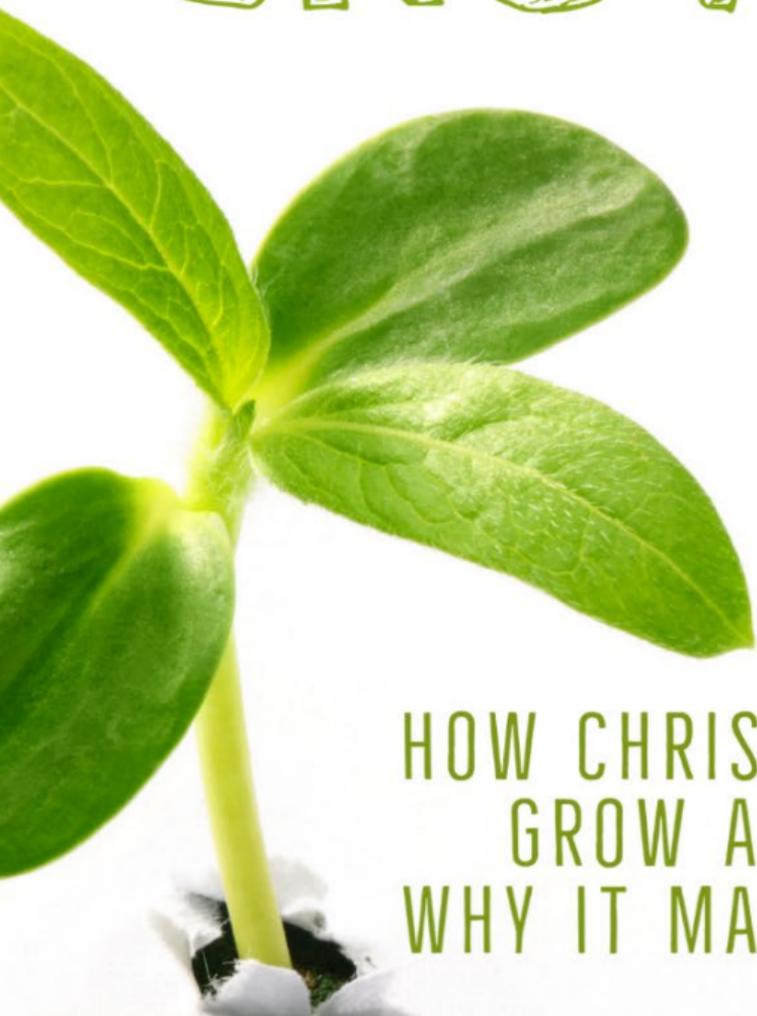


# GROW



HOW CHRISTIANS  
GROW AND  
WHY IT MATTERS

**WILLIAM CK YOMES**

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## **1: What is a Christian?**

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus. But, that leads to the next question "What does it mean to be a disciple?" A disciple is someone who learns from and submits to a teacher. Think about the Jedi from Star Wars. In the Star Wars universe, a young Jedi, called an apprentice, is assigned to an experienced Jedi, called the master, in order to learn the ways of the force. This is the heart of what it means to be a disciple. The young Jedi must learn from and submit to the lessons his Jedi Master is trying to teach him. Each individual Christian is an

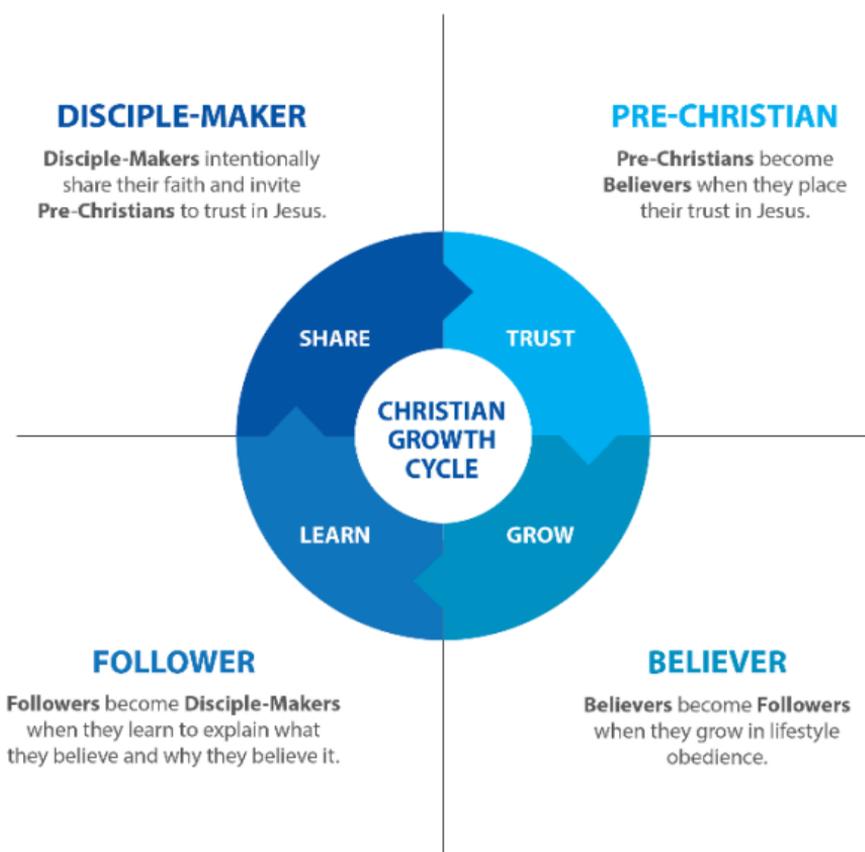
apprentice or student trying to learn from Jesus. He is the master. We are all his "students" trying to learn from and submit to His lessons. Christian leaders should never try to make disciples of themselves. Though some of us may be pastors or teachers, we are never called to make disciples of ourselves. We are all disciples of Jesus. Because we are all disciples of Jesus, our goal is to learn from and submit to the teachings of Jesus.

## **2: What is Christian growth?**

Christian growth is a lot like growing older, but with one big difference. As soon as we are born, we age. We all get older one day at a time. It's natural. It's automatic. At a certain point in the "age cycle," when we have matured enough, we become able to bear children. As we continue to get older, most people "settle down," find a partner, and have kids. Then the cycle starts all over again. The expectation of Christian growth is the same. Every Christian should grow, day by day, until they reach the point they can share their faith with someone

else and reproduce faith in them. There is one key difference, however. Christian growth takes personal effort. Unlike aging, it will not happen automatically. Someone can become a Christian and remain a newborn or a toddler for years and never become more mature. For the Christian growth cycle to take place, each person must put in their own personal effort to grow or mature in the faith.

### 3: What is the Christian growth cycle?



The Christian growth cycle has four distinct stages: pre-Christian, believer, follower, and disciple. Necessary actions connect each stage in the cycle.

A Pre-Christian becomes a believer when they place their trust in Jesus. A believer becomes a follower when they grow in lifestyle obedience. A follower becomes a disciple-maker when they learn how to explain Christian teachings and defend the faith. A disciple-maker intentionally shares their faith with others and invites Pre-Christians to trust in Jesus. It's really that easy.

Each stage is preceded by a step that must be taken voluntarily. No one can make someone else grow in the faith. Each person must put in their own personal effort to trust, grow, learn, and

share. As we progress through the stages, we gain knowledge and experience that helps us in the disciple-maker stage when sharing faith with others becomes the goal.

It is also important to note that the purpose of the Christian growth cycle is to reproduce new Christians. Just as the function and recognition of physical maturity is the ability to reproduce, so too the purpose and recognition of spiritual maturity is the ability to reproduce and help others to come to trust in Jesus.

## **4: What does it mean to trust Jesus?**

Trusting Jesus is an intentional act of the will. Many times, Christians will use the word "faith" to describe this. However, the word "faith" often comes with more misunderstanding than is needed. Biblically, "faith" and "trust" are the same thing. In order to fully trust Jesus, three things must change in our lives. First, Jesus is the only God we recognize and serve. Second, because Jesus is God, His Word becomes the standard for truth in our lives. Third, because Jesus is God and His Word is truth, His mission becomes our purpose.

Trusting in Jesus is as simple as recognizing that Jesus is God, He died on the cross, and resurrected from the grave to new life. Because of these facts, we can trust Jesus is who He said He was and that's why we trust Him. Our job from this point on is to spend our time learning from and submitting to Him.

## **5: What is lifestyle obedience?**

Lifestyle obedience is the active step of changing the way we live to reflect our commitment to Jesus. Everyone lives for something, even if they don't know it. Some spend their life pursuing money or power. Others live each day trying to avoid hurt or pain. Still others spend their time pursuing whatever makes them feel good. When we become Christians and recognize Jesus is God, He becomes the center of our life. Our role changes. We are no longer the center of our lives; we are the servants. This doesn't happen overnight. It takes time,

a lifetime in fact, to learn and submit to the teachings of Jesus. The most important thing to remember when we become a Christian is we are no longer the "god" or center of our life, Jesus is. Our new job is to learn what Jesus taught in His Word and then choose to submit to it. Once we become a Christian, our lifestyle should reflect our obedience to Jesus.

## **6: What is defending the faith?**

There are a lot of competing ideas, perspectives, and faiths in the world today. The simple fact is everyone cannot be right. Atheists claim there is no god. Christians claim Jesus is God. Pantheists claim god only exists within nature. These claims are mutually exclusive. That means if one of them is right, the other two are automatically false. If the atheist is right, and there is, in reality, no god at all, then both the pantheist and the Christian are wrong (not to mention every other faith or religion that believes in a god). It's one thing to believe something. Anyone

may believe what they want. But when you claim your beliefs are true, meaning they are actually the way the world works, only one of these three groups can be right. Our faith doesn't make something true. We should want to place our faith in what actually is true. This is what it means to defend the faith. As Christians, we believe the claim "Jesus is God" is true. It's not just a claim about religion; it's a claim about the real world, about reality itself. Christians must be prepared to answer questions and explain why we believe Jesus is God.

## **7: What is sharing your faith?**

Placing trust in Jesus is a personal effort. No one can do it for you. So, it may seem odd to talk about "sharing" faith with others. When Christians speak of "sharing their faith," they are usually talking about sharing either the reasons for their trust in Jesus or their experience as a student of His. Whether you are a follower learning to obey Jesus in your lifestyle or a disciple learning how to explain and defend the faith, you can share your experience as a student of Jesus. No one knows your story better than you do. "Sharing faith" with someone means

nothing more than talking with them about your personal knowledge or experience of Jesus. It doesn't need to be scary. You just need to tell your story. After all, no one knows your story like you do!

## **8: What should I do first?**

The answer to this question is going to depend on where you are in the Christian Growth Cycle. Have you placed your trust in Jesus? If not, then you're a pre-Christian. The first step is to place trust in Jesus. If you're already a believer, then do you practice lifestyle obedience? If not, then that is your first step. If you're already a follower, can you explain and defend the teachings of the Christian faith? If not, that is your first step. If you're already a disciple, your next step is to identify pre-Christians in your life and seek opportunities to speak with

them about Jesus, eventually inviting them to trust in Him. Everyone fits into one of the four steps of the Christian growth cycle. This means everyone has a natural next step they can take. Where do you think you are? What does that mean you need to do next?

## **9: Where can I ask for help?**

Being a Christian means being an active part of a community that is learning from and submitting to Jesus. The idea of being the "lone wolf Christian" who isn't connected to a community of some kind is simply not accurate. Jesus never intended for us to learn to follow Him all on our own. The plan for the community of people who trust and follow Jesus is His Church. We are all on this journey together. If you want help either finding your place on the Christian growth cycle or identifying what next step you will take, I encourage you to

reach out to a local Christian church and ask for help. My church is in Wilmington, Delaware, in the US. I believe I should do everything I can to help people follow Jesus. If you're worried or anxious about going to a church you've never been to before, please email me. I'll do my best to help you get started learning from and submitting to Jesus. My email is: [pastorbill@catalyst302.com](mailto:pastorbill@catalyst302.com)

## **10: Why does growing matter?**

Growing in faith as a Christian matters for two key reasons. First, Jesus died to save us for His Kingdom, not just from sin. As Christians, we belong to Him and should strive to grow and become more like Him. Second, Christianity is always on the brink of extinction. As soon as one generation fails to pass on the faith to the next, Christianity will cease to exist. It is the sacred responsibility of each generation of Christians to grow in the faith and train the next. This is the way the faith has been passed down for the past two thousand years. Now it's our turn.

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