

The Vineyard Way of Life

PRUNING



Trinity Church

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2019

INTRODUCTION TO THE VINEYARD WAY OF LIFE

The **Vineyard** is a way of life here at Trinity Church.

It is designed to help you become **connected** through **planting** and **pruning** and **impactful** through **providing** and **producing**.

This way of life is discovered through **four** Vineyard Way of Life manuals:

1. Planting

It will help you to become **connected** by bringing you into **membership** with God's family and Trinity's family. It will give you God's **people** to live with. You will come to **know** Christ.

2. Pruning

It will help you to become **connected** by bringing you into **maturity**. It will give you God's **principles** to live by. You will begin to **Grow** in Christ.

3. Providing

It will help you to become **impactful** by bringing you into **ministry**. It will give you God's **passion** to live out. You will begin to **serve** Christ.

4. Producing

It will help you to become **impactful** by bringing you into **mission**. It will give you God's **purpose** to live for.

Since each of these **Vineyard Way of Life** series builds on the other, it is suggested that each manual be studied in chronological order, starting with manual one and working through to manual four.

It is hoped that this **Vineyard Way of Life** series will equip you in understanding God's purposes for your life and His Church. These materials will also help you become a better disciple or follower of Christ!

A Disciple or Follower of Christ:

- 1.** Is **following** Christ.
- 2.** Is **being changed** by Christ.
- 3.** Is **committed** to the mission of Christ.

God bless you as you read and study through this series. May you discover fully the life God has planned for you!

Pastor Ed Niswender

PRUNING PRODUCES DISCIPLES

- Pruning is the process of growing in Christ. It involves bringing people into maturity and giving them God's principles to live by.

A Disciple:

1. Is **following** Christ.
2. Is being **changed** by Christ.
3. Is **committed** to the mission of Christ.

Two questions disciples ask:

- (1) What would Jesus do?
- (2) What did Jesus teach?

The goal of discipleship:

To develop committed followers of Jesus Christ by moving people toward a greater relationship with Christ and to transform them into His image.

A key Scripture on discipleship:

"Become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"
Ephesians 4:13 NIV

CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST

You were created to become like Christ.
This is your destiny and the purpose of your life.

Human beings are created in the image of God.

Genesis 1:26 NCV: *"Then God said, 'Let Us make human beings in Our image and likeness.'"*

Though we will never become God, or even a "god," there are several ways we are *like* God:

1. We are *spiritual beings*.

Our spirits are immortal and will outlast our earthly bodies. (1 Cor. 5:5)

2. We are *intellectual*.

We can think, reason, and solve problems. (Rom. 12:1)

3. We are *relational*.

Like God, we can give and receive real love. (Rom. 5:5)

4. We have a *moral consciousness*.

We can discern right from wrong, which makes us accountable to God. (Ps. 32:3-4)

God sent Jesus on a mission to restore the human race to the full image of God.

The Bible says in Genesis chapter one that all people, not just believers, possess part of the image of God. But that image is incomplete and has been damaged and distorted by man's fall and sin. So God sent Jesus on a mission to restore the full image that mankind has lost.

What does the full “image and likeness” of God look like?

It looks like Jesus Christ!

As stated before, we will never become God, or even a “god.” This desire to be a “god” shows up every time we try to control our circumstances, our future, and people around us.

God does not want us to become a “god”; He wants us to become *godly*. This means taking on His values, attitudes and character. God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not *comfort*, but *character development*.

This is what discipleship is all about - developing the character of Jesus! God gives us our time on earth to build and strengthen our character for heaven.

▪ **God’s Spirit working in you:**

How can we develop the character of Jesus? The answer is, we can't! Only God's Spirit can do this!

It is the Holy Spirit's job to produce Christ-like character in you. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to make the changes God wants to make in our lives.

How does this happen in real life? Through the choices we make. We choose to do the right thing in situations and then trust God's Spirit to give us His power, love, faith and wisdom to do it.

Since God's Spirit lives inside us, once we accept Christ as our Savior and Lord, His fruit, power, love, faith and wisdom are always available for the asking.

- **Being a disciple means cooperating with the Holy Spirit.**

Ephesians 5:18 commands us to be filled (or controlled) by the Spirit.
We must allow Him to control our lives. Obedience unlocks God's power.

Ephesians 4:22-24 says we have **three responsibilities** in becoming like Christ:

- (1) We must choose to let go of old ways of acting.

*Everything...connected with that old way of life, has to go.
It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it!*

- (2) We must change the way we think.

Let the Spirit change your way of thinking.

The Bible says we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.
(Romans 12:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18). The Greek word for "transformed" is *metamorphosis* used today to describe the amazing change a caterpillar goes through in becoming a butterfly. It is a beautiful picture of what happens to us spiritually when we allow God to direct our thoughts: We are changed from the inside out, we become more beautiful, and we are set free to soar to new heights.

- (3) We must "put on" the character of Christ by developing new, godly habits.

"Put on the new self, created to be like Christ in true righteousness and holiness."
(Eph. 4:24 NIV)

Your character is essentially the sum of your habits.

- **God uses His Word, people and circumstances to mold us.**

All three are indispensable for character development:

- (1) God's *Word* provides the *truth* we need to grow.
- (2) God's *people* provide the *support* we need to grow.
- (3) *Circumstances* provide the *environment* we need to practice Christ-likeness.

- **Becoming like Christ is a long, slow process of growth.**

You are a work in progress. Your spiritual transformation in developing the character of Jesus will take the rest of your life, and even then it won't be completed here on earth. It will only be finished when you get to heaven or when Jesus returns.

Remember: *God is far more interested in what you are than what you do!*

Many believers have abandoned living for God's great purposes and settled for personal fulfillment and emotional stability. That is narcissism, not discipleship. Jesus did not die on the cross just so we could live comfortable, well-adjusted lives. His purpose is far deeper. He wants to make us like Himself before He takes us to heaven. This is our greatest privilege, our immediate responsibility, and our ultimate destiny!

(Taken from *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, Chapter 22
"Created to Become Like Christ", pp. 171-178)

GROWING IN CHRIST

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV) gives us clear instructions about God's desire that His followers grow up like Christ in all areas of their lives:

“It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

It is clear that God wants you to grow up, to mature and develop the characteristics of Jesus Christ. But spiritual growth is not automatic. It takes an intentional commitment. You must *want*, *decide*, and *make an effort* to grow and then *persist* in growing.

Discipleship - the process of becoming like Christ - always begins with a decision.

God's part and your part:

Once you decide to get serious about becoming a disciple and become like Christ, you must begin to act in new ways. You will need to let go of some old routines and ways of doing things and develop some new habits, and choose to change the way you think.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV) tells us, “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”

These verses show us *two parts of spiritual growth*:

“*work out*” and “*work in*”.

The “work out” is your responsibility, and the “work in” is God's part.

The above verse is not about how to be saved, but how to grow. It doesn't say “work for” your salvation, because you can't add anything to what Jesus already did on the cross. (During a physical “workout” you exercise to develop your body, not to get a body. When you “work out” a puzzle, you already have all the pieces - your job is to put them together.)

God has given you new life; now you are responsible to develop it.

Changing the way we think:

To change your life and become Christ's disciple, you must change the way you *think*. Change always starts first in your mind. The way you *think* determines the way you *feel*, and the way you feel influences the way you *act*.

To be like Christ you must develop the mind of Christ. The New Testament calls this mental shift “repentance” (Which in the Greek means “*to change your mind*”).

Philippians 2:5 (NIV) tells us “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*” In other words, we must start thinking as Christ Jesus did!

How do we think as Christ wants us to think?

- (1) *Stop* thinking immature thoughts.
(These are self-centered and self-seeking)

1 Corinthians 14:20 (TLB) says, “*...stop thinking like children.*”

Babies by nature are completely selfish. They think only of themselves and their own needs. They are incapable of giving; they can only receive. That is immature thinking. Selfish thinking is the source of selfish behavior.

- (2) *Start* thinking maturely.
(Which focuses on others, not yourself)

1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV) is part of the great love chapter in the Bible that tells us what real love is. This verse reads, “*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.*”

The Christian life is far more than creeds and convictions; it includes conduct and character. (In other words, our deeds must be consistent with our creeds, and our beliefs must be backed up with Christ-like behavior.)

Christianity is not a religion (people trying to reach God) or a philosophy (a human understanding of life), but a relationship and a lifestyle.

TOOLS TO HELP US GROW

1. Transformed by Truth

God's Word is truth and His truth will transform us.

Jesus prayed in John 17:17 (NIV), "*Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.*" The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make us like the Son of God. To become like Jesus, we must fill our lives with His Word.

2 Timothy 3:17 (NIV) tells us, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

In John 6:63 (NIV) Jesus says, "*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*" The Bible is far more than a doctrinal guidebook. God's Word generates life, creates faith, produces change, frightens the Devil, heals hurts, builds character, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, infuses hope, releases power, cleanses our minds and guarantees our future forever.

God's Word is the spiritual nourishment you must have to fulfill your purpose!

To be a healthy disciple of Jesus, feeding on God's Word must be your first priority. Jesus called it "*abiding.*" He said, "*If you abide in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine*" (John 8:31 ESV).

Abiding (finding your home) in God's Word includes three things:

- (a) I must *accept* its authority.

The Bible must become the authoritative standard for my life. The compass I rely on for direction, the counsel I listen to for making wise decisions, and the benchmark I use for evaluating everything. The Bible has the first and last word in my life.

The most important decision you can make is to settle this issue of what will be the ultimate authority for your life. Determine to first ask, "What does the Bible say?" when making decisions.

- (b) I must *assimilate* its truth.

It is not enough to just believe the Bible. You must fill your mind with it so that the Holy Spirit can transform you with the truth. This means you must *read* the Bible daily to keep you in range of God's voice. You must also be willing to *research* or study the Bible asking what does it say and how does it apply to my life. Be willing to write down your thoughts and applications. Pause and ask simple questions like who, what, when, where, why, and how. You also have to be willing to *remember* it by memorizing verses to help you when tempted or tested, to make wise decisions, reduce stress, build confidence, offer good advice or share your faith with others. Assimilating God's Word also involves *reflecting* on it which the Bible calls

“meditation”. Meditation is focused thinking, selecting a verse and reflecting on it over and over in your mind.

- (c) I must *apply* its principles.

Reading, researching, remembering and reflecting on the Word is useless if we fail to put it into practice. The Bible tells us we are to be “*doers of the Word*” (James 1:22 NIV).

We fool ourselves when we assume that just because we have heard or read or studied a truth, we have internalized it. No, God wants us to implement what we have heard and read. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:24 (NIV) that “*everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock.*”

D.L. Moody said, “The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.”

2. **Transformed by Trouble**

Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* says that “God has a purpose behind every problem. He uses circumstances to develop our character.”

Life is a series of problems. All are significant in God's growth process for you. Listen to 1 Peter 4:12 (NIV), “*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*” God uses problems and trials to draw you closer to Himself.

Your most profound experiences of worship may well be in your darkest days, when your heart is broken and you are out of options and you turn to God alone. It is during suffering that we learn to pray our most heartfelt prayers to God. Problems force us to look to God and depend on Him instead of ourselves.

When facing trials and troubles, we must remember this: *None of your problems could happen without God's permission.* Satan will use these trials to bring out the worst in us, but God uses the same trials to bring out the best in us! Everything that happens to a child of God is allowed by Him and He intends to use it for good even when Satan and others mean it for bad.

Romans 8:28-29 (NLT) tells us, “*We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son.*”

Every problem is a character-building (discipling) opportunity. A silversmith was asked, “How do you know when the silver is pure?” He replied, “When I see my reflection in it.” When you have been refined by trials, people will see Jesus' reflection in you!

If you are facing trouble right now, don't ask, “Why me?” Instead ask, “What do you want me to learn?”

Don't give up - grow up! James 1: 2-4 and 12 (NIV) tells us: *“Consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything....Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.”*

3. **Transformed through Temptation**

Trials and temptations are not the same thing.

God uses trials to bring out the best in us.

God never tempts anyone.

So where do temptations come from?

Listen to James 1:13 (NIV): *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, **by his own evil desire**, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”* (Death refers to wrong existence, living a life God never intended).

With every temptation there is a *choice*. Every temptation is an opportunity to do good or evil.

“On the path of spiritual maturity, even temptation becomes a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling block when you realize that it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing.” (Rick Warren)

Temptation simply provides the *choice*. Every time you choose to do good, instead of sin, you are growing in the character of Christ.

One of the best descriptions of His character is the fruit of the spirit: *“When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”* (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT)

These nine qualities are an expansion of the Great Commandment (Matthew 28) and portray a beautiful description of Jesus Christ. To have the fruit of the Spirit is to be like Christ.

How does the Holy Spirit produce these fruit in your life? By allowing you to experience circumstances in which you're tempted to express the exact opposite quality.

Character development always involves a choice, and temptation provides that opportunity!

God allows the opposite situation of each fruit to give us a choice. (You can't claim to be good if you've never been tempted to be bad. You can't claim to be faithful if you've never had the opportunity to be unfaithful. Integrity is built by defeating the temptation to be dishonest; humility grows when we refuse to be prideful; and endurance develops every time you reject the temptation to give up). Every time you defeat a temptation, you become more like Christ!

Satan is pretty predictable. He has used the same strategy for centuries.

All temptations follow the same pattern.

Temptation follows a *four-step process*:

- (1) Satan identifies a *desire* inside of you.

Temptation starts when Satan suggests with a thought that you give in to an evil desire, or that you fulfill a legitimate desire in a wrong way or at the wrong time. Temptation begins *within us*. If you didn't have the internal desire, the temptation could not attract you. Temptation always starts in the *mind*, not in circumstances. (See Mark 7:21-23; James 4:1)

- (2) Satan tries to get you to *doubt* what God has said about sin.

Is it really wrong? Did God really say not to do it? Doesn't God want me to be happy?

- (3) Step three is *deception*.

Satan is called the "father of lies" in the Bible. He is incapable of telling the truth. Anything he tells you will be untrue or just half-true. Satan offers his lie to replace what God has already said in His Word.

- (4) Step Four is *disobedience*.

You finally act on the thought you've been toying with in your mind. What began as an idea gets birthed into behavior. You give in to whatever got your attention.

4. Overcoming Temptation

- (1) Refuse to be intimidated.

Many Christians become frightened and demoralized by tempting thoughts, feeling guilty that they can't "get a handle" on this temptation. But remember, you will never outgrow temptation. Temptation is a sign that Satan hates you, not a sign of weakness or worldliness. It is a normal part of being human and living in a fallen world. But don't be surprised or shocked or discouraged by it.

It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted, yet He never sinned. Temptation only becomes a sin when you give in to it. The closer you become to God, the more Satan will try to tempt you. Realize that Satan hates your prayers and will try anything to stop them. Instead of condemning yourself, refocus on God and turn to Him for help.

- (2) Recognize your pattern of temptation and be prepared for it.

There are certain situations that make you more vulnerable to temptations than others. Some circumstances will cause you to stumble almost immediately, while others don't bother you much. Satan knows exactly what trips you up, and he is constantly working to get you into those circumstances.

Ask yourself, “When am I most tempted?” “Where am I most tempted?” “Who is with me when I’m most tempted?” “How do I usually *feel* when I am most tempted?”

You should identify your typical pattern of temptation and then prepare to avoid those situations as much as possible. The Bible says we must be willing to flee temptations. (It does no good to argue with your glands! Get out of there!)

(3) Request God's help.

Heaven has a 24-hour emergency hot-line! God wants you to ask Him for help in overcoming temptation. Psalm 50: 15 (NCV) assures us, “*Call on Me in times of trouble. I will rescue you, and you will honor Me.*”

If God is waiting to help us defeat temptation, why don't we turn to Him more often? Honestly, sometimes we don't *want* to be helped! We *want* to give in to the temptation even though we know it is wrong. (At that moment we think we know what's best for us more than God does.) At other times we're embarrassed to ask God for help because we keep giving in to the same temptation over and over again. (But God never gets irritated, bored, or impatient when we keep coming back to Him). Listen to Hebrews 4:16 (GNB), “*Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.*”

God's love is everlasting, and His patience endures forever!

Temptations keep us dependent upon God. Just as the roots grow stronger when wind blows against a tree, so every time you stand up to a temptation you become more like Jesus!

FUNCTIONING AS A DISCIPLE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

As one functions as a Christ-follower in the local church, one becomes a “*participating member*” of that body.

A *participating member* is described as one who is maturing in the following five areas:

(1.) **Grace**

Christ’s followers understand and have individually received Christ’s saving grace. They realize that good works and religious striving will not “save” them or gain them access to God’s eternal kingdom. They have abandoned all attempts to earn God’s favor by accomplishments of their own and find security only through Christ’s sacrificial death on their behalf.

They are trusting in Christ’s death, burial and resurrection for their salvation. They believe they are saved by grace and grace alone.

In obedience to Christ’s command, they have undergone water baptism as believers, giving outward witness to the inner cleansing and renewal experience in Him.

(2.) **Growth**

Christ’s followers know that the grace of God that saved them is only the beginning of His work in them. They gratefully respond by actively pursuing a lifelong process of spiritual growth in Christ and by seeking to become conformed to His image.

Growing in Christ is called discipleship.

They regard the Bible as the final authority in all areas that it teaches about and desire to be wholly obedient to it. Christ’s followers honestly confront areas of personal sin and engage the Holy Spirit’s power in seeking to turn from sin.

Christ’s followers also desire to extend the grace they’ve received to others through personal evangelism and participation in the collective ministry of the church in their community, country and world.

Disciples come to grips with God’s purposes for their lives and seek to grow in those areas.

(3.) **Group**

A Christ follower honors God’s call to participate in community in order to grow in Christ-likeness, express and receive love, and carry out the ministry of the church.

For this reason, Christ followers give priority to attending the corporate gatherings of the church for the purpose of worship, teaching, and participation in communion, and are connected relationally to a small group of believers for the purpose of mutual encouragement, support, and accountability.

(4.) **Gifts**

Christ's followers recognize that the church is made up of interdependent members, each uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ and furthering the ministry of the church.

To discover your God-given S.H.A.P.E. for ministry as well as your personal *passions, gifts,* and *personal style*, please see *The Vineyard Way of Life: PROVIDING.*"

(5.) **Giving**

A follower of Christ soon comes to understand the principle of godly stewardship. Disciples realize that they have been bought with the price of Christ's blood, and that everything they are and have belongs to Him.

In light of this, they desire to be responsible caretakers (stewards) of the material resources with which God has entrusted them. They recognize the tithe (ten percent of one's earnings) as the historical standard of giving in Scripture. But beyond this, in response to Christ's abundant giving, they increasingly submit their resources to His lordship and display a spirit of generosity and cheerfulness in supporting the work of the church and reaching out with compassion to a needy world.

LIFE'S FIVE GREATEST QUESTIONS

A disciple of Jesus Christ will be able to answer life's five greatest questions. The *Vineyard Way of Life* series are designed to help you study and find the answers to these five questions. The *Vineyard Way of Life* manuals are our primary training tools.

1. **What will be the center of my life?**

The question of *worship*.

Who or what am I going to live for?

What am I going to build my life around?

(Planting)

2. **What will be the community of my life?**

The question of *fellowship*.

How will I demonstrate my commitment to other believers and connect with the family of God?

Where will I practice the "one another" commands with other Christians?

Where will I experience "body life," fellowship and support?

(Planting)

3. **What will be the character of my life?**

The question of *discipleship*.

What kind of person will I be?

This deals with what I *am* more than what I *do*.

(Pruning)

4. **What will be the contribution of my life?**

The question of *service*.

What will be my ministry to others in the Body of Christ – His Church?

What would be my best role in the family of God?

What is my S.H.A.P.E. for service?

What are my passions, gifts, and personal style when it comes to ministry?

(Providing)

5. **What will be the communication of my life?**

The question of *mission*. What will be my mission to unbelievers?

What is my *testimony*? How can I share the *Good News*?

What are *life lessons and godly passions* God has given me to share?

(Producing)

OUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

We have five main ministry areas to help develop committed followers of Jesus Christ:

1. Who We Are Orientation
2. The Vineyard Way of Life
3. Bible Discovery Classes
4. Life Groups (Small Groups)
5. Preaching and Teaching

These five ministry areas will help you to grow as a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ.

WHO WE ARE ORIENTATION

This orientation explores Trinity's Mission and Vision to be **Connected** and **Impactful** based on the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Orientation also lays out our Vineyard Way of Life process.

The Vineyard Way of Life

The Vineyard's focus is biblical discipleship, and its methodology is relational environments. It values and measures how many are actually becoming disciples who can make disciples. The Vineyard uses four discipleship manuals that take people through **Planting** (Knowing Christ), **Pruning** (Growing in Christ), **Providing** (Serving Christ), and **Producing** (Sharing Christ).

This Way of Life series enables us to become connected and impactful.

Bible Discovery Classes

These are Bible and life-related classes, held during our Sunday Discovery Hour prior to our Sunday morning worship service.

Life Groups (Small Groups)

Other small groups may function in the church, but these groups have a particular focus:

These small groups are designed for discipleship and outreach.

1. They will experience three things:
 - a. Relationship with God (Reaching Up)
 - b. Relationship with each other (Reaching In)
 - c. Relationship with non-believers (Reaching Out)
2. They will be made up of four elements:
 - a. *Community* – Gathering to fellowship
 - b. *Consideration* – Exploring the Bible and sharing their spiritual journey. (Study Pastor's message, special Bible study topics, life-related topics, etc.)
 - c. *Caring* – Sharing prayer requests, conversational prayer and meeting the needs of the group.
 - d. *Common Cause* – Sharing in an outreach project in the church, community, or the world.

3. Each member of the group will spur one another on to:
 - a. Maturity
 - b. Mutual edification
 - c. Ministry outreach

Preaching and Teaching

Our preaching and teaching on Sunday mornings, as well as at other times, will focus on teaching biblical absolutes, principles, and sound biblical doctrine. It will speak of Christ as a way of life, both in life and words.

We desire to be grounded and equipped in God's Word.

DISCIPLESHIP TAKES TIME

There are no shortcuts to Christ-like maturity. It takes time. But let these verses encourage you:

- (1) Ecclesiastes 3:1 (CEV)

“Everything on earth has its own time and its own season.”

- (2) Philippians 1:6 (TLB)

“I am sure that God Who begins the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in His grace until His task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns.”

While we may be concerned about how **fast** we grow, God is more concerned about how **strong** we grow! God views our lives *from* and *for* eternity, so He is never in a hurry!

Christlikeness is your eventual destination, but your journey will last a lifetime.

WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG?

God has chosen to develop us slowly. Jesus was deliberate in developing His disciples so they wouldn't be overwhelmed. He prefers to work in incremental steps in our lives.

- (1) **We are slow learners.**

It seems like we have to relearn lessons over and over again to really get them. The problems keep recurring, and we think, “Not again! I've already learned that!” - but God knows better. We can quickly forget the lessons God teaches us and how soon we revert to our old patterns of behavior. God knows we need repeated exposure!

- (2) **We have a lot to learn.**

We cannot expect a quick solution to long-standing, deep-rooted habits or problems in our lives. They did not develop overnight. It is unrealistic to expect them to go away immediately. There is no quick solution that can undo the damage of many years. It requires the hard work of removal and replacement. The Bible calls this process “taking off the old self” and “putting on the new self”. While you were given a brand new nature at the moment you were saved, you still have old habits, patterns and practices that need to be removed and replaced. Let's face it, the Bible has a lot to teach us about becoming like Christ!

(3) **We are afraid to face the truth about ourselves.**

Jesus says the truth will set us free but it often makes us miserable first. The fear of what we might discover or have to give up might slow down God's process of growth and development in our lives. Only as we allow the light of God's truth to shine on our faults, failures and hang-ups can we begin to work on them. It will take a humble, teachable attitude to grow in God's ways.

(4) **Growth is often painful and scary.**

There is no growth without change. There is no change without fear or loss. There is no loss without pain. You must be willing to let go of old ways in order to experience the new. Fear can slow down your growth.

(5) **New habits take time to develop.**

There is only one way to develop the habits of Christ-like character: you must *practice* them - and that takes time! Paul urged Timothy, "*Practice these things. Devote your life to them so that everyone can see your progress.*" (I Timothy 4:15 ESV). If you practice something over time, you get good at it.

DON'T GET IN A HURRY

As you grow to spiritual maturity in Christ, there are several ways you can cooperate with God in the process of becoming His disciple:

(1) **Believe God is working in your life even when you don't feel it.**

Just as there are seasons of growth in nature, so there are seasons in your spiritual life. Sometimes you will have a short, intense burst of growth (springtime) followed by a period of stabilizing and testing (fall and winter). Over time, a little sprout can turn into a giant redwood towering 350 feet tall.

(2) **Keep a notebook or journal of lessons learned.**

Let this be a record of what you are learning. Write down the insights and life lessons God teaches you about Him, yourself, life, relationships, and everything else. Record them so you can review them and remember them and even pass them on to the next generation.

(3) **Be patient with God and yourself.**

One of life's frustrations is that God's timetable is rarely the same as ours! We are often in a hurry when God is not. You may feel frustrated with the seemingly slow progress you're making in life. Remember that God is never in a hurry, but He is always on time. He will use your entire life to prepare you for eternity. When God wants to make a mushroom, He does it overnight, but when He wants to make a giant oak, He takes a hundred years!

(4) **Don't get discouraged.**

Habakkuk 2:3 (NLT) says, *“These things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient! They will not be overdue a single day!”*

Remember how far you have come, not just how far you have to go! God is not finished with you yet, so keep on moving forward!

(These thoughts taken from Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Chapter 28, “It Takes Time,” pp. 217-223)

MATURITY COMMITMENT

A copy of this commitment for you to sign is on the next page.

In order to continue to grow and mature in my Christian life, I will work to commit to the five following disciplines in my life:

1. Grace

Having accepted Christ into my life for salvation, and having been baptized by immersion, I will now seek to exhibit God's grace through me and expand His grace to others who need to experience it in their lives.

2. Growth

I will seek to demonstrate ongoing evidence of a changing life and pursuit of Christ-likeness through personal Bible reading and prayer (quiet time with God) and by attending services for worship and edification.

3. Group

I will seek to connect with others in significant relationships by attending a small group for fellowship and support.

4. Gifts

I will seek to discover my unique shape, passions, gifts and personal style by reading through the next two *The Vineyard Manuals: Providing and Producing*. I will then seek to minister and serve Christ's body and the world with the abilities God has given me.

5. Giving

I will seek to demonstrate godly stewardship in all areas of my life including my time, talents, tithes and resources.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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I will seek to demonstrate godly stewardship in all areas of my life including my time, talents, tithes and material possessions.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____