

## **Description of a Growing Disciple**

*Articulating a goal is the first step to achieving our purpose. What is a disciple of Jesus like? The Description of a Growing Disciple (DGD) describes six qualities of a person who is being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.*

### **Becoming a Disciple**

Once you have made a commitment to follow Christ, have you already arrived? Or is becoming a disciple somewhat like signing up for the “cruise of a lifetime?” Or, perhaps, a meticulously planned canoe expedition? While these are helpful metaphors to the extent that they describe a journey, they are inadequate portrayals of the new life Christ offers us.

Following Jesus is more like white-water rafting. He is the capable, committed guide, essential for our survival. Other rafters are critically important. Everyone must learn to navigate and to remain safely in the raft. There are moments of terror, exhilaration, tranquility, discouragement, and achievement, all of which describe the incredible adventure of entrusting ourselves to our Guide for the journey.

Jesus approached his first disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John – with the invitation, “Come with me . . . I will make you . . . I will show you how” ([Mark 1:17](#)). Words cannot adequately express all that transpires when the Creator of heaven and earth comes to dwell within, empowering us to “want to do and be able to do what pleases him” ([Philippians 2:13](#)). Jesus continues to extend this invitation to join him in this life-changing, revolutionary adventure called “discipleship.” Our lives and our world will never be the same.

### **Our Need for a Purpose**

What is our aim? If gaining knowledge is our primary purpose, we could easily test our success. Simply take a Bible knowledge test at key intervals: Grade 6, Grade 12, and several times throughout adulthood.

Discipleship is more than gaining knowledge, however. It is the process of transformation of the heart. It is choosing to be with Jesus in order to learn to be like him, in the power that he gives. Discipleship is responding to God’s work in our lives, with his initiative making our transformation possible.

This *Description of a Growing Disciple* (DGD) is an attempt to describe who our inner person is becoming as a devoted follower of Jesus, evidenced by changing behaviour. “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind to reward all according to their ways” ([Jeremiah 17:10](#)).

In the DGD, each quality is characterized by two adjectives that are similar, yet inadequate on their own. They complete the sentence, “A growing disciple is someone who is . . .” Like two sides of a coin, both attributes need to be considered to give a true picture of this quality in a disciple’s life. “Evidences” are provided as clues, or fruit bearing, signs that we are indeed responding to God’s initiative in this particular area.

The DGD is not exhaustive. The New Testament alone alludes to more than 600 behaviours and attitudes that describe a maturing Christian. [The Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith](#) has more than a dozen items describing our version of ideal behaviours and attitudes. The aim of this particular description is to keep the question “Am I becoming a more devoted disciple?” in the forefront.

## “A Growing Disciple is Someone Who Is . . .”

### Quality 1: Captivated and Committed

**Scriptures:** [Matthew 22:36-40](#); [John 21:15-17](#); [Revelation 2:1-7](#); [Luke 7:36-48](#)

**God’s initiative:** “We love, because he first loved us.” [1 John 4:19](#)

**Description:** A person who believes in Jesus increasingly loves him with “heart, soul, mind, and strength” and is committed to growing as a disciple, regardless of the cost.

**Evidence:**

- Understands the scriptural basis for, and is confident of, a personal saving relationship with Christ.
- Feels a growing love for God, which motivates increasing obedience.
- Expresses faith and is keen to talk about life in Christ.

### Quality 2: Thriving and Thirsting

**Scriptures:** [2 Peter 1:3-11](#); [Deuteronomy 5:33](#); [John 15:1-8](#)

**God’s initiative:** “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” [2 Peter 1:3](#)

**Description:** A person who determines to abide in Christ and is committed to cultivating a growing relationship with God, even in adverse circumstances, so that faith is progressively more vibrant.

**Evidence:**

- Learns to study Scripture, inductively and devotionally.
- Becomes devoted to knowing God through the Bible and prayer.
- Chooses to practice a variety of spiritual disciplines for training in godly character.
- Prioritizes time to nurture a deepening relationship with God.

### Quality 3: Bonded and Building

**Scriptures:** [Acts 2:38-47](#); [Hebrews 10:19-25](#); [1 Corinthians 12:7-27](#)

**God’s initiative:** “And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple . . . who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ.” [1 Peter 2:5](#)

**Description:** A person who engages with a community of faith, in small groups and larger contexts, and develops as a contributor to the health and effectiveness of a local congregation.

**Evidence:**

- Learns to live the Christian life in community with other believers, giving and receiving a maturing level of discipling, accountability, and support.
- Displays an unfolding awareness of a unique identity in Christ and joyfully uses spiritual gifts to serve.
- Practices generosity with time and resources.

### Quality 4: Inviting and Influencing

**Scriptures:** [Matthew 28:19-20](#); [2 Corinthians 5:11-21](#); [Luke 19:1-9](#)

**God’s initiative:** “No one can come to me unless the Father . . . draws him.” [John 6:44](#)

**Description:** A person who develops an invitational lifestyle in everyday relationships, contagiously attracting others toward Christ.

**Evidence:**

- Knows the importance of sharing faith and how to introduce a person to Christ.
- Learns to pray for and relate redemptively to non-Christian peers.
- Becomes a compassionate witness, demonstrating Christ's love by meeting practical needs and enthusiastically participating in group efforts to draw others to Christ.

### Quality 5: Discerning and Disarming

**Scriptures:** [Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-42; John 17:6-19; Philippians 3:17-21](#)

**God's initiative:** "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." [John 16:13](#) "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth." [John 1:14](#)

**Description:** A person who is being transformed into the spirit and character of Christ, able to interact with religious, political, and societal systems with increasing discernment, giving primary allegiance to God's kingdom by being "in the world, but not of it."

**Evidence:**

- Knows and orients life according to God's values.
- Increasingly portrays Christ's spirit of humility and meekness.
- Gains confidence in evaluating and relating to the surrounding culture, "obeying God rather than others."
- Pursues a grace-dispensing, peacemaking lifestyle, which addresses conflict, oppression, injustice and the needs of the poor.
- Endeavours to prioritize the concerns of God's kingdom over national concerns.

### Quality 6: Purposeful and Persevering

**Scriptures:** [Philippians 3:7-16; Colossians 3:5-17; Hebrews 12:1-13](#)

**God's initiative:** "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." [Philippians 1:6](#)

**Description:** A person who knows that discipleship is a lifelong journey of increasing responsiveness to God, embracing the perspective that we are on a path toward maturity, that having a relationship with Jesus is our greatest treasure, and that heaven is our real home.

**Evidence:**

- Knows assurance of salvation, but presses on to greater growth in each of the qualities of a Growing Disciple.
- Regularly assesses growth in being transformed into the image of Christ, being content—but not complacent with progress.
- Learns to live all of life in partnership with God.
- Celebrates the high points and joyfully carries on despite discouragement and failure.
- Seeks assistance from God and fellow travellers.
- Is dedicated to "finishing well."