



Living Out  
**LIFE**

# Philosophy of Ministry

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A philosophy of ministry defines why a ministry exists and how it is accomplished. Christ-centered leaders seek to develop a ministry philosophy that reflects the ministry's biblical convictions and the sense of direction that God has given for its existence.

Having a clear, concise, and compelling ministry philosophy significantly strengthens a church or ministry's intentionality and effectiveness. Defining and describing the ministry's direction brings greater discernment and clarity when making decisions. It helps guide leaders to focus on the great things God has called them to do amid so many good options. An articulated ministry philosophy also directs how the ministry focuses its resources of time, people, meeting space, and finances.

The following is a concise philosophy of ministry for Christ-centered leaders seeking to cultivate a LIFE-Giving, disciple-making ministry in a local church, Christian school, or ministry group. This philosophy of ministry features a unified mission, a vision, and a description based on three guiding questions.

## A Philosophy of Ministry for a LIFE-Giving Disciple-making Church or Christian Ministry

**Mission:** to glorify God by living out the LIFE we have in Christ  
LIFE is an acronym for focusing on the key developments of life in Christ: Loving God, Investing in others, Following His word, Engaging our world

**Vision:** Growing Deep, Reaching Out  
Just as a tree grows from a sapling to full maturity by developing roots that establish a growing trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit, there are parallels to the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Knowing Christ leads to growing deep in relationship with Him and reaching out to others with the message and mission of Christ in making disciples of all nations.

Years ago, Christian leadership professor Dr. Howard Hendricks posed three questions to pastors at a conference to help them intentionally and thoughtfully develop their churches' overall disciple-making ministry. These three questions and subsequent responses can become the basis of a well-thought-out philosophy of ministry:

1. What are key characteristics that God seeks to develop in His disciples?
2. What type of ministry does God use to develop this type of disciple?
3. What type of leaders does God use to produce this kind of ministry?

The three questions and proposed answers for a developing clear philosophy of ministry:

### 1. What are key characteristics that God seeks to develop in His disciples?

God desires spiritual depth and vitality in His people. Clarity of the end goal brings focus to the process. Start with clearly describing what maturity in Jesus Christ looks like and the qualities you hope to see God developing in the people you invest in over the next 1 to 5 years.

A mature person who is "complete in Christ" is the goal (Col. 1:28-29). The characteristics of such a person are expressed by the following traits highlighted by the acronym LIFE:

#### Loving God

- Christ-centered (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17)
- Committed (Matt. 22:36-40; 2 Tim. 4:6-8)

#### Investing in Others

- Constructive (Eph. 4:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 10:24-25)
- Compassionate (1 Tim. 1:5; John 13:35)

#### Following God's Word

- Character (convictions and conduct Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 4:17-6:9)
- Core competencies (Luke 6:40; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Maturing believers in Christ are becoming like Him and learning to integrate lifestyle skills such as:

Bible study	prayer	identifying spiritual gifts
serving	discipleship	walking in the Spirit
defined life priorities	hermeneutics	developing a biblical worldview
living by faith	relationship skills	financial stewardship
teaching	personal mission statement	
generosity	sharing the gospel and one's personal testimony	
mentoring	understanding the spiritual maturity process	
daily worship	growing in theological depth	

## Engaging our World

- Clear life priorities (Matt. 6:33; 2 Tim. 2:1-7 relationship with God, family, healthy balance, ministry to others, career, finishing well)
- Commissioned (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 1:28-29)

Because Christlike maturity is the goal of every believer, having a clear way to communicate the natural course of spiritual development is beneficial. The following four stages of the **Pathway of Growing in Grace** convey four significant developments in a growing disciple's life. We can compare these four stages of growth to the four different stages of a tree's development. Just as there is natural development with a tree, so there is evident growth in a believer. These four steps of a believer's development are not mutually exclusive but build upon one another as we grow in knowing and living in God's grace.

### Pathway of Growing in Grace: Begin → Establish → Serve → Multiply

- **Begin**

We begin our life in Christ when we believe in Him and His kingdom gospel. For trees, when germination occurs, a seedling takes root and begins to grow. The moment you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you begin your eternal relationship with the Triune God of the universe and are eternally united with Jesus Christ.

- **Establish**

From the one germinating seed of a tree comes the primary root that eventually develops into a seedling and then a sapling. With the development of a growing root system comes the emergence of a maturing trunk, branches, and leaves. A similar process takes place in a growing believer in Christ. When you believe the gospel, the good news about Jesus and His kingdom, you begin to grow in your new relationship with Jesus Christ. You start to sink roots in knowing God and His word, and spiritual growth begins in your new life in Christ. Your values, character, relationships, career, and ministry start being shaped by Christ's love, His word, and His leadership.

- **Serve**

A tree continues to grow to support other kinds of life. Birds of the air can put a nest in that tree. Squirrels and cats can climb in it, and the tree can produce refreshing shade. Just like a tree grows to support other life, a significant development step occurs when believers begin

serving Christ by serving others. Growth occurs with the realization that God has saved us to serve Him.

When you understand that God has called you to be a part of His mission of maturing Christ-centered believers, anything you do that contributes to this work is an act of service. Those who serve God will experience the joy of seeing God's kingdom work accomplished through His people.

- **Multiply**

Another aspect of spiritual growth is when mature believers multiply themselves. Trees can produce a substantial amount of shade and thousands of seeds, potentially producing more trees. A mature tree like this can sustain children climbing among its branches and even support a treehouse. There is a parallel to what God is doing in the lives of His people.

A disciple of Christ who becomes a multiplier is actively helping others engage in ministry. Multipliers are discipling believers, training leaders, building teams, casting vision, assisting people in taking next steps, assessing progress, and always encouraging faith in Christ. They serve not just as an individual contributor, but as a relational leader mobilizing others for ministry.

Here is a helpful process leaders follow when training others: 1) "I do this, you watch, and we will talk about it." 2) "I do this, but you help me, and we will discuss." 3) "You do this, and I will help you as we discuss it." 4) "You do this, I will watch, and we will talk it over." Multipliers are modeling maturity and developing believers who will potentially make the same investments in other believers.

## **2. What type of ministry does God use to develop this type of disciple?**

Once we can answer the question about what kind of disciples God is asking us to develop, we can identify what type of ministry God uses to cultivate these maturing believers. The following characteristics of a particular ministry and a personal disciple-maker will be beneficial in helping believers take steps of growth in the process of becoming fully mature disciples of Christ:

- Inviting
- Interactive
- Investing
- Intentional
- Inspiring

Ministries and small groups with these characteristics create environments for relational discipleship to flourish as shepherding, teaching, fellowship, and accountability are experienced and valued.

### **3. What type of leaders does God use to produce this kind of ministry?**

This third question focuses on leadership. A ministry or church is only as strong and healthy as its leadership. A LIFE-Giving discipleship ministry requires healthy Christ-centered leaders who embody and express these qualities:

- Empowered (Col. 1:29)
- Encouraging
- Equipped
- Engaging
- Exponential (modeling maturity and multiplying future disciple-makers and leaders)
- Excellent Shepherds (intentionally leading, feeding, guarding, healing, helping, and rescuing)

### **Core Values of a LIFE-Giving Disciple-making Church**

The New Testament vision of seeing the gospel go forth with clarity and disciples of Christ developing spiritual maturity compels Christ-centered believers and spiritual leaders. The following are core values emphasized in LIFE-Giving disciple-making churches:

- Exalting God in public and personal worship
- Emphasizing clear, systematic, and relevant expository preaching and teaching of the Bible
- Experiencing personal growth in godliness and in the knowledge and application of God's word
- Embracing a biblical basis for governing and leading the church
- Equipping believers biblically to fulfill their roles in life and ministry through personal discipleship
- Entrusting ministry to believers in our church
- Encouraging one another by committing to genuine and loving relationships
- Extending the good news of Jesus Christ to people in our lives, in our community, and abroad