

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

THE REPRODUCER

In the last four articles we've been discovering the Life Stages we go through in our spiritual quest. So far we've discovered the *Seeker* who is searching for answers, the *Follower* who has found the answers they were looking for in Jesus Christ and accepted Him as Lord and Savior, and the *Owner*, who is that person that has been a Christ Follower for some time and is secure in his or her faith and belief system.

In this article we are going to learn about the *Reproducer*, that person who has progressed through the first three stages and is now at the point of reproducing their faith in the lives of others. Now for some reason many people seem to stop at the *Owner* stage, which is most unfortunate, because they never get to experience the fullness of God's plan for their lives.

We want to answer two basic questions in this article. The answers to these questions will help those who are not yet *Reproducers* see why they need to set this as a spiritual goal. If you are already at the *Reproducer Stage* this article will help you to more clearly define what God expects from you.

QUESTION #1: WHY SHOULD I BE A REPRODUCER?

Most of us, when we are asked to commit to a project, learn something new, or change our lifestyle in some way, need some type of incentive to motivate us to do or be something different than what we presently are. I want to give you four very strong biblical reasons that you should become a *Reproducer*:

To Be Obedient To Christ's Command

Do you remember the first positive command that God gave to Adam and Eve after He created the world? He told them to, "*Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it*" (Gen. 1:28). God commanded Adam and Eve to have a physical relationship that would allow their kind to multiply on the earth and take dominion over it.

When Jesus came to earth He commanded us, not to physically reproduce, but to spiritually reproduce, so that we might fill the world with our Christian offspring. Jesus was about to ascend to heaven when He said these words to His immediate followers and to each of us today:

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

When Jesus spoke these words to the church and to individual Christians down through the ages, He did not leave us any other option. This was not simply a suggestion. The fact of the matter is, when I accept Jesus as the Lord of my life I am agreeing to follow Him and obey Him no matter where He leads me.

Let me state this positively and then negatively. First positively: If I follow Christ's command to reproduce more Christians I am living in obedience to Him; Now negatively: If I am not working toward reproducing more Christians I am living in direct disobedience to this One I have claimed as Lord. Now if that sounds too harsh to you, you haven't yet understood the level of commitment and sacrifice that you were called to when you became a Christian.

To Be Receptive To Christ's Promise

When we become truly receptive to God's promises, we begin to live our lives with a level of confidence and assurance unknown to us before. When it comes to being a *Reproducer*, there is one specific promise given by Jesus that we really need to focus on and be receptive to. Jesus was about to leave this earth and He had one last word to give to His disciples. This promise is just as much for us as it was for them.

"When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The promise was power, the time that the promise would be fulfilled was when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and the purpose of the gift of power was specifically to give us the ability to be a witness for the cause of Christ. Every person that trusts in Christ is promised the Holy Spirit, and along with the Holy Spirit comes the gift of power for witness. That means that *every Christian* is empowered to speak to others about salvation in Jesus Christ and that *every Christian* is given the ability to lead others to Christ. I am well aware that this is something that scares most of us to death, but I believe that our fear is based on not being receptive to this promise of Christ. When we recognize and accept the fact that this is not done in our power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, we begin to understand that our role in this whole process is that of being willing to be used as God's vessels.

To Follow the Biblical Example

My Christian roots are found in what, historically, is known as the *Restoration Movement*. The driving force behind the idea of Restoration is to base our principles and practices after the church we find in the Bible. This is just as true in the area of reproducing more Christians as it is in the area of what our belief system should be.

The history of the early church is found in the book of Acts. What I want to do is introduce you to twelve verses in the book of Acts that very clearly demonstrate that the early Church was focused on reproducing their faith in the lives of the people around

them. These are 12 *Church Growth Statements* that God included in His Word because He wants us to understand and learn from them:

Church Growth Statements in Acts

Statement #1: *Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all (Acts 2:41).*

Statement #2: *all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).*

Statement #3: *But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so that the number of believers totaled about five thousand men, not counting women and children (Acts 4:4).*

Statement #4: *And more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women (Acts 5:14).*

Statement #5: *God's message was preached in ever-widening circles. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too (Acts 6:7).*

Statement #6: *The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it grew in strength and numbers. The believers were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31).*

Statement #7: *The power of the Lord was upon them, and large numbers of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21).*

Statement #8: *Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And large numbers of people were brought to the Lord (Acts 11:24).*

Statement #9: *After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned again to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 14:1).*

Statement #10: *So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew daily in numbers (Acts 16:5).*

Statement #11: *Some who listened were persuaded and became converts, including a large number of godly Greek men and also many important women of the city (Acts 17:4).*

Statement #12: *Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and all his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also became believers and were baptized (Acts 18:8).*

It becomes very obvious that God is interested in numbers, doesn't it? The reason that God is interested in numbers, and the reason we should be interested in numbers, is because every number that we add to the Christian faith represents another person that Jesus Christ died for. If we are to be biblical Christians we are going to be Christians who follow the biblical example and reproduce ourselves in the same way they did in the early church.

To Pass Down Your Faith to the Next Generation

The only reason that any of us have faith today is because the first generation of Christians believed in reproducing themselves, and so did the next generation, and the next generation, and all successive generations that followed. It is our duty as Christ Followers to do everything we can, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to pass our faith down to the generations to follow.

I have the privilege of looking out at a large group of young people every week in the congregation I serve, and I can clearly see the future of the church. Hopefully in your church you can do the same. We cannot and we must not, discontinue the cycle of reproduction that has been passed down to each of us.

QUESTION #2: WHAT DOES A REPRODUCER LOOK LIKE?

Once a woman got on a bus with her baby and sat down next to a man. Because the baby kept making noises, the man's attention was drawn to it. He looked at the baby, and then said to the mother, "That's the ugliest baby I ever saw! I mean, that's an ugly baby! Ugly!" When the bus stopped the woman rushed to the driver with her baby and complained. Angrily, she demanded that the rude man be thrown off the bus. The bus driver tried to soothe the mother, telling her that some people are just born rude and there's not much you can do about it. He added, "Calm down lady. Everything will be fine from here on in." Then he reached into his lunchbox and said, "Oh, and here's a banana for your monkey." I guess some people were blessed with good looks and some people weren't!

But when we ask, *What Does a Reproducer Look Like?* We're not talking about their physical appearance; we want to know what it is that is different about a *Reproducer* that helps to define them?

A Reproducer is a Person Who Has Personalized Christ's Commission

When John Grisham wrote a book called *A Time To Kill*, it sold just 5,000 copies in hard cover. It wasn't advertised, never made a list or was reviewed by anybody that

I'm aware of. It was sort of a flop. Then he wrote *The Firm*, and it wasn't advertised either. It was hardly reviewed, and the reviews it received weren't very good. But people read it and liked it and told other people they liked it and *The Firm* sold seven million copies. John Grisham has written quite a number of other books and a few years ago the number one paperback best seller in the United States was by John Grisham, as were numbers two and three. At the same time the number-one hardcover best seller was by John Grisham. That has never happened before in history, and it's not because of advertising, and not because of the publisher's clever marketing plan, but because people liked the book. It would appear that a lot of people liked the book and told other people, until millions of these books have been sold.

Reproducers are people who love Jesus. They've experienced Him, and so they tell somebody else. It doesn't take a newspaper ad and it doesn't take a review in a magazine. A *Reproducer* is person who is in love with Jesus and has experienced Him, telling other people about Him, until it has spread to thousands and millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions and more. This person takes Jesus' command to *Go, Disciple, Baptize, and Teach* to heart and has this as the driving force behind everything he or she does.

A Reproducer is a Person Who Has a Heart for the Unchurched

Jesus traveled through all the cities and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And wherever he went, he healed people of every sort of disease and illness. He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields" (Matt. 9:35-38).

You can identify a *Reproducer* by their compassion for those who are hurting and helpless. You can recognize them by their willingness to put their own needs on the shelf while they minister to others. The *Reproducer* understands that he or she is an answer to Jesus' prayer for more harvesters. You see, the term *Reproducer* that we're using is simply a synonym for the person Jesus describes as a harvest worker in the preceding text.

A Reproducer is a Person Who Is Committed to Discipleship

In Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) He did not just instruct us to win people to Him, but also to *Disciple* them. To *Disciple* means to teach them in the ways of Christian maturity, to teach them the Bible, to teach them to pray, to teach them how to treat other people, to teach them how to be good spouses and children, and to mentor them in their newfound faith.

Think of what it means to be a mother or father. Your job isn't finished after the baby is born. You've just begun a long process toward leading that child to maturity. No less is expected of the *Reproducer* who leads someone to spiritual birth. While every Christian is personally responsible for his or her own growth, each of us needs someone to hold us accountable and to help us as we progress in our walk with Jesus Christ.

A Reproducer is a Person Who Lives In Expectation

Earlier in this article we reviewed the *12 Church Growth Statements in Acts*. This type of growth is presented to us as the norm for those who are Christ Followers. These were not selective events that took place. This level of reproduction went on throughout the history of the early church, and this same level of reproduction should be what each of us fully expects to take place today.

For the church in Acts, I don't think this level of growth was a surprise to them. They had grown accustomed to the fact that God would work wonders in their midst if they were fully committed to Him. Somehow through the years, the church has lost this level of expectation, but it's not too late for us. There is a great movement of God taking place right now in this generation. The church of Jesus Christ worldwide is experiencing the power of God in a way that hasn't been seen in many years. The winds of the Spirit are blowing. The *Reproducer* understands and welcomes this, and has faith that God will use him or her to reach other people for Jesus Christ. They live in confident expectation of God blessing others through their ministry. God will use you to build His kingdom. May His blessing be on you as you fulfill His calling in your life.

CONCLUSION

My hope and prayer is that as you've read this series of articles you have been able to identify yourself and have committed yourself to move to the next level. Never get to the point that you feel that God has finished with you. For each of us, there is always another rung on the ladder, another step to take, and another stage in which we can grow. Allow God to take you from where you are today, to where He wants you to be. He will do it, and you will be blessed.

If you have any questions don't hesitate to e-mail me at: barry.davis@insightbb.com

Sincerely,

Barry L. Davis