
Growing Disciples

Christ calls us to follow Him as disciples. Disciples are those who have come to Jesus for eternal life and are becoming like Him as they live in relationship with others. Discipleship is not something we do alone, only on Sabbath or during a five-week seminar. For the Christian, discipleship is life.

Discipleship begins with our commitment to Christ in response to His eternal Love. We count the cost, accept Him as Savior and choose to follow Him. While we do not follow Him around the countryside as His original disciples did, we do follow Him figuratively through every step of every day of our lives. Because He is our God, we want to be transformed into His likeness. Since we are powerless, Christ sends His Spirit so that His strength can be made perfect in our weakness. As the seed dies to bring forth new life, so we surrender all aspects of our lives as the Holy Spirit regenerates our hearts, minds, bodies, and relationships.

The Growing Disciples Model

Even though discipleship can be described simply as “following Jesus,” it is a complex combination of our entire experience as Christians. The *Growing Disciples* model is an effort to help us think more clearly and deeply about our growth as disciples. This discipleship model includes four cyclical processes.

Three processes describe the disciple’s journey while following Jesus:

Connecting: Growing in relationship with God, self, and others;

Understanding: Growing through studying and obeying God’s Word; and

Ministering: Growing in participation in God’s mission of revelation and reconciliation.

The fourth process occurs in community, within the body of Christ. In the church disciples are prepared to disciple others:

Equipping: Growing the Body of Christ by discipling one another.

All four processes in the *Growing Disciples* model are centered on and accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Separating these processes is artificial, but it does allow us to bring clarity to vital aspects of discipleship that might otherwise be overlooked. As you read the descriptions, think about how each process plays a role in your life as a disciple.

Connecting

Christian discipleship occurs in relationships. It begins with responding to Jesus’ call to connect with and abide in Him. Through this transforming connection with Him, we come to know ourselves as Jesus created us to be and to appreciate our infinite value to Him. As we grow in our connection with Jesus we also grow in a more balanced view of our strengths and weaknesses. We are then more able to connect with those around us in healing and redeeming ways.

In the *Growing Disciples Framework*, a dynamic and deepening relationship with Jesus, through His Spirit, is the number one *commitment*. Through our relationship with Him, we come to

understand ourselves in a more balanced way, which anchors us in reality. Our next *commitments* are to ever deepening relationships of grace within our families, then the local and global body of Christ, and ultimately with every child of God to whom He wants to be reconciled. We become avenues for administering God's grace in its various forms, as we continually strengthen our connections with God, and all of His children.

Understanding

Disciples come to Jesus for life. In the Bible we meet and come to know Him. Disciples must learn how to study the Bible, find Jesus in its pages, and follow him. Reading, meditating on, praying, and obeying the Scriptures are methods used by the Holy Spirit to transform us into His image. In the broadest sense, we learn through the Word what God intends us to be and to do. We come to understand how the *story* of our life fits into the *Great Story* of God and his creation.

The Understanding section of the *Growing Disciples Framework* expresses the need to study the entire Bible by organizing the process into five *commitments*. The first is a commitment to learn of the invitation of Jesus to be his disciple. The following four *commitments* trace the Great Story of God and His relationship with human beings: 2) God, as the source of life, creates the world and its inhabitants; 3) Human beings reject him and suffer death; 4) God inaugurates his plan of redemption; 5) God provides everything needed to restore human beings to their original perfection of reflecting him. This biblical worldview is foundational to knowing God and to responding to His love in ministry to others.

Ministering

In response to God's love, disciples minister to others by participating in God's mission of reconciliation and restoration. As they connect with Jesus and learn of His unfailing love, they are eager to invite others to share in the joy that they experience as His followers. They are compelled to share the story of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives and of their blessed hope of salvation through faith in Jesus.

Realizing that God's mission entails reconciling the world to Himself, the disciples' territory is global in scope. They begin discipling those close to them and extend their ministry as God leads. Daily they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the only agency that can empower their ministry. Not only do disciples support Christian ministry with their means, gifts and prayers, but like Jesus they invest themselves in building God's kingdom as they serve His children.

Equipping

Christ described the church as His body to show the influence of the health of one part on the health of all other parts. This metaphor helps disciples understand their role to support, nurture, and strengthen one another. After committing their lives to Christ, all Christians need spiritual parenting as they grow into the likeness of Christ. It is within the church that we are discipled and that we are equipped to disciple others.

The Connecting, Understanding, and Ministering processes are nurtured and supported through the Equipping process. The Equipping *commitments* all deal with Jesus' command to His followers to love one another. As His disciples we have the unique opportunity, through the

ministry of the Holy Spirit, to be discipled by other Christians and to invest ourselves in discipling our brothers and sisters. Equipping *commitments* represent the actions of those who are fulfilling the Great Commission by “teaching them to obey all things.”

As in the previous processes, the first Equipping *commitment* is personal. It begins with helping one another learn how to connect with Christ and His Word through a dynamic devotional life. As disciples are transformed, they learn to obey through His strength and to be covered by His righteousness. The second *commitment* is about showing one another how to nurture and maintain Christ-like relationships. The final three *commitments* focus on helping one another learn how to share the Love of God with others through both witness and service. Disciples show one another how to share with others the story of what God is doing in their lives; they help one another learn to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the world around them; and they help one another learn how God has gifted and called them to minister with Him.

The Growing Disciples Framework: Purpose and Function

Because discipleship is life, and is occurring within the loving relationships in the body of Christ, the processes and content of discipleship cannot be reduced to statements in a grid. Thus, the *Growing Disciples Framework* is designed to serve as a skeleton of basic characteristics of discipleship. It is a structure around which individuals, groups, and churches can organize experiences to edify the followers of Christ. Those who disciple others can use the framework to create learning events in any method of discipling such as parenting, mentoring, teaching, or facilitating small groups.

In the *Growing Disciples Framework*, *commitments* for the growing Christian are articulated for each of the individual processes. *Equipping commitments* are listed for those who disciple others. Within each process, *commitments* are further divided into key aspects of spiritual growth called *indicators*. These *indicators* represent a lifetime of following Jesus.

This *Framework* of *processes*, *commitments*, and *indicators* serves as a guide to outline the scope of discipling. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, current discipling can be evaluated using this *Framework*. Some *commitments* and *indicators* may have been strongly addressed while others may have been overlooked. This evaluation will assist in making informed decisions for improving discipling.

Growing Disciples is a collaborative initiative by the Ministries Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Andrews University. It is designed as a whole-church endeavor, based on the biblical view that the person who accepts Christ as Savior is called to a Christ-like life of spiritual, mental, physical, and relational growth. *Growing Disciples* will help church ministry leaders at every level of church organization to better undertake the complex, multi-faceted process of discipling – that of enabling people to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ within the fellowship of the church, His body.

Growing Disciples Framework

Processes & Commitments	<p>Connecting</p> <p><i>Growing in relationship with God, self, and others.</i></p> <p>As a growing disciple, I am:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing a dynamic relationship with God. 2. Developing an identity that is complete in Christ. 3. Developing Christ-centered family relationships. 4. Developing Christ-centered relationships in the local and global church as a member of the body of Christ. 5. Developing positive relationships with those outside the church to fulfill the Gospel commission. 	<p>Understanding</p> <p><i>Growing through studying and obeying God's Word.</i></p> <p>As a growing disciple, I am:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning that Christ calls me to be His disciple. 2. Learning that God is the source of life. 3. Learning about the human fall from God's original plan, and its consequences. 4. Learning that God has provided everything that is needed for the redemption of human beings. 5. Learning that God has provided everything needed for the restoration of human beings into the image of God. 	<p>Ministering</p> <p><i>Growing in participation in God's mission of revelation and reconciliation.</i></p> <p>As a growing disciple, I am:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seeking opportunities in all daily activities to minister to others. 2. Investing myself in the discipleship of others. 3. Recognizing and responding to the needs of God's suffering children in the local community and around the world. 4. Supporting the ministries of the local and global church with personal resources. 5. Embracing the evangelistic mission of the church to tell the world the story of Jesus.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helping one another engage in a transformational devotional life. 2. Helping one another build Christ-like relationships. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Equipping</p> <p><i>Growing the body of Christ by discipling one another</i></p> <p>Each member of the body of Christ disciples by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Helping one another study and obey God's word. 4. Helping one another live a contagious, holistic Christian life. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Helping one another discern where God is working in His world and in their lives. 6. Helping one another use spiritual gifts in fulfilling a personal call to mission and ministry.

Commitments & Indicators	Connecting: <i>Growing in relationship with God, self, and others</i>
	<p>C1. To develop a dynamic, deepening, love relationship with God, I am:</p> <p>C1.1 communing with God regularly through His word, prayer and other Christian disciplines. C1.2 participating with other believers in worshiping God on Sabbath and at other times. C1.3 worshipping God daily as a living sacrifice by choosing His will over my own will. C1.4 paying attention to what God is doing and praising Him for His love and faithfulness. C1.5 participating with God in His mission of reconciliation and restoration.</p>
	<p>C2. To develop an individual identity that is complete in Christ, I am:</p> <p>C2.1 surrendering my heart and my will to God C2.2 learning that God places infinite value on me. C2.3 recognizing my continual need of God’s forgiving and empowering grace. C2.4 inviting the Holy Spirit to guide in my on-going self-reflection and actions. C2.5 embracing cultural expectations that are aligned with the Bible and replacing those that are not.</p>
	<p>C3. To develop Christ-centered family relationships, I am:</p> <p>C3.1 recognizing that my commitment to Christ takes priority over every human relationship. C3.2 contributing, supporting and extending unconditional love to those within my family circle. C3.3 holding as sacred my family commitments and responsibilities to parents, spouse, and children. C3.4 passing on the Christian faith to my children through both teaching and living an authentic Christian life. C3.5 practicing hospitality, welcoming into my family or home those who God brings to my attention. C3.6 committing to live by biblical standards of sexual morality.</p>
	<p>C4. To develop Christ-centered relationships in the local and global church as a member of the body of Christ, I am:</p> <p>C4.1 being supported and nurtured by the community of believers. C4.2 praying with and for fellow believers, rejoicing with those that rejoice, and caring for those that are in need. C4.3 loving and serving the church’s children, continuing to disciple them as they mature into adults. C4.4 treating others redemptively when they are disciplined or shunned by church or society. C4.5 keeping informed and responding to news and stories of the world church.</p>
	<p>C5. To develop positive relationships with those outside the church, I am:</p> <p>C5.1 respecting and praying for non-believers because all are of infinite value to their Creator. C5.2 being a good neighbor, participating in community life, and helping those in need. C5.3 being ethical in all my business dealings and in my professional and personal life. C5.4 reflecting the character of Christ in all my interactions with others.</p>

Understanding: *Growing through studying and obeying God’s Word*

L1. To understand that Christ calls me to be His disciple, I am learning that:

- L1.1 by beholding Jesus and abiding in Him, I will continue to grow more Christ-like.
- L 1.2 the love of Christ constrains me to a life of obedience and self-denial.
- L 1.3 all biblical teachings illustrate the character and mission of Christ.
- L 1.4 being a disciple involves all of my life – my worldview, my relationships, and my purpose and mission.
- L 1.5 I will participate in the body of Christ and its work in the world.
- L 1.6 I accept life – both now and eternally – as a gift from God to be shared with others.

L 2. To understand that God is the source of life, I am learning that:

- L 2.1 God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, including all people created in His image.
- L 2.2 God is a triune God consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- L 2.3 God reveals Himself to us in many ways, but most clearly through His Son, the Incarnate Word.
- L 2.4 God is love and he desires from me a response of love for himself and for others.
- L 2.5 the God-given purpose of humanity is to glorify God through daily life, work, and relationships with others.

L 3. To understand the consequences of the human fall from God’s original plan, I am learning that:

- L 3.1 the great controversy between God and Satan originated in heaven.
- L 3.2 because of the disobedience of the first human beings, I have a will to sin and a sinful nature.
- L 3.3 the ten-commandment law of God expresses the character of God and gives the standard for human conduct.
- L 3.4 the natural world no longer reflects the perfection in which God created it.
- L 3.5 the Bible is needed to interpret the natural world as an expression of the character of God.

L 4. To understand that God has provided everything that is needed for my redemption, I am learning that:

- L 4.1 salvation and eternal life are gifts to me through the grace of God.
- L 4.2 Christ came to earth to reveal the character of God and to die in my place as an atonement for my sin.
- L 4.3 the love of God draws me to feel sorrow for my sin, to confess, and to repent.
- L 4.4 God forgives sin and restores brokenness.

L 5. To understand that God has provided everything needed for my restoration, I am learning that:

- L 5.1 Jesus died to redeem me from sin and now lives to restore me to physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness.
- L 5.2 through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ will live in me and I will live in Him.
- L 5.3 because every person is created in God’s image, my relationships will be based on love, forgiveness and respect.
- L 5.4 the Holy Spirit daily prompts me to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with my God.
- L 5.5 God expects me to be a steward of all he created.
- L 5.6 the great controversy ends when God brings an end to sin and restores Earth to its original perfection.

Ministering: *Growing in participation in God’s mission of revelation and reconciliation*

M1. To seek opportunities in all daily activities to minister to others, I am:

- M1.1 inviting God to change me to bear the fruits of the Spirit.
- M1.2 choosing Jesus as a daily companion and sharing Him joyfully.
- M1.3 investing myself in service wherever the Holy Spirit leads.
- M1.4 carrying out my occupation as a calling to ministry.
- M1.5 building networks for friendship, fellowship, and support.

M2. To invest myself in the discipleship of others, I am:

- M2.1 willing to be mentored by maturing Christians, accountable for my spiritual growth.
- M2.2 willing to be humble and honest when sharing my walk as a disciple.
- M2.3 committing time and effort to mentoring growing Christians.
- M2.4 working intentionally to train fellow believers to disciple others.

M3. To recognize and respond to the needs of God’s suffering children locally and globally, I am:

- M3.1 looking for physical, mental, social and spiritual needs in the local community.
- M3.2 responding mercifully to the discovered needs, individually and/or as a church.
- M3.3 speaking out and acting to relieve suffering and injustice in society.
- M3.4 reducing human suffering by being a faithful steward of God’s creation.
- M3.5 acting compassionately on behalf of people who are disadvantaged or at-risk.

M4. To support the ministries of the local and global church with personal resources, I am:

- M4.1 managing my resources with the understanding that all belong to God.
- M4.2 returning a faithful tithe and giving offerings systematically.
- M4.3 serving in one or more ministries of my local church.
- M4.4 participating personally, as possible, in global service projects or ministries.

M5. To embrace the evangelistic mission of the church, I am:

- M5.1 praying for the Holy Spirit to prepare me to reach others for Christ.
- M5.2 choosing to be aware of the spiritual climate locally and globally.
- M5.3 using my spiritual gifts to help tell the world the story of Jesus.
- M5.4 be able to give a reason for my faith when asked.
- M5.5 sharing my story of Jesus with community members, family, friends and co-workers.

Commitments & Indicators	Equipping: <i>Growing the Body of Christ by discipling one another</i>
	E1. To help believers engage in a transformational devotional life, I am showing others how to: E1.1 study the Bible to know Christ and to develop a biblical worldview. E1.2 communicate with God through prayer and Christian meditation. E1.3 participate in other Christian disciplines to be open to the Holy Spirit. E1.4 set priorities to allow for regular, quality devotional time. E1.5 seek spiritual growth opportunities with other believers.
	E2. To help believers build Christ-like relationships, I am showing others how to: E2.1 inventory themselves, acknowledge defects of character, and invite God to remove them. E2.2 work with God to care for themselves and live a balanced life. E2.3 cherish, respect and nurture family members as children of God. E2.4 be disciplined by other believers in the body of Christ. E2.5 resolve conflicts within the home, church, workplace and community.
	E3. To help believers study and obey God’s word, I am showing others how to: E3.1 value the Bible as a revelation of God’s character and mission of reconciliation. E3.2 study the Bible to understand and accept the truth about God and His will for our lives. E3.3 use Bible study aids such as available versions, dictionaries, maps, concordances, commentaries, and Ellen White’s writings. E3.4 obey Bible teachings in response to deepening understanding of truth and relationship with Jesus.
	E4. To help believers live a contagious, holistic Christian life, I am showing others how to: E4.1 share the story of their personal relationship with Jesus. E4.2 explain how Christ is the center of all biblical teachings. E4.3 express Christ’s love by creatively using their talents and interests. E4.4 apply biblical principles to every aspect of their lives. E4.5 lead someone to accept and follow Christ.
	E5. To help believers discern where God is working, I am showing others how to: E5.1 pray for a clear understanding of what God wants to accomplish through them. E5.2 recognize the work of the Holy Spirit within and around them. E5.3 detect where God is calling them to serve. E5.4 assess the needs of those God has called them to serve. E5.5 evaluate the culture they are called to serve in, in order to find and reach others.
	E6. To help believers use spiritual gifts to fulfill a personal call to mission and ministry, I am showing others how to: E6.1 confer with fellow believers to confirm and refine their areas of spiritual giftedness. E6.2 be prepared for mission and ministry by participating in training programs. E6.3 disciple other believers in the body of Christ. E6.4 choose and participate in ministries that use their gifts and talents. E6.5 find ways to support Adventist mission and evangelism, ministries and education.