

Session 3: Growth Strategies **(What is a good growth strategy?)**

Definitions:

Strategy: The methods and ways that one goes about growing as a Christian.

Church strategy vs personal strategy: While it may be a good strategy for a church to use something like a NewLife Network to interconnect church programs and other sources of Christian growth, connecting these together with the glue of common goals, unity of purpose, focus on Christ and the mission of the church, what we are talking about today is the spiritual growth strategy of an individual, not that of a church.

Introduction:

Growth involves a strategy. It is common for Christians to do the following for growth: go to church, listen to random sermon topics, Bible studies, read Christian books, classes, involvement in church programs, personal Bible reading, community service, fellowship. These can definitely produce growth. However, random approaches may lack efficiency. People leave churches dis-satisfied, so what is the reason? Obviously, not all growth strategies are equal or effective. Therefore, it is important to identify what makes a growth strategy effective. What is a good growth strategy?

What is a Good Growth Strategy?

A good growth strategy involves the following:

- Efficiency
- All the Stages
- Caring Nurturing Relationships
- Mentors with Resources
- Questions that Help Provide Next Steps
- Changing the World
- A Balance of Dynamic and General in a Strategy
- Christ Centered
- A Caring Group

Good Strategies Efficiently Navigate:

What is the best way to get from point to point? This is an extremely complicated problem. To understand why, we can compare navigation in the world of Christian growth to navigation from city to city. Even for computers, the algorithm for finding the most efficient route is difficult. It is known as the traveling salesman problem. (<https://youtu.be/xi5dWND499g>)(<https://youtu.be/SC5CX8drAtU>) Navigating efficiency becomes much more complicated the larger the number of cities or destinations. In spiritual growth, there are many destinations. There are millions of Bible verses, sermons, books, teachers, studies, programs, prayers to pray, strategies of learning, counselors, and countless ways with which one might attempt to grow. As a result, a random, unguided approach may result in Bible-ism, or Churchianity, relegating the Christ of Christianity to a tiny part of spirituality. So how does one navigate a path in spiritual growth? Some people rely exclusively on Sunday sermons. Some people are self-guided following the whims of the moment. Some call it a spiritual growth strategy to merely defeat a guilty conscience with daily devotionals. Some try to rely on the Holy Spirit, read the bible and pray everyday. While there is good to be found in honest attempts, everyone is human, and prone to failure. Inefficiencies happen to us all. Therefore, we recognize the need for efficiency here in finding a growth strategy that reaches the heart of God.

Progress through Stages of Growth:

Remembering from session 2, we know that there is both breadth in growth (green steps image), and depth in growth (colorful layers image). We want to grow up spiritually in breadth and depth through all the stages of growth. Looking to human childhood, we can get perspective. For instance, we could gather that a child would probably struggle to grow up if there was an issue of parenting. A child without a parent would struggle. And certainly a child would struggle with a new parent once a month or once a week. Without consistency, and a long-lasting relationship, a parent would struggle to gain insights from history about the child. Not only can such short-lived parents be ignorant, but one could imagine a parent with an issue of cruelty. A child would struggle to progress in growth with such parenting. Similarly, with the stages of spiritual growth, we recognize these important factors: quality parenting, consistency in long term relationships, quality progress through stages of growth.

Caring Nurturing Relationships:

We have already mentioned how God uses relationships to help us grow. Relationships were the foundations of Jesus training to his 12 disciples. Following Christ's example, we need relationships. Relationships happen with pastors, teachers, parents, mentors, friends, or anyone who both cares and who helps one grow in Christ. But not all relationships produce effective Christian growth. Relationships need to be caring and nurturing towards Christian growth. Sadly, it can be rare to find Christians

who have ever experienced this kind of relationship. Those who have not personally experienced this kind of relationship are at a loss to provide an effective growth strategy to another. God can use people, and equip people, even miraculously towards growth, and at other times the blind lead the blind. To figure this out for yourself, think about the following questions. Who is my prayer partner or mentor? Is the mentor going to use a Biblical or effective strategy? Is my mentor caring or trustworthy? Does my mentor ask good questions that help me progress spiritually? Does my mentor have access to resources that I need? Is there a caring group that can help me in ways that my mentor can't?

Mentors With Resources:

Mentors (whether pastors, teachers, parents, mentors, or friends) need resources. These are some examples of resources:

- Training
- Experience or Insight
- Access to appropriate media (starting with the Bible)
- Good Questions
- A Mentor (yes, a mentor needs a mentor)
- A group (caring groups strengthen mentors and students)

A Good Strategy has Good Questions:

Administer "Christian Growth Assessment" file

These are questions that are best asked by a caring mentor.

Are the programs that are offered at your church what you need?

What is your next step of growth?

Are you involved in the right church or community programs?

Are the sermons at your church hitting topics that you need?

Are you reading and understanding the Bible verses that you need most?

Are you able to attend church when you need it most?

Are your prayers the kind of prayers that the Bible recommends?

Are you reading or listening to the right books or teachings?

Are you a part of a group or connected to a person who offers caring Christian fellowship?

What about Bible studies, classes, sermon downloads, and other sources of Christian media?

Are there any influences in your life that have a negative or draining effect upon your growth strategy?

Do you have a caring spiritual mentor? _____

When you die, what will happen to you?

Have you ever prayed to ask God for forgiveness?

What does Jesus mean to you?

Do you love God the way you want?
 Do you love God the way God wants?
 Do you love others the way you want?
 Do you love others the way God wants?
 How well are you physically?
 How well are you spiritually?
 How well are you mentally?
 How well are you emotionally?
 How well are you socially?
 What stresses you out or holds you back in life?
 What holds you back in your faith?
 Have you ever read the Bible book of Matthew?
 Have you ever read the Bible book of Mark?
 Have you ever read the Bible book of Luke?
 Have you ever read the Bible book of John?
 What percent of the Bible have you read? _____
 What percent of the Bible do you feel you understand? _____
 What is the great commission?
 What are the great commands of Jesus?
 On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very unfamiliar. 10 being able to confidently teach them to others), how strong are you in the teachings of Jesus?
 Other questions can be formed from the list of milestones or other things from session 2.

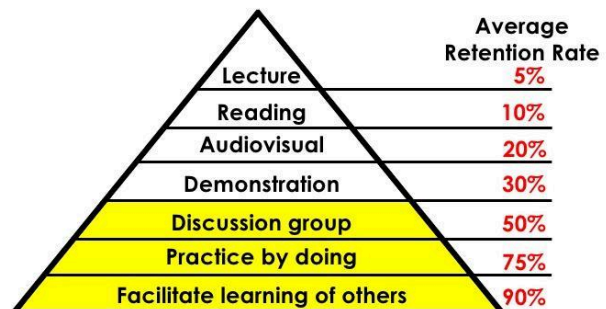
A Strategy that Changes the World:

A good growth strategy will eventually be exponential and involve world domination. The world needs help and there are endless problems in the world. What is the best way to reach the world?

-Confucius Says: "If your plan is for 1 year, plant rice. If your plan is for 10 years, plant trees. If your plan is for 100 years, educate children."

-Metaphor of bacteria infections. Never worry about picking up a few germs, it is the grandkids of those germs that you would worry about.
 -Math spreadsheet. ([GrowthMath.pdf](#))

The Learning Pyramid



Ref: National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine, USA

Therefore, We ask “does the strategy have grandkids in mind?” Not only is this kind of growth useful to change the world, it is also most effective to change the self when teaching others is centric. Learning so as to teach is the best learning. Jesus' disciples eventually figured this out. Jesus had 12 disciples who learned and accepted a world-changing strategy. Specifically, Jesus gave his disciples the great commission and the great commandments. If the disciples followed the strategy of Jesus, eventually the world would be changed. And, in fact, the entire Roman world was changed. We have the opportunity to continue changing the world if our strategy of growth is as good as the strategy Christ showed to the 12.

Balancing Dynamic and General in a Strategy:

A strategy can be dynamic or general. Dynamic is relative to the student, it is a strategy customized to fit like a well tailored suit. However, when starting out, having no general direction can feel disorganized. And even tailored suits start with a generic pattern. There is no one strategy for everyone, no universal sequence for how to navigate through all the topics of spiritual growth. Students have different needs at any given moment. A student may want or need breadth on one topic while another needs depth. There are times to dive into detail, and times to simply summarize. People love detailed specific plans (especially when feeling confused), and at others times the simplicity of spontaneity fits like a well tailored suit. This why it is both needed and bothersome to pre-fashion a strategy for someone. Having a general pattern is a good start for a strategy. However, a mentor needs to recognize when to customize the strategy. Both general and dynamic are good. LoveSteps is an example of a general strategy, and a mentor can use it dynamically for a student.

The LoveSteps Strategy:

I have already shared the story of how growth in the love of Christ happened in my heart and mind. That experience and my research has helped me to compile a strategy of Christian growth called LoveSteps. I have been detailing this strategy at www.LoveSteps.org . After teaching children at church for years, it became even more apparent to me the need for a good strategy of growth. I remember asking “What is discipleship?” I desired to wrap my mind around it, so I looked at a number of resources. Here are some books and programs I used to compile LoveSteps.org:

- My Faith
- Growing strong in God's family
- Alpha Course
- Christian Living Series 1 & 2
- Foundations of Faith (AG)
- Willie George Discipleship Programs
- MasterLife and other Discipleship Bible study series
- Disciple's Prayer Life(TW Hunt)
- Purpose Driven Life
- Christian Foundations by Mark Harper

- Master Plan Discipleship
- Discipleship²
- Now What
- Grace Church's Discipleship Strategy
- Square One
- Curricula used to teach Sunday schools
- Curricula used to teach children's church
- Topics I assembled, from Bible college & ministry experience

In researching these resources, I assembled a master list of topics that relate to discipleship. It became apparent how to group topics, and how certain topics had a natural hierarchy (Some topics rely on other topics. Topics can be ordered from most basic to most complex.). The research that gave birth to LoveSteps was initially fashioned for use by parents. But since then, it has become universal and more centered on Jesus Christ. The research continues and media is under development to make LoveSteps.org a useful tool for mentors, teachers and pastors.

<http://lovesteps.org/>

The Great Commandments

The Great Commission

[LoveSteps Introduction](#)

Lovesteps Basics:

[Love](#)

[Connection](#)

[Compassion](#)

[Steps](#)

[Relationships](#)

[Jesus](#)

[Beyond Basics](#)

Explanation of "Steps":

[1. Newborn](#)

[2. Toddler](#)

[3. Youth](#)

[4. Adolescent](#)

[5. Parent](#)

[6. Grandparent/ Shepherd / Coach](#)

Other things on Lovesteps.org:

Add ons Questions

Topics for Growth

Christian Questions

Useful Resources & Media

Jesus Class Outline

Jesus Journal Journey

A Good Strategy is Centered on Christ:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly...Colossians 3:16a

In John 5:39-40

Jesus said to the religious leaders: "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life."

"Follow Me" Verses:

Matthew 4:19-22 / Mk 1:17-20/ Luke 5:11/ Fishermen

Matthew 8:22 Dead bury dead

Matthew 9:9 Matthew Mark 2:14/ Luke 5:27/

John 1:43 Philip

Matthew 19:21

And others

John 10:27

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

John 12:26

Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me.

John 15:5

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

Mark 8:34

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.

A Good Growth Strategy Use Groups:

A good growth strategy involves usage of a group. There is an atmosphere of love and fellowship that can energize growth. A group may not be able to customize efficiently next steps of growth as well as a mentor could, and some people may feel shy in groups, but the excitement, fellowship and acceptance that comes in a group is effective. A group is not to replace a caring mentoring relationship with an individual, but is an additional supplement to the growth strategy.

Review:

So, the strategy that I recommend is to efficiently progress through all the stages of growth in the context of caring nurturing relationships. Don't go it alone, because a good mentor can save you from years of spinning your tires and years of sitting idle or from taking the long difficult road. A good mentor will have access to provide needed resources, good questions, and will teach in such a way that the student can become a teacher who will change the world. The mentor will be organized with a general plan and can dynamically encourage special next steps customized to the needs of the student. A good growth strategy is Christ-centered and also involves fellowship in a caring group