherd and are called to follow.¹⁷ They invite God's presence on a daily basis, and radical changes occur in the way they relate to the Creator and to others.¹⁸ Through Christ's transforming grace, believers are called to imitate God "as dear children."¹⁹ Through His Spirit they can come to a unique understanding of God's character and a relationship with God through a steadfast relationship of obedience.

Jesus commands us to abide in Him to receive life and to maintain a living relationship.²⁰ Abiding in Jesus means believing in Him as the Son of God, obeying what He says, loving one another within the community of God's people, extending that love by obeying Christ's command to bring the gospel to the world, and following His example to make disciples of all nations.²¹

The Spirit Empowers New Birth, Growth, and Fruit

By accepting the influence of the Spirit, the sinner can experience new birth, and, through baptism, die and be resurrected with Christ.²² A new life in Christ is characterized by spiritual growth that leads to unity with Jesus and others.²³ Like a baby who grows to adulthood and a seed that develops into a tree, disciples will bear fruit through the Spirit as long as they stay connected to the Vine.²⁴

Having spent three years discipling the Twelve, Jesus left them with the great gospel commission to follow His example in making disciples.²⁵ To empower them to accomplish that commission, He gave them His greatest gift, the Holy Spirit.²⁶ They were to teach all things that Jesus taught.²⁷ Disciples today still grow and mature through the Spirit.²⁸ Like a farmer who prunes the plant in order to induce fruit bearing, the Holy Spirit, in harmony with the Word of God, "prunes" Christ's disciples through conviction and correction.²⁹ Only a Spirit-led disciple can make another disciple for Jesus Christ.³⁰ Thus the life of a disciple extends the Master's love and ministry to the world.

Jesus Calls Disciples to Love One Another and Build Up His Body

God showed His love for the Church by sending His Son to die for her.³¹ He also designed that His love for the Church manifest itself through His disciples. He calls them to the task of loving one another and of edifying and building up the Church.³² The biblical teachings of the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit are the key to understanding how God loves and builds up the Church through His disciples. He provides every grace and ability that is needed to fulfill this commission.

The fruits of the Spirit³³ provide the graces through which God's love is revealed in the relationships of disciples with one another. This fruit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The gifts of the Spirit, such as teaching, evangelizing, faith, and service, provide disciples with the ministries that build up the body of Christ.³⁴ God is responsible for the success of this work, only asking that His disciples serve as willing instruments in His hands.

Jesus Sends Disciples Into the World to Further His Kingdom

Throughout history God has called men and women to testify of His goodness, share their faith, and invite those who did not know Him to follow.³⁵ As the first disciples of Christ were invited to follow and then were commissioned to "go and make disciples," so each believer becomes part of a continuing line of witnesses who seek to expand the fellowship of believers.³⁶ In simple form Christian witness involves a passionate testimony of a personal encounter with Jesus and an invitation to follow Him.³⁷ Along with witnessing through preaching and proclamation, and seeking to model the exemplary life of Jesus, disciple-making also requires the support and mentoring of new followers and fellow believers.³⁸



Discipleship

Ellen G. White

It is your privilege ever to grow in grace, advancing in the knowledge and love of God, if you maintain the sweet communion with Christ it is your privilege to enjoy. In the simplicity of humble faith ask the Lord to open your understanding, that you may discern and appreciate the precious things of His Word. Thus you may grow in grace, grow in simple, trusting faith (*God's Amazing Grace*, 292).

Abiding in Christ is choosing only the disposition of Christ, so that His interests are identified with yours. Abide in Him, to be and to do only what He wills. These are the conditions of discipleship, and unless they are complied with, you can never find rest. Rest is in Christ; it cannot be as something apart from Him (*Selected Messages*, book 1, 110).

The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. God is glorified as His people unite in harmonious action (*The Adventist Home*, 179).

We need to live in close fellowship with God, that we may love one another as Christ has loved us. It is by this that the world is to know that we are His disciples (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, 218, 219).

All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another. . . . This love is the evidence of their discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples," said Jesus, "if ye have love one to another." When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence (*The Desire of Ages*, 677, 678).

When in conversion the sinner finds peace with God through the blood of the atonement, the Christian life has but just begun (*The Faith I Live By*, 117).

So the Christian strikes root deep into Christ. He has faith in his Redeemer. He knows in whom he believes. He is fully persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners. . . . The roots of faith strike deep down. Genuine Christians, like the cedar of Lebanon, do not grow in the soft surface soil, but are rooted in God, riveted in the clefts of the mountain rocks (*Our High Calling*, 331).

The Saviour . . . points out the sign of discipleship: “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (*Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2, 292).

Our Saviour compares Himself to a vine, of which His followers are the branches. He plainly declares that all who would be His disciples must bring forth fruit; and then He shows how they may become fruitful branches. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4) (*Reflecting Christ*, 96).

The humility and benevolence of Christ’s life revealed in ours, is the testimony we give to the world that we are his disciples. Through a life of obedience and self-sacrifice we are to reveal the love of God for fallen man (*Review & Herald*, September 17, 1908).

Christ is our personal Saviour; and if we are His disciples, our wrong-doing will cease, unrighteousness will come to an end. The strife to be first will no longer exist; for Christ will be formed within, the hope of glory. Pure and undefiled religion will be seen in our lives (*Youth’s Instructor*, December 8, 1898).

In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns

to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 328).

Do not seek to shun responsibilities. To do this is to dishonor the claim of discipleship. In His ministry on this earth Christ represented His Father. We are to follow in His steps (*Letter 140*, 1901).

As you reveal wisdom by faithfulness in the home life . . . you will reveal faithfulness in the church as patient, kind, forbearing teachers. The Lord will see that you can be trusted with souls. You have learned lessons in His school as to how to deal with human minds and to lead them forward and upward to the holy standard of God, that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (*Testimonies to Southern Africa*, 33).

Those who are called of God to labor in word and doctrine should ever be learners in the school of Christ. . . . Those who do not feel the importance of going on from strength to strength will not grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (*Reflecting Christ*, 297).

There are many Seventh-day Adventists who do not understand that to accept the cause of Christ means to accept His cross. The only evidence they give in their lives of their discipleship is in the name they bear. But the true Christian regards his stewardship as a sacred thing. He perseveringly studies the Word, and yields up his life to the service of Christ (*Reflecting Christ*, 287).

FOR FURTHER READING:

- Ellen G. White, *Education*
- Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*
- Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*. Chapters: “The Test of Discipleship,” “Growing Up Into Christ.”

ENDNOTES

- 1 1 John 4:8.
- 2 Job 11:7, 8; Ps. 82:5; Prov. 4:19; Isa. 59:2, 9; 60:2, 3; Luke 1:76-79; John 1:5-9; 3:16-21; 8:12; 9:5; Acts 17:27; 1 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 2:4-9; 2 Pet. 1:19.
- 3 Ps. 8; 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20.
- 4 Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Heb 1:1.
- 5 John 1:14; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 1:2, 3.
- 6 John 15:26; 16:14, 15.
- 7 Ps. 33:5; 107:43.
- 8 Matt. 12:11-13; John 11:14, 15, 38-44; 14:11.
- 9 Ex. 19; 20; Num. 12:7, 8; Deut. 8:3; Ps. 19:7-9; 119; Matt. 3:17; John 5:38, 39; Rom. 2:20; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:21.
- 10 Prov. 4:18; John 14:21; 15:15; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:12, 13.
- 11 Matt. 5:14-16.
- 12 Gen. 1:26, 27; Josh. 24:15; 1 John 4:12, 19.
- 13 Gen. 3:12; Isa. 53:6; 59:2.
- 14 Rom. 1:18-24.
- 15 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:13-17.
- 16 John 8:44; 10:10-14.
- 17 John 10:14, 27.
- 18 Ezek. 36:26; Rom. 8:6; John 15:15.
- 19 Eph. 4:31-5:2.
- 20 John 15:4, 5.
- 21 Matt. 28:18-22; John 3: 16; 13:15; 1 John 3:24; 4:15.
- 22 Gal. 2:20.
- 23 John 17:23.
- 24 John 15:5; 1 Cor. 3:1, 2; Eph. 2:10; 4:13; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 4:13.
- 25 Matt. 28:19, 20; John 13:15.
- 26 Matt. 28:20.
- 27 John 14:26.
- 28 Ps. 139:23, 24; Rom. 9:1; Phi. 3:15; James 1:2-5.
- 29 2 Tim. 3:16.
- 30 John 20.
- 31 John 3:16.
- 32 John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 14:19; 1 Cor. 12:27; 14:12; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2, 11-16; Phil. 1:27; 1Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 3:11, 23; 4:11, 12; 2 John 1:5.
- 33 Gal. 5:22, 23.
- 34 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4; 1 John 4.
- 35 Gen. 18:18, 19; Deut. 4:9, 10; 6:4-9; 20-25; Ruth 1:2, 16; 1 Kings 17:7-24; 2 Kings 20:15; Esther 4:13-16; Prov. 6:20-23; 22:6; Isa. 49:6; Dan. 1:8; John 4:46-53; Acts 26:1-29; Eph. 6:4.
- 36 Matt. 4:19; 28:19, 20; John 20:21; 1 John 1:2-4.
- 37 John 1:40-42; 4:29.
- 38 Deut. 6:4-9; Isa. 58:6-12; 61:1-4; Matt. 25:34-40; Luke 1:36, 46; 4:18-21; Acts 8:35; 12:25; 15:36-39; Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 2 Tim. 1:3-2:26; 4:11.



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