

Stage 4: Shepherd Disciples. Mark 6:7-8:26

Stage four disciples: Entering **Adulthood**:

As a disciple of Jesus Mashiach, it is imperative that you grow up and bear fruit. In fact, Jesus Mashiach promises that growth and the accompanying “fruit” is the only sign that you are “abiding” in him, the “true vine” and that the Father is at work in your life to “prune” you to greater fruitfulness (John 15:1-2). And, if *fruit* is the one affirming sign of your viability as a disciple, then you should welcome fruitfulness and to see it as the *path of progress* you must take until you reach your inevitable maturity.

Now, the question is, what is this “maturity” that you must grow into as a disciple of Jesus Mashiach? In a fleshly, **man-centered Gospel**, the maturity is entirely *personal*—it is to experience as an individual the evidence of spiritual life. In a

man-centered Gospel, whose purpose is simply the *salvation of man*, then the individual's spiritual survival and satisfaction is all that can be imagined.

Case Study: the man-centered Gospel.

Critics of *late-stage Christianity* pointed out the *selfish* orientation of its religion. Sadly, their observations were correct. Late-stage Christianity, especially what we would call “evangelicalism” and especially “reform theology” was blindly human-centric in its theology and its Gospel. Although embedded within its catechisms and creeds was the *worship* of the true God, its entire system was centered on “the Gospel”—the *truth that Jesus died for me*. And, the entirety of God's plan was thus fulfilled in “my salvation.” And, my best efforts, calling, and purpose was simply to *recognize, meditate, and repeat* mantra-like the truth that “Christ died for me.” Ironically, Gentiles were as guilty in this *self-fixation* as were Jews who

viewed the entirety of God' purpose of salvation as being "for Israel" and that "God redeemed Israel."

Both Jew and Gentile misunderstand the "Gospel of the Kingdom" and the divine purpose behind salvation, which is to make Mashiach, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Heir of all creation, of "heaven" and "earth" (Genesis 2:4) which the Firstborn Son was to share with those others redeemed as sons.

But, limited in their view of the Gospel, the Churches had little need to see *discipleship* and its growth beyond the first three stages of maturity—the *childhood* of disciples which produced the fruit of *new life*, of *repentance*, and of *fellowship*.

For, the next four stages of development into "adulthood" and "parenthood," being actual spiritual growth stages, would yield a *spiritual harvest* which would establish the *throne of Jesus* and expand the "Kingdom" of God.

Instead, churches relied on *fleshly curricula* which demanded “compliance” rather than “sacrifice,” which were guided by “committees” rather than “calling,” to raise up leaders, to create church structures, with the result that not the Kingdom of Mashiach but rather denominational, church, and religious kingdoms *honoring “man” were built*.

Likely, this is the reason the Church Age eventually *burnt out*, like the last *flicker* of a menorah finally going out, giving in to the cold and surrounding darkness. The fleshly fruit it produced—fleshly leaders, selfish shepherds, and *religious households* was no defense against the encroaching darkness.

Thus, let your generation be the first generation to bear Kingdom Fruit, as disciples reach the *full maturity* called for by Mashiach!

Stages of Adult Discipleship:

As already pointed out, the first three levels of discipleship should be considered the *formative*

years of "childhood" for the disciple. In these formative years, the child is naturally Self-focused, maturing in their personal experience of *new life* in Jesus Mashiach (stage 1), in the interpersonal relationship they develop with Jesus as they follow him (stage 2), and in the social relationships they connect with in community (stage 3). All these stages lay the foundation for *discipleship maturity*. Sadly, the man-centered Gospel of the Church gives little reason to mature beyond church-membership which, in fleshly terms, is the pinnacle of growth because it produces the *commodities needed* for the institutional church's survival: monetary donations, church attendance, and human resources. However, the spiritual kingdom of God is only established when disciples reach their full maturity.

For, only fully mature disciples become the shepherds able to raise up generation of reproducing disciples, forming them into

households capable of planting the Word in the rich soil of their surrounding networks of friends and family. Only such households, led by *sacrificial* shepherds, are resilient to *pray and bind the strong man and endure hardship* when the Kingdom Warfare breaks out into the open.

So, consider the growth path that “adult” disciples follow as they bear fruit, gather households, and parent these multiplying households across generations. Importantly, your relationship with the Lord Jesus Mashiaich will also *mature* into an *adult* relationship. Though we never outgrow our dependence on him for life, our walk by faith, and our identity as his body, we

Responsible
for a People



Shepherd
(young adult)

Stage 4 Disciple

Redeeming
from Bondage



Sacrificial
Shepherd
(adult)

Stage 5 Disciple

Reproducing
New Disciples



Household
Shepherd
(parent)

Stage 6 Disciple

Raising them
to Grow



Generational
Shepherd
(elder)

Stage 7 Disciple

Replicating
New Households

know him in increasingly familiar and mutual ways, as we mature as shepherds of his flock and share experiences and accomplishments with him!

- Stage 4: Shepherding Disciples on his behalf.

When you reach the fourth stage of your development, your growth will seem to be like your *spiritual adolescence*. Having been cared for up to this point, and learning to care for yourself and your walk with the Lord Jesus, you are now ready to be *responsible for others*. Notice that when the Lord Jesus gives his disciples his power, he sends them out as partners to *shepherd* the lost sheep back into the flock. As these disciples go out, they *represent Jesus Mashiach*, bringing his power and restoration to those far from the Kingdom. As they go out to *take responsibility* to care for these needy people, they have the Lord's power to cast out demons and to teach. As these disciples *go out* to care for these lost sheep, they learn to be shepherds as they observe Jesus, the

good shepherd models for them this *responsible care* for others that shifts them from their earlier *Self-interest* to be interested in the needs of others. The Lord consistently reveals his *shepherd's heart* for the “sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34).

- Stage 5 disciples: Sacrificial Servant Shepherds.

As a stage five disciple of Jesus Mashiach, you take the step into full maturity by becoming like him as a shepherd willing to “lay down his life” for the sheep (John 10:11). Serving Jesus sacrificially by “denying” your Self, taking up your “cross” of ministry responsibility, and “following” Jesus opens your eyes to the hidden glory of the Kingdom and its righteous life.

- Stage 6: Household Shepherd Disciples.

For shepherds who serve well, showing that they are willing to “deny” their Self-interests and Self-ambitions to serve Jesus Mashiach to care for his

sheep, they then grow into “Household Shepherds.” From the developmental stage of “adulthood,” the disciple now is spiritually *anointed* and empowered to move into the stage of “parenthood.” In adulthood, *shepherding* is a competency that disciples develop through patient and faithful service. But, as shepherds learn to lay their lives down for the sheep, the Lord God will invariably give them a bountiful harvest—not simply helping younger disciples to grow, nor seeking the lost sheep to bring them back into the safety of the Lord’s flock. Now, as one steps into spiritual “parenthood,” the disciple now is called to co-labor to care for an entire household. Household disciples learn to lay the foundations needed to *plant the faith of their household* on the solid rock of Jesus Mashiach. At this stage, Household Shepherds can be called to “houses” of many configurations and sizes that range from single households, clans, or even

nations, as some Household Shepherds will even be called to *shepherd the errant* House of Israel!

- Stage 7: generational shepherd disciples.

Finally, Jesus models for his disciples what it means to serve as a “generational shepherd” who equips the many generations of shepherds to gather and reproduce households across generations. Serving in this stage requires the deepest and most thorough of sacrifices, for *generational shepherds* grow accustomed to pouring out their very *souls* that their people may thrive in the new life of the Kingdom!

So, generational shepherds share in Jesus Mashiach’s afflictions, experiencing loss, humiliation, and suffering as he himself did to secure the *Kingdom Life* for his people. Imitating the ministry of their Chief Shepherd, these generational prepare their households for the *Redeeming Work of Mashiach*. Revealing to them the nature of Mashiach as the “Lamb of God” and

showing their need to experience a complete *spiritual rebirth* by the Holy Spirit. For, God's people must realize their utter helplessness in light of the *Almighty*. To Passover from Satan's Kingdom of enslavement, your people must understand the full burden of their sin and their impossible Self-redemption much less any service or worship to be given to God. But, as a generational shepherd, not only will you understand deeply the Lord's work as the Redeemer of your house, but you will also emulate the Lord, sharing in the same kinds of afflictions he endured that your house might multiply through generations of disciples and shepherds whom you will raise up.

The Responsibilities of Shepherds:

So, whether you are just beginning to serve the Lord Jesus as a *shepherd* in his household, or even when you are a *generational shepherd* raising up

disciples themselves to become shepherds, your work of shepherding will involve these key areas:



Responsible
for a People



Redeeming
from Bondage



Reproducing
into New Life



Raising them
to Grow



Repopulating
New Households

All shepherds are responsible for a people. Remember, it is the Lord Jesus Mashiach, as our Chief Shepherd, who puts a people on your heart. Without this sense of being *called* to a people, you become a mere “hired hand,” working but for *fleshly reward* but having no deep family commitment. For, we shepherd *parentally in this* great “House” of the Lord Jesus, and we are committed not for base profit but by an eternal kinship from God. Without this *burden of* kinship, your service will be as *shallow as earthly employment* and nothing more. So, you shepherds, furnished with this divine and Fatherly

call on your lives as his family shepherds, will first lead your people to our great Redeemer to release them from the *captivating bonds* of this world and its *fleshly chains of sin*. You will help your people come to Jesus Mashiach for *new life*, to be reborn into his flock. And, you will “feed them” with “knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15). Remember, you can only feed them what is fed to you, and impart to them the *life* lavished upon you. For, we are not a family of mere “words” but the “people” sanctified by our great Lord himself to be his very own people, “zealous” (Titus 2:14) and abounding in this eternal life (Colossians 2:6-7).

Case Study: mercenary shepherds:

Through this series, we have considered quite a few signs or causes of the Church’s steady decline. But, one indication of danger *clearly stands out*, and the Lord God prophetically denounces this type of “rot” that ruins entire

generations and households: shepherds who feed only themselves (Ezekiel 34:10). Recall that starting with Stage 4 shepherds, the first step of development is the need for Self-denial—to sacrifice, to abandon Self-interest along with Self-ambition, so that one puts the needs of the flock above one's own life.

But, in late stage Christianity, a professional class of *pastors* were trained who saw ministry as simply an opportunity and a career path. Of course, a worker is *worthy of their pay*, but a worker without a genuine call of God is a mere *mercenary*, a “hired hand” who puts Self-interest first. Such “hired hands” are incompatible with Kingdom service for these reasons:

Limit to Service: Whereas a *shepherd* is called to *lay down his life* for his people, a “hired hand” has a personal limit that is never crossed, and the *mercenary* is never *inconvenienced*. His service is only at his own convenience.

Easy Road: Mercenaries and Hired Hands love the *commodification* of Body Life, because functions and processes can be easily managed without the messy need to understand personal needs. And, the *fleshly heart* loves control and its simplicity.

- The pastor of a fairly large church did not the people of his congregation to read, handle, or understand the word for themselves. Instead, he relied on published authors who would say *predictable and safe platitudes and doctrines*. But, such generalities do not feed *spiritual growth*, and the church failed to raise up mature leaders.

Career first priorities: In the North American church, very wealthy congregations sprung up, giving pastors a wide range of choices. Some future pastors I knew chose their churches not by a sense of “calling” but the best benefits package offered. Pastors would move when it was convenient or financially feasible to do so.

Serving with the Good Shepherd:

When the Lord Jesus sends you out in this fourth stage of discipleship, as a *shepherding disciple*, his relationship with you matures. Now that you are secure in an *abiding and life-giving* relationship with the Lord, and he knows that you follow him faithfully in your personal walk and in relationship with other disciples, now he entrusts to you the responsibility of *caring for others*. He entrusts to you the very task that he is involved with, the care of his flock.

Consider how he now entrusts to you his very ministry. Now, you **represent the Lord** as you go forth with your partner to care for his flock.



Called
to People



Authority
to Serve



Responsible
for Growth



Encourage
with Word

Key Verse.

7 And he called the twelve and began to **send them** out **two by two**, and gave them **authority** over the **unclean spirits** ⁸ He **charged them** to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ^[b] ¹⁰ And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, **stay** there until you depart **from there**.”

Mark 6:7-10

³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a **great crowd**, and he **had compassion on them**, because they were like **sheep** without a **shepherd**. And he began to **teach** them many things. Mark 6:34

Developmental Disciple Stage:

Milestone/ Abilities:

A. Knowing/ Responding to Jesus:

B. Living in His Household:

C. Establishing His Throne and Kingdom:

Assessment Question:

Further Discovery: