

# LifeStages: Growing to Spiritual Maturity – Part 1 of 5

By Barry L. Davis

## *UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE STAGE PROCESS*

When I was a kid I enjoyed playing sports but I definitely wasn't considered a star athlete. In Little League when I got up to bat, the other players would call out, "Strike Out King!". That might not seem all that unusual if it were the opposing team making the derogatory comment, but when I looked around I saw it was the guys on my own team yelling the loudest! A few years later I got cut from my 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Basketball Team. I played football through my freshman year but never made it past second string. The main problem I had in athletics was that I really didn't have any drive or motivation to succeed. I was perfectly content being the back-up running back in football and I never really made any effort to make it to first team.

While I survived my lack of motivation in sports, it would be disastrous if I took that same attitude toward my spiritual life. The Apostle Paul uses a sports analogy to help us understand the need to be motivated for growth in the arena of our spiritual lives.

*Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:24-27).*

What is Paul talking about? He's talking about giving it everything you've got to develop into the person God wants you to become. He's talking about setting spiritual goals for your life that can be achieved when you are bound and determined to reach them. He's talking about living your life as a winner – as an achiever – as a person who has focus, direction, and is driven to win with a spiritual purpose. He's talking about moving through the stages of life, always with the goal of spiritual success foremost in your mind. And the good news is that everything he is talking about is doable for every one of us! You don't have to be a great athlete, or an intellectual giant, or in the top 10 percentile of any class of people. All you need to have is a willingness to follow some very simple steps throughout your life. I want to share these steps with you in this article as an overview of what is to come, and then in the articles to follow, we'll get into some more details.

### **STEP #1 – DISCOVER YOUR LIFE STAGE**

As we talk about *Life Stages* in this series of articles, we are talking about the different stages of spiritual growth and maturity that we go through. When we talk about *discovering* your Life Stage, we are talking about the point that you find yourself on the

spiritual continuum. Wherever you find yourself today in the growth process, it is important that you understand that your stage of spiritual maturity does not determine your worth in God's eyes – it simply gives you a realistic look at where you are today, so that you can see clearly what you need to work on to reach the next level.

Let's take a brief look at the four Life Stages of spiritual growth. We will present a more in-depth study of each stage individually in the articles to follow:

### ***Stage 1 – The Seeker***

I like to think of *Seekers* as “pre-Christian.” They have not yet become Christ followers, but their hearts are open enough that it is probably just a matter of time until they do. A *Seeker* is not just any non-Christian person. A *Seeker* is someone who recognizes that they are missing something spiritually in their lives and they are searching for answers. Now if you are a *Seeker*, first, let me say I am glad to see you are starting your quest for spiritual truth and am very pleased that you are reading this article no matter what your belief system happens to be. I applaud you for beginning the journey. You most likely have lots of questions, like: *Is the Bible really true? Is there any such thing as truth? Who determines what is right and wrong? Is Jesus really the only way to salvation, or are there many paths to God?* These are great questions and I'm sure you have many more. Please be patient as the answers come. Be open to what God has to say, and in time, your questions will be answered to your satisfaction.

For those of you who are beyond the *Seeker* stage, you need to understand that *Seekers* are not your enemies, they are just people that are at the beginning stage of their spiritual journey. In fact, we are all *Seekers* at some level, and that is a very positive thing.

### ***Stage 2 – The Follower***

A *Follower* is a person who has recognized that Jesus is the answer to his or her spiritual needs and they have placed their trust in Him as the Savior and Lord of their lives. Once Jesus was walking past some fisherman and the following exchange took place:

*Jesus called out to them, “Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and went with him (Matt. 4:19-20).*

These men didn't just follow Jesus physically, they had reached the point in their spiritual journey that they realized Jesus was the one they were looking for to meet their needs. The *Follower* is the one who knows enough about Jesus to accept Him as God in the flesh, but at the same time is hungry to know more and fully recognizes that he or she is in the infancy stage of Christianity.

### **Stage 3 – The Owner**

The *Owner* has become secure in his or her decision to follow Christ and has begun to study, explore, and grow in many facets of the Christian faith. This person is growing in spiritual maturity and has a good grasp of the big picture. They are established in their belief system. They have searched for answers to their questions and have found them. They are now following the writer to the Hebrews instructions to:

*...stop going over the basics of Christianity again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start all over again with the importance of turning away from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (6:1-2).*

### **Stage 4 – The Reproducer**

While the *Reproducer* is secure in his or her faith, this person realizes that they must begin to present that faith to the people around them. They have become dissatisfied with learning only for themselves and are now convicted to share the good news of Jesus with the people in their circle of influence. Spiritually speaking, they have gone from being a daughter, to a wife, to a mother. They are birthing others into the kingdom of God. They have heard Jesus' command to "*Go and make disciples*" (Matt. 28:18) and are implementing His instructions into their day-to-day experience.

Hopefully, you're getting the picture. Now what you need to do is find yourself on this Life Stage Scale of *Seeker, Follower, Owner, or Reproducer*. There should be no shame, discomfort, or embarrassment about what Life Stage you find yourself at. The fact is, you have to know where you're starting from before you can determine how to reach your destination.

## **STEP #2 – MAKE YOUR PLAN**

It's one thing to identify where you are at on the Life Stages Scale; it is another to determine how to get from where you are to where you want to be. Our goal is to move from *Seeker*, to *Follower*, to *Owner*, to *Reproducer*. If you're already a *Reproducer*, you want to become the best *Reproducer* you can be. In fact, being a *Reproducer* is the only one of these stages you will never get bored or dissatisfied with. With all the others you reach a point where you are feeling unfulfilled. So how do we make our plan?

### ***Begin With the End in Mind***

What you want to do is study the *Reproducers* in the Bible – people like Paul, Peter, Acquilla and Priscilla, and many others. You also want to start hanging around other *Reproducers* who might be in the congregation you attend and learn as much as

you can from them. Find someone who can be a role model, or spiritual mentor, who can help you move from where you are at, to where they are. Eventually you might surpass them, but for now, where they are at becomes your goal. I begin with the end in mind. I know before I begin my journey where it is I want to end up. That makes sense doesn't it? Do you ever go on vacation and just start driving without any knowledge of your destination? Of course not! Why do it with your spiritual life?

### ***Count the Cost***

Once Jesus posed these attention-grabbing questions:

*“Who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills?... Or what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of ten thousand is strong enough to defeat the twenty thousand soldiers who are marching against him?” (Luke 14:28,31).*

Now Jesus was talking about making an initial decision to become one of His followers in this context, but the logic is true in any decision. I need to count the cost of the spiritual journey I am going to embark on.

I've looked at the people in the Bible, and my own contemporaries, and I've evaluated their level of commitment. I now have a good idea of what it takes. How much time is involved? How much emotional and spiritual output does it take? What else do I need to learn? Before I begin my journey, I want to have an understanding of what lies ahead.

### ***Make the Commitment***

There comes that point where you sign on the dotted line. You know your destination, you know what it's going to cost you, and now you're ready to step up to the plate and commit yourself to God's calling for your life.

Once it was a mother's birthday and her family threw a party for her. When the time for her to receive her gifts arrived she was told to sit in her favorite chair in the living room. One by one, the father and two older children came in from the kitchen with their gifts on a tray and presented them to her as if she was royalty. The smallest girl in the family had somehow been left out on the plans. But after watching her dad and the older kids bring their gifts, she suddenly appeared from the kitchen holding the tray with nothing on it. As she approached her mother, she placed the tray on the floor, stepped on it herself, and said, “Mommy, I give you me!”

When I commit myself to this process of moving through these Life Stages I am presenting myself to God as His gift. I am not committing myself to perfection, or to having all the answers, or to being someone I am not. I am saying, “God, I understand

what you are asking of me, and from this moment on, I am committed to the process of becoming who You want me to be.”

### **STEP # 3 – ENJOY THE JOURNEY**

You’re deeply mistaken if you think I’m describing a dry, boring kind of life here. If you commit yourself to moving through these Life Stages you will find it to be more exciting, exhilarating, joyous, and satisfying than you could have ever thought possible. Let’s conclude this article by quickly look at three reasons why you’re going to enjoy this journey.

#### ***You Are Not Alone***

While you are called to a great level of personal commitment, and while you must be determined to personally fulfill what God is calling you to, this is not a solo performance. Every child of God in your church, and every Christian in this world who has made a similar commitment, is on your team. We struggle together, we rejoice together, we grow together. We are unified in our purpose and in our calling.

#### ***You Are Promised God’s Guidance***

*For that is what God is like. He is our God forever and ever, and He will be our guide until we die (Psalm 48:14).*

*I will lead blind Israel down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will make the darkness bright before them and smooth out the road ahead of them. Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them (Isa 42:16).*

You will never have a greater sense of God’s guidance in your life than when you know you are following His will for your life. I know that many people are afraid of stepping out in faith because it is stepping into the unknown for them. But the fact of the matter is, until you step out in faith you will continue to live in fear. It is only when you let go and let God that you will finally understand what it means to have the rest and security you seek. You will never know God’s guidance until you let go of the steering wheel and allow Him to take the driver’s seat of your life.

#### ***You Are Fulfilling Your Purpose***

A wise person once said, “*Fear not that your life will come to an end, but rather that it shall never have a beginning.*” – Anonymous

I believe that the greatest problem most people have in our contemporary culture is not drugs and alcohol, pornography, stealing, lying, or any of the other vices. These are only symptoms of a greater problem. The problem is that people do not know why they are here on planet earth. They do not understand their purpose in life.

When I begin to move through the Life Stages I am doing so because I understand that my purpose is to please God and to accomplish the tasks that He has set before me. When I understand my purpose, and begin fulfilling that purpose, the journey of life becomes not only enjoyable, but also entirely satisfactory. When I recognize and identify with God's purpose, I realize that I am in partnership with God and His plan for this world. Nothing, absolutely nothing, brings more fulfillment than that.

One of the main jobs of the leadership of your church is to bring you and others through this process that I am calling *Life Stages*. They do not have to use this same terminology, but they are responsible for bringing you through a similar process that will help you to know Christ and to assist you in growing to maturity in your walk with Him.

*(Jesus) is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity of our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:11-14).*

In the next four articles we will look at each of the four Life Stages individually, and try to equip you to move to the next level. I hope and pray that you're ready to begin the journey.