

HOW

DO

I

GROW?

BY JOSH HANSON



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Introduction

I remember the day. It was early January in 2023. I was meeting with some pastors in Orlando when our Executive Director sent me an article that included a list of stressors for pastors. She asked, “Which stressors on this list would you say you relate to the most? And is there anything else you would add?” She had copied one of our elders in her email to me, so I couldn’t ignore her. I spent a couple days reflecting on her questions before I sent my reply.

I wrote, “I don’t know that I’m good at being the vision guy for Gateway Church. Things like ‘Should we start another campus?’ or ‘Should we think about starting Saturday night services again?’ are decisions I never know what to do with, when to bring them up, or how we’d even know if we have answers. I’ve never understood how pastors come up with a 3-5 year vision plan. It all seems like throwing spaghetti against the wall to me.”

This email thread sent me and the elders on a ten month journey. Through many conversations, meetings, prayer, and reflection, a vision started to become clear. I wrote down some ideas, discussed them with the elders, presented them to the staff and some volunteers, and eventually did an entire preaching series on all of this.

This graphic depicts what had become clear to me:



These four columns represent the key components that drive the life, ministry, and direction of a local church. The first component is the pastor. The second component of a church is its key leaders. The third component of a church is its discipleship process. And the fourth component is the disciples — all of us who are followers of Jesus here at Gateway.

So component one — the pastor. This is me, Pastor Josh, for better or worse. The Bible has a lot to say about the qualifications, characteristics, and calling of a pastor. You can learn more about those in the first booklet of this series - *The Pastor*¹.

¹ You can pick up copies of any booklet in this series at your campus Resource Center.

The second column, or the next component of a church, is the other key leaders. Here at Gateway Church our key leaders include our elders, our deacons, our staff, and those who serve as Life Group leaders. To learn more about our leadership model, check out the second booklet in this series, *Church Leadership*.

These key leaders help the pastor move the church along in a certain direction, which leads to the third component of a church: our discipleship process. This process is what really what this booklet, especially Chapter 3, is all about. Here at Gateway this is our process of Worship, Connect, Serve, and Go. This is how we help you grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the fourth component of the church is the disciples who make up the church. What we **do** to grow in our faith — our discipleship process — is vitally important. (So important, in fact, I wrote this booklet about it!) But our doing must always lead us toward who we are to **become** as disciples of Jesus Christ. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is the goal and everything else, our discipleship process, our key leaders, and our pastor are all leading us toward this goal.

Our vision for every follower of Jesus here at Gateway is that we'd be disciples...

1. Who are Word and Spirit Christians.
2. Who are generous.
3. Who are family.
4. Who are disciples who make disciples.
5. And who are Kingdom-minded.

The fourth booklet in this series, *Disciples of Jesus*, goes into detail about each of these characteristics of a disciple. These four booklets, together, will help you better understand our vision for the kind of church we are striving to be here at Gateway.

Chapter 1

God Loves You

You are loved by God! But what does that mean? What does his love look like? How do we define God's love? The Bible gives us the best look into God's love for you and me.

“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”²

God first loved us. He loved us before we loved him. He loved you before you ever loved him. So our relationship with God doesn't begin with our love for him; it begins with God's love for *us*. His love is primary. He is the one who initiated the relationship.

But does this mean we don't love God? Does our love even matter? Yes we love God and yes our love matters! However, God's love for us matters more. For without God's love, none of us would believe or know him.

Something amazing about God's love is that he loved you before you ever existed. His love for you is an eternal love. So if that's when God's love for you began—before you

² 1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)

even existed—it should give you an amazing reassurance, right? For that would mean he loves you unconditionally.

Do you want proof of God's unconditional love for you? He sent his Son, Jesus, proving how much he loves you.

So have confidence. God loves you. He loved you first and he demonstrated his love for you by sending his Son to die on a cross as a sacrifice to pay the price for your sins.

So there's no arguing, and there's no reason to doubt if you believe in Jesus. God loves you.

Chapter 2

Personal and Family Growth

This chapter will be written from my perspective as a Christian, husband, father, and pastor. Some of the things below I, and my family, do better at than some of the other things listed. The point is not for you to go from 0 to 100 by next week. Pick one or two things to do personally and as a family. If you try to do everything, you will more than likely end up failing. So start slow. Be consistent. And watch God spiritually grow you and your family.

One last note. There's not a microwavable option for spiritual growth. We're used to being promised things like being able to lose 10 pounds in a week, to master the piano in 30 days, or make the NBA after playing just one year of high school basketball.

So let's be real. It's all silliness. Let's not let the silliness creep into our spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is possible. Just take it one day at a time. The days will add up, and before long, you will discover that you have grown in your spiritual walk with the Lord.

Personal

Let's begin by looking at some ways that you can spiritually grow as an individual.

Read Your Bible:

I know, I know. It is an intimidating book. It may be the thickest book you own. Don't let that keep you from reading it. A good Bible reading plan³ will help you navigate your way through. Expect things to be a bit confusing the first time through. It's OK if you don't remember every name, date, and place because you are not reading the Bible to pass an exam. You are reading to hear from God.

The key to reading the Bible is to just do it! The next best advice is to keep doing it! The third piece of advice I have is to keep doing what you are doing. You get the idea. The more you read the Bible, the more you will find yourself being surprised by two things. First, you understand things you didn't before. Second, you will realize how unified the entire Bible is.

Study Your Bible:

Beyond reading your Bible, you need to study it. There are all kinds of resources to help you study your Bible. Publishers even make "study Bibles"⁴ with lots of notes, maps, and other helpful tools so you can better understand what you are reading. The difference between reading and studying your Bible is that, in studying, you are thinking long and hard about how all of the pieces of God's story fit together. It is best to study the Bible with someone else. So grab a buddy, pick a book in the Bible, and start studying together.

³ See Resources for some examples

⁴ See Resources for some study Bible suggestions.

Memorize Your Bible:

Now you're probably thinking that I'm crazy. Memorize it? Yes. Throughout the Bible we are shown the importance of memorizing God's Word. You can do it. It does not matter if you memorize a verse here and there or entire books of the Bible. Just be sure to put God's Word in your heart by memorizing it.

Prayer:

To pray means to communicate with God. It's that simple. A good model to follow is the A.C.T.S. model of prayer. The "A" stands for adoration. Praise God for who he is. The "C" stands for confession. Confess your sins to God. The "T" stands for thanksgiving. Thank God for all of the wonderful things he has done for you and others. Finally, the "S" stands for supplication. This is where we bring our needs and the needs of others before him.

It's OK if you need to write out your prayers or have lists so that you don't forget something. Some people journal their prayers and others don't. No matter what you do, just be sure to communicate with God daily. And don't do all of the talking. Let him get in a word or two.

Reading:

Not in place of reading your Bible, but in addition to reading your Bible, you should be reading good books on and about the Christian faith. These could be Christian living books, books on theology, books on current issues in the world that are affecting religious freedoms, and even

biographies of other Christians or moments in church history. Reading books written by other Christians helps us to learn from one another and helps us to see that we are part of a much bigger faith family than just our local church.

Some current authors worth reading include:⁵ John Piper, Tim Keller, Matt Chandler, Don Carson, Priscilla Shirer, David Platt, Lysa Terkeurst, Francis Chan, John MacArthur, Russell Moore, Al Mohler, Michael Horton, Rick Warren, RC Sproul, JI Packer, Randy Alcorn and Jared Wilson.

Some past authors worth reading include: Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, John Bunyan, John Owens, Andrew Murray, CS Lewis, JRR Tolkien, John Stott, Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, Richard Baxter, John Flavel, Thomas Brooks, Richard Sibbes, Samuel Rutherford, and AW Tozer.

Listening:

Beyond listening to your pastor preach each Sunday, we live in a day and age where the world of preaching and podcasting is at our fingertips. But first, a warning. It is easy to fall into the comparison trap with the access we have to so many resources. No pastor wants their preaching to be used as a tool of criticism for another pastor in the trenches of

⁵ It must be said that, although I appreciate these authors, preachers, and Bible teachers, there are some things that I would say a bit differently and have some slight differences on minor theological issues. Overall, though, you will find these people to be an encouragement as you grow in your faith.

ministry. So listen for your own growth and not to compare and critique your pastor.

Some pastors worth listening to are: Tim Keller, JD Greear, Ray Ortlund Jr., Sam Storms, John Piper, Matt Chandler, John MacArthur, Francis Chan, Louie Giglio, Bryan Chapell, Craig Groeschel, and Mark Dever.

Some female Bible teachers worth listening to are: Kathy Keller, Jen Wilkin, Kathleen Nielson, Nancy Guthrie, Melissa Kruger, Rosaria Butterfield, Christine Caine, Kay Arthur, Priscilla Shirer, Joni Eareckson Tada, and Sheila Walsh.

Family

Having looked at some ways to grow spiritually as individuals, let's now talk about growing spiritually as a family. Be sure to check the Resources for more ways to grow together as a family.

Read the Bible Together as a Family:

Find a time to gather as a family and read from the Bible. When the kids are younger, find an age appropriate Bible or app. When your kids are a bit older, maybe read a chapter a day from an easy to understand translation. When you have teens, maybe have them read the Bible and then discuss what they've read.

Many people have grown up not knowing the Bible. If that's you, you may feel like you're behind because it is so unfamiliar to you. Don't pass that unfamiliarity on to your children. Read to them. Choose a gospel, like Mark, and

begin there. If you read the Bible regularly, your kids will grow up loving to hear God's Word.

Prayer:

Pray together as a family. My children each have a night to pray before dinner. We started this routine to keep the bickering down about who would get to pray, but also to encourage our quieter child to participate. If your child isn't sure how to pray, model for them. Have them repeat after you and always be sure to encourage them for doing a great job.

Some husbands and wives make it a habit to pray together before bed or first thing in the morning. Some may text their spouse with something to pray for. Whatever your routine, just make sure that you are both praying with and for one another.

Reading:

Similar to our personal growth, reading good Christians books can help your family grow spiritually. There are a ton of great children's books for all ages and good literature for couples as well. My kids and I are typically in some sort of faith based series. We take it slow and make it through a couple of books each year. See the Resources for some book recommendations.

Watching:

Our kids have grown up in a visual world. One way to redeem their screen time is to have them watch programs

that will help them grow in their faith. My family has enjoyed many programs on missionaries, books of the Bible, and other faith based material. See the Resources for some recommendations.

Conversations:

Kids love to talk about what they're learning. Look for opportunities to ask your kids questions about faith and life. Be intentional about having meaningful faith conversations with your kids while driving in the car, playing at the park, or doing chores around the house. Your kids will remember those meaningful conversations, and they'll develop the habit of talking with you.

One Last Note to Fathers:

I know that not every family has a father who is present. Our world is broken and the family has experienced the brunt of the effects of sin. But if you are a father, you have a biblical responsibility to "raise your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."⁶ So lead your family. Pastor them well. You are their shepherd and your wife and children are the souls God has placed under your care. Don't neglect this responsibility and joy that has been entrusted to you.

⁶ Ephesians 6:4b (NET)

Chapter 3

Growing at Gateway Church

At Gateway, we have five characteristics we desire all disciples of Jesus to grow in.⁷ Our discipleship process is how we help you grow in these characteristics as a disciple. As a disciple of Jesus, engaging in our discipleship process is how you help us accomplish our mission of “glorifying God by making disciples of Jesus Christ.”

So you growing as a disciple of Jesus is how we accomplish our mission as a church.

So what is our discipleship process?

Step #1: Worship

Our discipleship process begins with worship. When we talk about worship, we mean an obedient life that brings glory to God. So we worship God when we obey his commands, when we repent of sin, when we come under his authority, and when we submit to one another. Worship also includes congregational singing, our gathering together, giving, and listening to the sermon with an attentive heart and mind.

⁷ You can learn more about these characteristics by watching the Vision (2024) preaching series on our website or app, or picking up a copy of the booklet *Disciples of Jesus* at your campus Resource Center.

At Gateway, our expectation is that our members will make plans to attend a worship service on a regular basis. Now immediately you may be wondering about this and that and all of the reasons why you won't be able to make it to church. So let's be clear.

We believe that a disciple of Jesus will prioritize worshiping with his people. So that means Sunday mornings are already booked on your calendar. You have a reoccurring event that you are planning on being at and you schedule the rest of your Sunday activities accordingly.

Now illnesses happen, we are not against vacations, and we know that college students go home for the summer (and snow birds fly south for the winter), but what we are saying is that all too often worshiping God in a local church is more of "an option that we will do if our calendar is open" instead of something that we have made plans to do.

But this isn't the mindset of a member of Gateway. We believe that anyone who wants to be part of our church will be more than willing to make it a priority to worship with us weekly. We don't have this expectation of non-members, but this is what sets apart our members from people who have not made a formal commitment.

In Hebrews 10—in writing about the assurance we have because we have been washed clean by the blood of Christ—the author writes, "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our ***meeting together***, as some people do, but

encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”⁸

We are to not abandon meeting together. That includes meeting together weekly for worship, but there are other ways that we are to not abandon meeting together. Which leads us to our second step.

Step #2: Connect

After you are worshiping regularly with the congregation, we want you to take your next step in our discipleship process which is to gather with a small group of people on a regular basis. At Gateway, we call these small groups “Life Groups.”

You may already be in a Life Group, but do you know the purpose of our groups? Life Groups are where the Bible is applied and where care for one another takes place.

You worship with us on Sunday and then you go to your Life Group to discuss with other disciples of Jesus how the Bible is or should be changing your life. The people in your Life Group will help you apply the Bible to your life. They will pray for you and care for you.

- If you go to the hospital...your Life Group will be there for you.
- If your kids get sick and life is crazy and you can't get dinner made...your Life Group will be there for you.
- If your marriage is in a crisis...your Life Group will be there for you.

⁸ Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT)

Our Life Groups are our first line of defense for your care as a member of Gateway.

In Ephesians 4, Paul says that a pastor’s “responsibility is to equip God’s **people** to do his **work** and **build up** the church, the body of Christ.”⁹ Our Life Groups are our way of equipping you to do the work of caring for one another so that no need goes unmet in our congregation.

Our expectation is that all of our members will participate in a Life Group because we grow as disciples of Jesus when we are regularly putting our faith into practice within the context of a small, committed group of believers.

Step #3: Serve

The next step in our discipleship process is all about serving others. However, this step specifically focuses on serving those **within** our church. The Bible teaches us that every disciple of Jesus has been given a spiritual gift for the good of the local church they are part of.

If we continue in the Ephesians passage, the pastor’s... “responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such **unity** in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be **mature** in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of **Christ**. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love,

⁹ Ephesians 4:12 (NLT)

growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”¹⁰

Disciples of Jesus are to serve each other. You are to serve the people of this church because, when you don’t...

- You are keeping this church immature.
- You are keeping us from unity.
- You are keeping us from measuring up to the fullness of God’s love.
- You are not using the gifts that God has given you.

So our expectation is that all of our members will serve this congregation.

Children’s ministry, youth ministry, worship team, tech team, greeters, ushers, parking lot attendants, Life Group leaders, prayer ministry—if we do it—you can serve there. We are a church that serves one another. This is what we expect of our members because we grow as disciples of Jesus when we follow his example of serving one another.

Step #4: Go

Finally, we want everyone to go. In Matthew 28 Jesus says, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, **go** and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:12-16 (NLT)

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.”¹¹

Jesus said, “If you believe in me, be sure of this, I am with you for all eternity.” That is an amazing promise. So have you believed in Jesus? If so, he will be with you forever.

But you cannot ignore what Jesus said before his promise to always be with you. He told you to **go** and **make disciples**. And the reason why you are to go and make disciples is because Jesus is with you. See how that works?

Jesus was a disciple maker. He had the twelve disciples that we know the names of as well as hundreds of others whose names we don't know. And Jesus is still making disciples today. The only difference is that today you are the means by which Jesus makes disciples.

That means...

- To be a Christian is to be a disciple maker.
- To follow Jesus means that you follow his disciple making lifestyle.
- It's impossible to follow Jesus and not make disciples.

So we expect all of our members to be goers. Throughout the year, we offer both local and global missions trip opportunities for you to go and make disciples. Why do we do all of this? Because we desire to be a going church and

¹¹ Matthew 28:18b-20 (NLT)

to be a member at Gateway means you make the commitment of being a goer along with us.

Giving

Although giving is not one of the steps in our discipleship process, we do expect that all of our members will be givers. God's Word is clear that the members of a church are responsible for providing financially to their church. But giving is not only an expectation, it is also a warning. God has been gracious in warning us about the deceitfulness of wealth and our weakness in being more dependent upon money than we are on him.

One way to fight that temptation is by being generous. So each week we mention that you can give through our app, website or the black boxes near the doors when you exit the worship center.

- Giving is a time of worship.
- Giving is an opportunity to participate in and support all that God is doing in and through Gateway.
- Giving to the church is when we go from consumers to contributors.

Everything you have is God's. Every dollar you have is on loan and you are to be a good steward of it. So everything that your purse or wallet represents—your wealth, income, finances—is really God's. You're just managing his money.

So the question is not, “How much am I supposed to give?” The real question is, “How much of your money, Jesus, do you want to spend on me?”

When we realize that we are not the owner of our finances—we are stewards of Someone else’s finances—the question changes. And at Gateway, we believe that every member will be a generous giver because Jesus wants to use his finances to continue accomplishing the mission he has for our church.

Next Generation

Our ministry for kids and students (birth through high school) is called our Next Generation ministry. It has a similar discipleship process as we have just explored. We want our kids to grow in their faith just like our adults.

So our kids have a time of worship every Sunday—during Large Group for elementary age students and Wiggle Worship for our preschoolers. They have small groups that meet while the adults are in the worship services. We encourage families to serve together as greeters, ushers, and in other ministries at Gateway because our kids are an important part of this church.

The same is true for our middle and high school students. For worship, our Youth Director wants every student to attend one of our worship services. Parents should not let their teen(s) skip out on the worship service. It is their first discipleship step at Gateway.

Youth Life Groups meet every week. These groups are where our students connect to one another and to an adult

leader. We also want our youth serving in the church. We have youth serving in the nursery, the children's ministry, on the tech team, and in many other ministries.

Finally, our youth are goers. We generally have mission trips every year or every other year for the youth. They have been overseas and to various places in the US. If you have a teen, be sure to support them in going.

This isn't everything that we do as a church, but the point is that no matter your age we want you to worship, connect, serve, and go. This is how we help you grow in your faith. And this is how we accomplish our mission to "glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ."

Resources

Bible Reading Plans:

- 90 Day New Testament
- M'Cheyne One Year Reading Plan
- Psalms and Proverbs in a Month

Bibles:

- Jesus Storybook Bible (written for kids, but great for adults)
- ESV Study Bible
- NLT Study Bible
- NIV Study Bible
- NET Study Bible
- NKJV Study Bible
- HCSB
- NIV Adventure Bible (for kids)
- Action Bible (for kids)

Prayer:

- See Gateway Church's sermon series titled "A.C.T.S." from 2017.
- *Prayer* by Tim Keller
- *Hunger for God* by John Piper

Apps:

- YouVersion Bible app
- YouVersion Bible app for kids
- New City Catechism

Bible Memorization Helps:

- Bible Memory (website and app)
- Hidden in My Heart (memory Bible)
- <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/ten-reasons-to-memorize-big-chunks-of-the-bible>

Websites:

- Bible.com
- thegospelcoalition.org
- 9Marks.org
- Desiringgod.org
- Gateway News (Gateway Church's blog)

Family Books and Devotionals:

- God's Creation A to Z
- Long Story Short
- Old Story New
- Big Bible Challenge
- The Ology
- Chronicles of Narnia series
- Lord of the Rings Trilogy
- Little House on the Prairie

Catechisms:

- Westminster Confession of Faith
- New City Catechism

Programs:

- What's in the Bible?
- Torch Lighter series
- Adventures in Odyssey



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