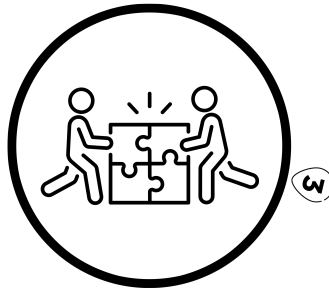




THE PATH

fellowship bible church

Stage 3 — The Productive Life



If anyone would come after [follow] me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. - Matthew 16:24-25

The Productive Life - Working for God from love within the local church for the sake of others.

Case Study

Debbie has been a follower of Jesus for 9 years but due to life circumstances hasn't fully plugged into a local church. Now with some stability in her life, she wants to join a church and bless the congregation. She's in Stage 3.

There hasn't been a day of Bryan's life when he wasn't a part of the same church. He grew up there and he attends there still — 42 years in one place. He is on the parking team twice a month, ushers at Christmas, gives faithfully and without being asked, and went on the Guatemala trip three years running. If you needed someone to set up chairs at six in the morning, Bryan would already be there. He worships, he gathers, he gives, and he goes. He is also, by his own quiet admission, exactly the same man he was fifteen years ago. Nobody has asked him a hard question in a decade, because nothing about Bryan looks like it needs one. He's in Stage 3.

Overview

It takes between 20,000-30,000 nails and 5,000-15,000 screws to build a house. Each of those fasteners serves the crucial purpose of holding that house together. As a church we are held together by Jesus¹ and built together by God². At the same time each of us is a part of building Jesus' church³ together. Stage 3 finds the follower of Jesus engaging in the local church in deep and meaningful ways. They will connect to a local church, discover their gifts, and deploy them there for the sake of those who call that church home. Stage 3 differs from other stages by its unique focus on church

¹Colossians 1:17

²Ephesians 2:22

³Hebrews 10:25

membership⁴ and the significant time that most people spend in stage 3. Growth tends to be accelerated here in Stage 3 due to spiritual adrenaline shot this stage usually has. While here a follower of Jesus will make worship a priority, gather intentionally in a small group, graciously give their time, talents, and money to the church, and live as a gospel missionary to the world.

Earlier you've discovered the interconnectedness of discipleship and spiritual formation. Stage 3 may see you still in a discipleship relationship but should also include you pursuing to make disciples of your own. There will undoubtedly be starts and setbacks in being and making disciples yet those in Stage 3 tend to find that great things come from humble beginnings. While here you will also continue the process of being transformed by Jesus from the inside out through spiritual formation that plays itself out in consistent exercise of spiritual disciplines.

At Stage 3 we begin to see the positive and sometimes dramatic blessing of God (internally and externally) as we follow him. Stage 3 has a recognizable shape to it: we worship, we gather, we give, and we go. That is not a tier of disciplines to be completed — it is a description of what a productive life in Christ actually looks like from the outside, and it is the same set of commitments Fellowship asks of its members. Most importantly, it is when we begin our journey as disciple-makers — teaching those in Stage 1 and 2 to obey what Jesus taught.

What You Carry Into This Stage

From the stages before, you bring wonder, need, and the practices that keep you near God. Stage 3 adds the outward shape of a formed life: worship, gather, give, go.

Carry all four forward. They should still be visible decades from now — but watch the engine underneath them. At this stage they are often driven by duty or the desire to be useful, and that is an honest beginning. In the stages ahead the same practices get carried by love instead. The behavior looks the same from across the room. The difference is everything.

Biblical Examples

Most of Paul's epistles are addressed to churches and involves instruction on how to not only build God's house together but also how to grow with one another. For those in the church in Corinth Paul's instruction centered around truly following Jesus and not men⁵, protecting their peace from evil⁶, being generous with their money⁷ and using their spiritual gifts⁸ to build up the body of Christ.

⁴Start Here is the first step toward membership at Fellowship: fellowshipproswell.org/groups/group-detail/312755/. Further questions can be directed to membership@fellowshipproswell.org.

⁵1 Corinthians 3:4-10

⁶1 Corinthians 5:9-11

⁷2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁸1 Corinthians 12

For those in church in Ephesus Paul highlights how each member of the church is saved by grace through faith⁹, is unified by the work of Jesus¹⁰, called to bear with one another in love¹¹, and to be kind to one another¹².

The church at Thessaloniki served as an example of faithful Christian living — being in the world but not of the world. They were an example to other believers in the region¹³, the word was at work within them¹⁴, and they exemplified brotherly love¹⁵.

Taken together, Paul's epistles paint a picture of unified diversity that deeply cares for one another, serves one another, and is financially generous. These believers met together to worship Jesus and were living testimonies of God's faithfulness.



The Great Need of This Stage

The great need in Stage 3 is someone who asks how you are, not what you are doing. Not another role. Not another team. A question your activity cannot answer.

Stage Steps

3.1 - Be in a Discipleship Relationship

3.2 - Become a Member of a Local Church

⁹Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁰Ephesians 4:3-4

¹¹Ephesians 4:1-2

¹²Ephesians 4:32

¹³1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

¹⁴1 Thessalonians 2:13-15

¹⁵1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

3.3 - Be Connected with the Mission of God

3.4 - Be a Disciple-Maker

3.5 - Be Courageous - Don't get stuck here

3.1 - Be In A Discipleship Relationship

As you are leaving Stage 2 you may be in a discipleship relationship already. If not, before you go any further you should find someone who has a life worth imitating and ask them to disciple you. You will likely find this relationship to be challenging but worth while. Don't give up too quickly.

3.2 - Become a Member of a Local Church

Your next move is to become a member of a local church. You should find a healthy church that preaches/teaches the Bible, has a healthy accountability structure, and serves the poor and plug in. Don't halfway commit — fully commit and begin to consistently practice worship, intentional group life, service, financial giving, and living on mission for God's kingdom.

3.3 - Be Connected To The Mission of God

You are likely growing at a significant rate at this point and are beginning to see how your life is not only a gift from God but should be stewarded for him. At this stage you begin to identify how your desires and gifting intersect to form calling¹⁶ that informs vocation¹⁷. You begin to understand how your work is connected to the mission of God.

3.4 - Be a Disciple-Maker

As you continue to grow in Christ you are now at least a step ahead of some people close to you in your life. Now it's time for you to guide someone else on The Path. Pray about who that is and approach them and invite them onto The Path. Be sure to invite your disciple-maker or Jesus-focused mentor to join you as you make your first disciple.

3.5 - Be Courageous - Don't get stuck here

Your next step is to go on the Inward Journey in Stage 4. To say 'yes' to that requires courage to look deeply within your own heart and be honest about it. You will find that it is easier to stay here. After being established in a local church have courage to continue to press into those people as well as allowing the light of Christ to expose the darkness of your heart.

WARNING

Stage 3 is the most dangerous stage in The Path because most churches have a vision of your life up to this point. If you are regularly attending church, connected in small groups, serving and financially giving, and go on a local or foreign mission trip then you are considered to be doing the things a healthy disciple does. However, doing for God does not always equate intimacy with him. Activity is

¹⁶Calling: The unique way that God has designed you to represent him in the world.

¹⁷Vocation: From the Latin word "vocare" which means "calling". This calling is specific to work and is the basis of understanding how one's work is to be used for and by God to represent his nature and character to others.

not always equal to proximity. For this reason many Christians will spend most, if not all, of their spiritual lives in Stage 3 and believe themselves to be healthy followers of Jesus.

"Being" Milestones Of Stage 3

Stage 3: Domain Milestones

Spiritual - Experiencing Jesus through spiritual disciplines and local church community.

Relational - Pursuing and nurturing belonging in a local church.

Emotional - Increasing in awareness of your own soul and self-awareness with others.

Intellectual - Increasing in knowledge about God to be shared with others.

Physical - Cultivating gratitude for your current body and awareness of internal narratives about your body.

Exercise: On A Scale of 1-10, what score would you give yourself for each of these domains? What lesson from the life and ministry of Jesus will help you take a step toward holistic health?

Spiritual -

Relational -

Emotional -

Intellectual -

Physical -

"Feeling" Milestones Inventory of Stage 3

1. Do others experience God's kindness and gifts through me in the local church?

2. Do my opinions and how I express them give others a clear view of God's Kingdom?

3. Do I acknowledge when I'm wrong and apologize when I've hurt someone?

4. Do my bank account and calendar reflect God's care for the poor?
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Taking Your Next Step

There is one critical relationship and one growth step for those in this stage.

Critical Relationships: Be-Disciplined and Make A Disciple

Discipleship centers on the scriptures and the person and work of Jesus Christ for the purpose of obeying Jesus, imitating his life, and making disciples who make disciples (multiply). You should be in a relationship where you are growing in these three areas. Once you've been disciplined, you must find someone and lead them to growth in those three areas.

Growth Steps: Spiritual Disciplines and Courage

Church membership allows each follower of Jesus a fast-track to growth in Christian formation. While membership is not finish line of our spiritual growth, becoming a meaningful member in the church will fast track that growth. Consistently worship, gather, give, and go within a local church. The next step may be the most important: have courage. Be courageous and take the next step into the Inward Journey.

Owning Your Growth

My Disciple-Maker/Mentor Is:_____.

My Disciple Is:_____.

Questions For Stage 3 Analysis

1. Are you a member of a local church? Why or why not?
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2. Why is intentionally gathering in a small group crucial to spiritual growth?

-
3. What have been barriers to discipleship (being discipled or discipling others) so far?
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Turn to the chart of spiritual practices in Chapter 14. Which of those are you currently engaging, and how consistently?

FOR THE DISCIPLE-MAKER

The Stage That Looks Like Success

Stage 3 people are your best volunteers. They serve, they show up, they carry things. Nothing about them looks like a problem, which is exactly why this stage is the easiest to miss and the hardest to move someone out of.

The church has every reason to keep them here. A Stage 3 believer is useful, and a plateau that produces good work does not feel like a plateau. But activity can substitute for formation for a very long time before anyone notices, including the person doing it.

So ask a different question than the one they are used to. They are asked constantly what they are doing. Almost no one asks how they are — and when you do, expect the first answer to be about their schedule. Ask again. The gap between how quickly they can describe their service and how slowly they can describe their interior life is the whole diagnosis.

Do not solve this by giving them something else to do. Stage 4 is inward, and the move toward it usually requires doing less rather than more. If they are already stretched thin, helping them step back from something may be the most spiritual advice you can give.

Resources

- I Am A Church Member - Dave Harvey
- Life In The Father's House - Wayne Mack
- When Helping Hurts - Brian Fikkert
- People Are The Mission - Danny Franks
- Celebration of Discipline - Richard Foster