

LIFE CONCEPTS



STEPPING
FROM
BEING

UNDEVELOPED
TO
MATURITY

LEADER'S GUIDE



BIG IDEA

Each believer needs to be part of an environment characterized by healthy relationships with God, other believers and unbelievers in order to grow in Christian maturity. Begin by reviewing the Bible's answer to four common struggles:

1) **UNCERTAINTY** - We have seen how God wants to move us from uncertainties in our relationship with Him to a position of confidence (through our faith in His promises).

2) **UNWORTHINESS** - God also wants us to move from our feelings of unworthiness resulting from our sin and failure to a daily experience of His forgiveness.

3) **UNABLE** - Though we are unable to live the Christian life in our own strength, God wants to give us the power to do so through the filling of the Spirit.

4) **UNPREPARED** - Our last time together, we learned one of the biggest struggles in the Christian life occurs within us –the battle between the desires of our old sinful nature (or the flesh) and the desires of God's Spirit. God has equipped us to experience victory in this struggle as we walk moment by moment in the power of the Spirit.

The focus today is how to grow in a relationship with Christ. When someone first receives Christ, they are at the beginning of a new life. We might use the word “undeveloped” to describe them. Someone who is undeveloped is lacking growth or yet to realize their full potential. Most believers go through this phase at the beginning of their relationship with Christ. The key is not getting stuck there but continuing to grow.

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THE 5 ELEMENTS OF THE TEMPLATE

The goal of your interaction is to effectively and relationally communicate key biblical concepts, and so each interaction contains the following elements: Comparing Our Stories; Considering Our Struggles; Exploring the Solution; Examining the Sketch; and Taking Steps.

COMPARING OUR STORIES

Share the story of your spiritual growth. Use an appropriate example or two of your early spiritual immaturity. Also be sure to talk about who and what God used to help you begin to grow.

Ask the two questions about the new believer's spiritual background.

CONSIDERING OUR STRUGGLES

Read the “Think about it” notepad.

Get the new believer's feedback to the questions listed in the section.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF, AFTER MANY YEARS, YOU LOOKED BACK AND REALIZED YOU HAD FAILED TO GROW IN THE MOST IMPORTANT AREA OF YOUR LIFE, YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? Great disappointment with significant consequences.

The following passage illustrates the environment needed for healthy spiritual growth.

EXPLORING THE SOLUTION

Together read the whole passage aloud.

How did the believers know the apostles' teaching was authoritative, that it was truly God's Word? God attested to the authority of the apostles through signs and wonders. (See Hebrews 2:3-4.)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DEVOTED TO SOMETHING? To be dedicated, steadfast and loyal.

WHO WERE THE APOSTLES? The 11 men who Jesus specially trained to be leaders.

WHAT DID THEY TEACH? They taught all that Jesus had taught and commanded them. This is the very teaching that is written down for us today in the New Testament.

HOW COULD WE DEVOTE OURSELVES TO THIS SAME TEACHING TODAY? By attending Christian functions and activities where the Word is taught. Also by reading and studying it for ourselves.

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP? The root meaning of fellowship is sharing. The believers shared in a common relationship with Christ. They also exhibited two other kinds of sharing or different expressions of fellowship. First, they would get together, whether it was in a large group gathering in the temple courts or in small groups in one another's homes (2:46). Later we'll discover the second type of fellowship they shared.

WHAT MOTIVATED THE BELIEVERS TO GATHER TOGETHER SO OFTEN? When they were together they could encourage each other and enjoy their common relationship with Christ. The second kind of fellowship is described in verse 45. The believers shared their possessions with one another. They would meet each other's needs as they were able. Sharing with each other was an overflow of the greater fellowship they enjoyed with Christ.

HOW WOULD CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS LIKE THESE HELP US IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

HOW CAN WE EXPERIENCE THIS KIND OF FELLOWSHIP TODAY? By getting together with other Christians. One important example is by attending a church regularly where Christ is honored and His Word is preached.

The breaking of bread probably refers to the fellowship meal which included using the bread and wine as a remembrance of Christ's death. This meal reminded the believers that they were unified not only by a common interest or a common cause, but a common Lord and a common salvation. That is the heart of fellowship. In many churches today, this remembrance is called "communion" which is another word for sharing.

WHAT IS PRAYER? It is simply talking to God. But prayer can take on many forms. We can be alone praying for ourselves, or praying for others and their needs. Or we can gather together with other believers to praise God (like the believers did in verse 47). That is often called worship.

WHAT MOTIVATED THE BELIEVERS TO DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO PRAYER? Their desire to know God and their sense of need and dependence.

HOW CAN WE DEVOTE OURSELVES TO PRAYER TODAY? By setting aside time each day for prayer and by getting together with other Christians to talk with God.

Verse 42 says the believers were devoted to all these things. What motivated them to devote themselves to the Word, fellowship and prayer? The key is they had found real and genuine relationships with God and each other. They experienced a real relationship with God through the Word and prayer. They experienced genuine relationships with one another through fellowship. It's like a couple who falls in love. They naturally desire to be together. As they spend time together, their relationship naturally grows stronger.

WHY DID OTHER PEOPLE JOIN THEM? Because they had what everyone truly desires genuine relationships with God and with others. It is significant to note that it was God at work through them adding to their numbers.

EXAMINING THE SKETCH

This sketch puts it all together. The environment someone grows in has a lot to do with how healthy they are.

CONSIDER A SEED THAT IS PLANTED IN POOR SOIL WITH LITTLE WATER OR NUTRIENTS AND LITTLE SUN. HOW WELL WOULD IT GROW? Not very well, if at all.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE SAME SEED WAS PLACED IN RICH SOIL WITH PLENTY OF NUTRIENTS, WATER AND SUN? It would flourish and experience steady growth over time. What makes the ideal environment for people to grow? It is an environment filled with relationships of grace and truth.

READ SECTION A. For an optional cross-reference, look up Ephesians 4:15.

READ SECTION B. God speaks to us through His Word. We speak to Him through prayer. What would a relationship be like with hardly any conversation or communication? It would be distant, unfulfilling, etc. What would a relationship be like if only one person did all the talking? It would be frustrating to the other person, lacking intimacy, etc. Likewise, we grow in our relationship with God through plenty of two-way communication (talking and listening through prayer and reading His Word).

READ SECTION C. It's through fellowship that we build one another up. In time, you will discover how much you need other Christians and how much they need you. The Bible often describes the relationships believers have with one another as a "body." Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, especially 12:27.

READ SECTION D. God gives us the power to influence others for Christ through His Spirit. See Acts 1:8.

TAKING STEPS

To help your friend develop a plan of action for all three relational characteristics of the growth environment, consider using the following conversation. The person's possible responses are in brackets.

A SAMPLE CONVERSATION: What are you currently doing to enjoy and develop your upward relationship with God? [I've read a little bit in John.] Great. Have you been praying any? [A little at night.] What would you like to be doing? [I'd really like to finish reading John.] Well, I've found it really helpful to have a time every day when I read a chapter of the Bible, think about what it says, and then pray for a few minutes. If you were to set up a daily time, when do you think you could be most consistent? [Maybe in the morning after classes.] Great. Why don't you plan to take 10 minutes each morning to do this? Do you think you could handle that? [Yeah, I think so.]

How about inwardly, what are you currently doing? [Just meeting with you.] Is there anything you would like to do? [I should probably go to church.] That is a great idea. In fact, I would like to talk more about that sometime soon. In the meantime, I'd be glad to give you a ride to the church I attend. Also, how would you like to come and meet a few of the friends I get together with each week? We meet for an informal small group Bible study each Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. I'd love to introduce you to them. I want to help you get involved in a small group, whether that means joining my friends or some other group. Are you up for it? [I guess I'll give it a try.]

OUTWARD - Is there anyone you are particularly concerned about spiritually? [Yeah, my folks.] Maybe we could begin by just praying for them. You could start trying to remember to pray for them every day. That might be the most important thing you do for them, though I am sure as you grow God will use you as a witness to them, both through your changing life and your words.

Since this is the last lesson of the Life Concept series, ask your friend which of the five were most helpful. Suggest getting together within the next week to talk about your friend's progress in taking these steps.

There are two basic reasons why people aren't mature. One is time and the other is health. The world is full of immature people. Some are children who are healthy but have not had the time to grow. They, of course, are normal. Others have had adequate time but have failed to mature either physically, emotionally or socially. They are a source of concern. Their immaturity isn't normal and can indicate either a health problem or an unhealthy growth environment. Spiritual growth has many similarities to growth in the other dimensions of life.



LIFE CONCEPT

I. COMPARING OUR STORIES

The Christian life is a life of growth in our relationship with Christ. Spiritual maturity is attained over time, not in an instant.

MY EXPERIENCE ...

YOUR EXPERIENCE ...

How much of a spiritual foundation have you received for your Christian life—either from your family or your religious background?

What one or two things from your background do you think will be most helpful in your Christian life?

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2. CONSIDERING OUR STRUGGLES

WHY do you think many believers fail to grow spiritually at a normal, healthy rate?

WHAT might be some evidence of spiritual immaturity?

HOW would you feel if, after many years, you looked back and realized you had failed to grow in the most important area of life, your relationship with God?

We need a healthy environment for spiritual growth to ensure that we mature in our relationship with God.

ACTS 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes

and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



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3. EXPLORING THE SOLUTION

The Book of Acts is an historical account of the first believers' experiences after the resurrection of Jesus. In the second chapter, Peter (one of the early leaders) addresses a large crowd and many become new believers. This passage is about that group of new believers and what characterized their spiritual growth.

There are four characteristics of growing Christians found in this passage:

1. DEVOTED TO THE WORD (2:42)

What does it mean to be devoted to something?

Who were the apostles?

What did they teach?
(See Matthew 28:18-20)

How could we devote ourselves to this same teaching today?

2. DEVOTED TO FELLOWSHIP (2:42)

What is fellowship?

What motivated the believers to gather together so often? (2:46)

How would close relationships like these help us in the Christian life?

How can we experience this kind of fellowship today?

3. DEVOTED TO PRAYER (2:42)

What is prayer?

What motivated the believers to devote themselves to prayer?

How can we devote ourselves to prayer today?

4. HAVING AN IMPACT (2:47)

Why did other people join them?

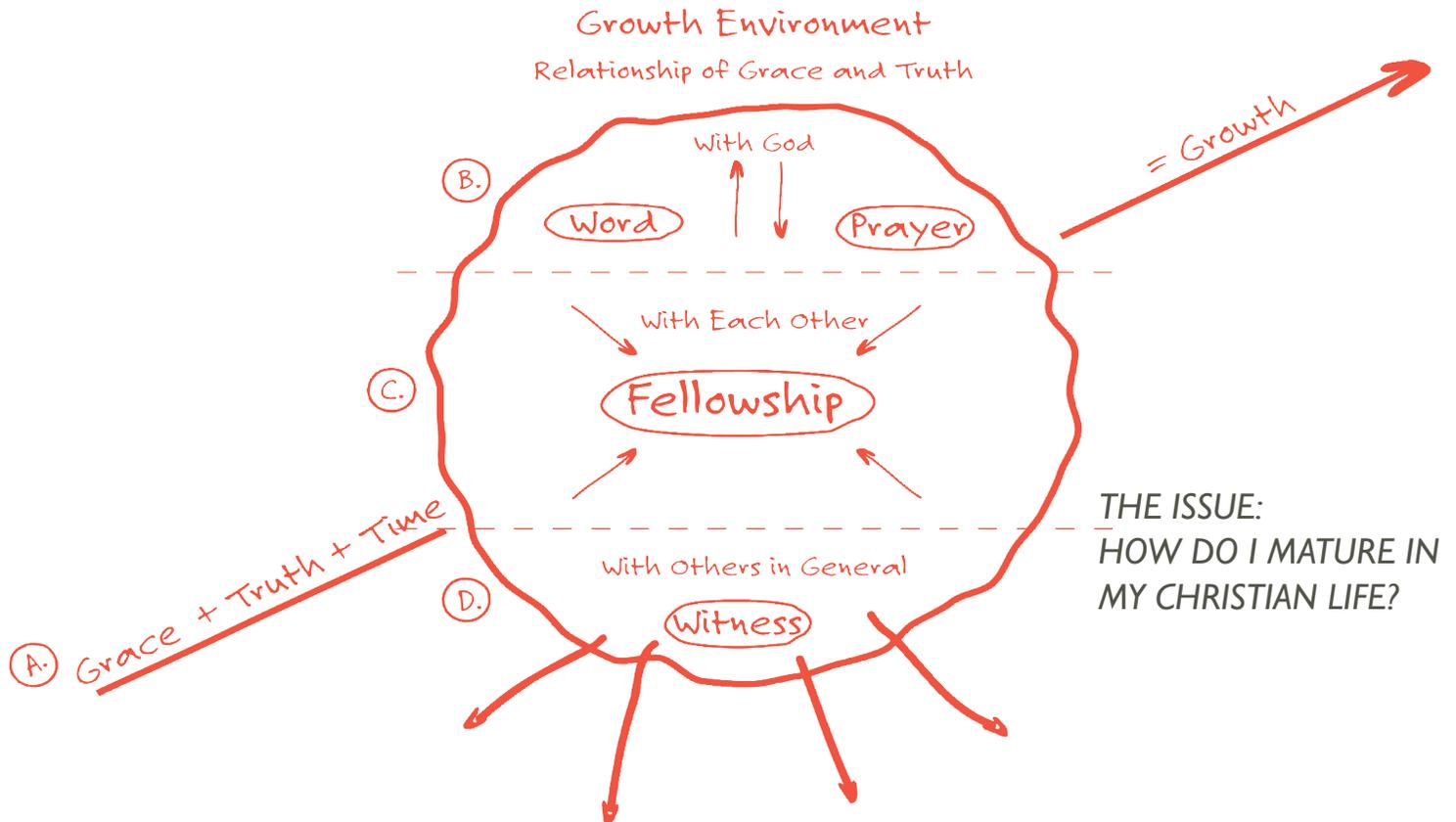
Imagine how exciting it would be if God used your life to influence others to become true believers in Christ.

4. EXAMINING THE SKETCH

Consider a seed that is planted in poor soil with little water or nutrients and little sun. How well would it grow?

What would happen if the same seed was placed in rich soil with plenty of nutrients, water and sun?

The difference in growth would be caused by the environment. The same is true for us spiritually.



A. The two primary ingredients that God uses to cause growth in our lives are grace and truth. Truth gives us the understanding we need to live the Christian life. Grace provides the acceptance and encouragement we need to keep on going. But growth doesn't happen all at once. It occurs as process over time. Thus, the formula for an ideal growth environment is:

$$\text{Grace} + \text{Truth} + \text{Time} = \text{Growth}$$

Like the new believers in Acts, we experience "Grace + Truth + Time" in the context of relationships.

- B.** The upward relationship is with God and is experienced through His Word and prayer.
- C.** The inward relationships are with each other (believers) and are experienced in fellowship.
- D.** The outward relationships are with those who do not believe in Christ. Our influence with them is through our witness for Christ.

5. TAKING STEPS

Develop an action plan for each of the relational characteristics of the growth environment.

UPWARD – Word and Prayer

Example: Take about 10 minutes each morning to continue reading the Gospel of John and talk to God about your day.

Your plan:

INWARD – Fellowship

Example: Go to church or to a Christian gathering.

Your plan:

OUTWARD – Witness

Example: Identify one or two people you care about and begin praying for them. Look for appropriate opportunities to tell them about the difference Christ is making in your life.

Your plan:

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FROM UNCERTAINTY TO CONFIDENCE

FROM FEELINGS OF UNWORTHINESS TO FORGIVENESS

FROM BEING UNABLE TO EMPOWERED

FROM BEING UNPREPARED TO EQUIPPED

FROM BEING UNDEVELOPED TO MATURITY