

LifeStages: Growing to Spiritual Maturity – Part 2 of 5 By Barry L. Davis

THE SEEKER

In the preceding article I emphasized the importance of discovering your Life Stage. I want to remind you that Life Stages are the different levels of spiritual growth that we go through as we draw closer in our relationship with God. We move from the *Seeker* Stage, to the *Follower* Stage, to the *Owner* Stage, to the *Reproducer* Stage.

Not long ago, our 3-year-old, Micah, looked at me with a kind of angry stare and said, “Dad, you’re getting me on my nerves.” I asked, “Where are your nerves Micah?” Pointing toward the opposite end of the room, he said, “Over there!” Obviously, Micah had no idea what he was talking about. If he had, we probably would have had a little more serious conversation. Instead, I just laughed.

While Micah didn’t have a clear grasp on the terminology he was using, that need not be the case for you when discovering your Life Stage. My purpose in the next four articles is to help you define where you are at, what your relationship is to those at different stages, and how you can keep moving closer to God throughout the Life Stage process. In this chapter we want to discover the Life Stage we have labeled *The Seeker*. We’re going to look at the *Seeker* stage by answering three very basic questions:

WHO IS A SEEKER?

A Seeker is Someone Who is Not Yet in a Relationship with Jesus Christ

This person, for whatever reason, has not yet dedicated his or her life to Jesus. This person might be an atheist, an agnostic, or something else. They may or may not attend church. They might be young, or old, or somewhere in between. They may have heard all about Jesus, or never heard of Him. But the one thing every *Seeker* has in common is that they have never taken the step of commitment that is necessary to be considered a Christ *Follower*.

A Seeker is Someone Who is Consciously or Subconsciously Looking for God

This is where the term *Seeker* comes from. This individual is searching for answers, especially in the spiritual realm. Every cultural indicator that you look at today will tell you that people, especially younger adults and those in the upcoming generations, are more open to spirituality than any other generation in history. A few years ago the rock group REM had a song out called “Losing My Religion.” In that song they sang that, “*every day, every waking hour, I’m choosing my confession.*” In many ways they were speaking for a generation of spiritual *Seekers* who are sick of religion, but understand the value of relationships. They are in the spiritual marketplace, choosing which confession of faith meets their needs.

People today are beginning to tap into the spiritual dimension like never before. Notice, I didn't say they are tapping into Christianity like never before, but they are open to different forms of spirituality. Some are searching the Eastern Religions, many are looking at different forms of New Age teachings, and many are open to virtually any type of religious experience to see if it will fulfill their needs. Now whether these *Seekers* are looking at Christianity for their answers or not, the fact is, they are searching for answers. That is what I mean when I say they are consciously or sub-consciously looking for God. They are open to experiencing whatever will bring them fulfillment.

WHAT DOES THE SEEKER NEED TO KNOW?

If you are one of the people I have just described I hope you'll continue reading and give me an opportunity to assist you on your spiritual quest. First, let me say that I admire your openness and willingness to hear what Christianity has to offer you, as well as what you have to offer to Christianity.

What I'm going to share with you might sound a little intense, and it should. When we talk about being open to a relationship with the God of the Universe it ought to shake us all up a little bit and cause us to think long and hard about this world and our place in it. Any spiritual value that does not cause you to examine yourself and motivate you toward change is not worth considering. Let me give you three truths you need to know:

God is Searching for You

As you search for answers one of the most important facts you need to know is that God is on the lookout for you. Jesus, who is God in the flesh, came to this planet specifically to seek you out and offer you the gift of an eternal relationship with Him. Jesus very clearly stated that one of His purposes in coming was to seek you out.

Jesus said, "I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those...who are lost" (Luke 19:10).

There is a dual purpose here – Jesus wants to both find you and save you. He wants to locate the deepest doubts, and hurts, and mistrusts, and misunderstandings, and through the miracle of what He did on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead. He wants to make you whole. God is all around you, waiting for you to see Him. He's not hiding from you. God is right here, right now, ready to give you what you need for wholeness and security in both this life and the next.

Whether you realize it or not, what you are seeking is the full expression of your own humanity. We are only completely human when we join with God in relationship. That void that you feel in your life can only be satisfied when you turn about face, and allow the God who is seeking you to find you. The true expression of what it means for

me to be a human being is only manifested when I find completeness in my relationship to the God who is searching for me.

God is Giving You a Window of Opportunity

The prophet Isaiah admonishes us to, *Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near* (Isa. 55:6). My purpose is not to scare you or manipulate you, but you need to realize that there is a limited amount of time available to each of us. The average life span for a man is seventy years and eighty for a woman. That is assuming that Jesus doesn't return before that time.

While I think that you have every right to have your questions answered, and while you should expect solid evidence to back up the claims Christ has made, you need to do the necessary research within a reasonable time frame. None of us have any guarantee of tomorrow. And on top of that, the sooner you begin this relationship God is offering to you, the more time you will have to fulfill your own life mission while still on this planet.

God is Ready to Accept You Right Now

God is so amazing! He designed us as free moral agents, with the ability to choose for or against Him. In addition to that He is willing to accept us into an intimate relationship with Him whenever we are ready to come and join forces with Him. He doesn't twist our arm and He doesn't force Himself on us. God just gives us the answers we need and sets down the opportunity before us.

God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you." Indeed, God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2)

God isn't waiting for you to get your act together. He's not holding back until you get rid of all your bad habits. It is important that you understand that God is not as much concerned with where you're at today, as He is with where He can take you in the days to come. Whenever you're ready, God is ready for you. The following section will teach you how to become a Christ Follower.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRIST FOLLOWER?

Understand God's Purpose: Peace and Life

God loves you and wants you to experience peace and life, both abundant and eternal. The Bible teaches us that this peace comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

We have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us (Rom. 5:1).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"...My purpose is to give life in all its fullness" (John 10:10).

Understand Our Problem: Separation

God created us in His own image to have an abundant life. He did not make us as robots to automatically love and obey Him. God gave us a will and a freedom of choice. Each of us has chosen to disobey God and go our own willful way. We still make this choice today. This results in separation from God.

For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard (Rom. 3:23).

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

None of our attempts to reach God under our own power or ability will be successful. People have tried in many ways to bridge this gap between themselves and God but it is not possible in our own strength.

The Proverb writer explains, *there is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death (Prov. 14:12).*

Isaiah the prophet wrote, *...your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore (Isa. 59:2).*

Understand What God Has Done for Us: The Cross

Jesus Christ died on the Cross and rose from the grave. He paid the penalty for our sin and bridged the gap between God and each and every one of us.

For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5).

Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God (1 Pet. 3:18).

God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8).

God has provided the only way for any of us to be saved from our sins. Each person must make his or her own personal choice to either accept or reject what Jesus Christ did on the Cross for his or her own personal benefit.

Understand Our Need: Receive Christ

We must trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and receive Him by personal invitation. This means that we believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be – the crucified and risen Son of God. It means that we are willing to place our eternal destiny in His hands. It is trust taken to the extreme.

Jesus promised, "Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends" (Rev. 3:20).

To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9).

Are you ready to receive Jesus Christ right now? Are you ready to move from the *Seeker* to *Follower* Stage? Here is how you can receive Christ:

1. Admit your need (I am a sinner).
2. Be willing to turn from your sins (repent).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the Cross and rose from the grave.
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit (Receive Him as Lord and Savior).
5. Be baptized in obedience to Jesus' command (Matt. 28:19) and to demonstrate your dedication to your new life.

Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives (Rom. 6:3-4).

How to Pray:

*Dear Lord Jesus,
I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to*

*trust and follow You as Lord and Savior. I will demonstrate my commitment to you by being baptized.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Accept God's Assurance From His Word

Jesus promised: "I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

"Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it (Eph. 2:8-9).

So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him (Gal. 3:26-27).

Receiving Christ, we are born into God's family through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer. This is called regeneration, or the "new birth." This is just the beginning of a wonderful new life in Christ. If you have followed the steps listed above, you are a child of God and will spend eternity in heaven. Read on to see how you can continue to grow in your newfound faith and help others to make the same decision to follow Christ.

HOW CAN I INFLUENCE SEEKERS?

To those of you who are *Seekers*, you need to understand *why* Christ Followers want to influence you. It is because we truly believe that without Jesus Christ in your life you have no hope for the future. In addition, we know from personal experience how much better your life will be here in the present once you have the assurance and joy that comes with that relationship. And on top of that, we who are Christ Followers have been adopted into the family of God, and God, our Father, tells us that He wants us to bring as many more kids into the family as we possibly can. We want you to be a part of our family.

To experience God's love is our greatest need; to influence others toward that experience is our greatest purpose. Let's look at four biblical ways God calls us to influence those who are seeking.

Be Loving

This is number one in both the order I am listing these influences, as well as in importance. You will not have a positive influence over people who don't recognize that you love them.

If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

It might be easy for you to love your spouse, your kids, your parents, or your friends, but how do we show love to *Seekers* that we might meet for the first time? The secret to being able to truly love everyone you meet is found in being truly in love with Jesus Christ. I learn to love as I grow in the love Jesus has for me. As I become more like Him, I not only begin to live morally like Him, in the sense of right versus wrong, but I begin to emulate and express His compassion to the world around me.

Jesus spent the majority of His time being with, and loving, *Seekers*. Have you ever considered that? One of the biggest complaints leveled at Jesus by the religious leaders of His day concerned His hanging out with all the non-believers. His greatest demonstrations of love were to those who did not yet know God in relationship. Perhaps we can learn something from that.

Be Real

In other words, be yourself. You have a God-given personality; don't waste it by trying to be someone you're not. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus refers to "hypocrites" 13 times. Every time He uses this term He is addressing religious people who are pretending to be something they are not.

Let your *Seeker* friends know that while God has given you security, peace, and many other blessings, you are a real person that is not perfect, nor do you have the answers to every question that might be asked. People will appreciate the fact that you are a real human being that deals with many of the same issues everyone else does. The difference is, you have God on your side, assisting you in working it all out.

Be Patient

This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all. But that is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

Jesus' patience with each one of us is the example we must live by as we await the entrance of our *Seeker* friends into the Kingdom of God. I know what it is like on a personal level to need the patience of others while contemplating a decision for Christ. It took me an entire year of church attendance and fellowship with Christian people before I committed myself to a relationship with Christ. We cannot expect a person that is not familiar with the Christian faith to automatically embrace it and everything it stands for. For many *Seekers*, if not most, the message you bring them about Christ will be the first time they have ever heard. We need to accept the fact that it takes some time to process and commit to such an important decision.

Be Bold

Before God called me into the ministry I was a cabinetmaker. I will never forget a guy I used to work at a cabinet shop in Columbus, Ohio. We'll call him *Bill*. Bill was a great Christian guy and very zealous about his faith. The shop we worked for was adding new employees on an almost daily basis. As soon as Bill spotted a new worker at the time clock, he would run up to him or her and shout the question, "Are you saved?" Of course, most of them wrote Bill off as some type of a kook. Now Bill was definitely bold, but that isn't the kind of boldness I'm talking about here.

I'm talking about being willing to share what you know about Christ and Christianity openly with those who are ready to receive it. I'm not talking about beating strangers over the head with a big black King James Study Bible. The following passage should be very helpful to us in this regard:

...if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

What is he saying? Be ready to defend your faith, but do it in a gentle way that shows respect to the person you're sharing with.

As we close this article it will be beneficial to recognize that the *Seeker* Stage is in one way the hardest, and in another way, the easiest Stage. It is hard, because it takes a lot of guts and conviction to move from this Stage into the *Follower* Stage. In addition, you need to make sure that you are ready to make the life-changing commitment that God is asking for. The *Seeker* Stage is easy in that God is ready to

take you just the way you are and offer you salvation as a free gift. All you need to do is say *no* to yourself and *yes* to Jesus Christ.