AN ANNUAL DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

When planning your year, we always recommend you start with your discipleship strategy. That's because **spiritual growth should be the lens through which we see everything else we do in our ministries.** We believe there are four spiritual habits that help kids (and adults, too) grow closer to God. These four habits aren't anything new. They've been talked about countless ways, by countless numbers of people. Your church is probably already talking about them in your own unique way, so feel free to change the language to fit your context if you need to. The words aren't important, but here's what is: if these four spiritual habits are the behaviors that help kids grow closer to God, **we need a strategy to help kids engage in these four spiritual habits on a regular basis, year after year.**

If you're an adult (or maybe even a "professional" Christian) the idea of **spiritual habits** is probably pretty familiar to you. Through spiritual disciplines, quiet time, devotions — whatever you call it — you've probably established a few rhythms in your life that help you grow spiritually. Maybe you …

- Start your day with a quiet time.
- Follow a Bible reading plan.
- Listen to worship music while you drive.
- Subscribe to sermon podcasts.
- Go to church, attend a small group, or serve somewhere.

Since you're a grown-up, you've had a little time to figure out this whole "spiritual growth" thing. The kids in your ministry, on the other hand, aren't grown-ups, so they might need a little help from you to figure out how to grow spiritually.

This is where spiritual habits come in. **Spiritual habits are the decisions, behaviors, and rhythms that help us grow spiritually over time.** If you're like most people, the first things that pop into your head when you hear "spiritual habits" are probably reading the Bible, praying, or going to church. Sure, reading, praying, and going to church are important spiritual habits, but they're not the only spiritual habits that matter.

So what's the complete, final, definitive list of spiritual habits? Well, there isn't one. You can organize and categorize and define spiritual habits in a number of ways, and feel free to steal our list if you think it's helpful. It's a list of the **four spiritual habits** to help kids, teenagers, and adults all grow spiritually.

But just *knowing* what helps kids grow spiritually doesn't guarantee they *will* grow spiritually. If we want to give kids as many chances as possible to grow, **it's so important we have a discipleship strategy that is based on these four spiritual habits.**

But how? That's what this post is all about! We hope this strategy we're about to unpack **will give you a framework for discipling kids that you can replicate and improve year after year.** With this Annual Discipleship Strategy, you'll learn a system for helping kids grow spiritually all year long.

If you're familiar with Grow Curriculum & Annual Strategy, some things in this post might sound familiar to you. That's because everything we do in Grow Kids Curriculum is based on the strategy we're about to break down for you! **But don't worry if you've never used** Grow Kids **in your ministry before. You can still steal our strategy!** Take the ideas you find helpful, ignore the parts that don't quite fit your context, and combine them with the unique language, vision, and strategy of your church.

Okay, are we ready? Let's get started!

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THE 4 SPIRITUAL HABITS

Before we talk about our discipleship strategy, we have to define the spiritual habits that are the foundation of that strategy.

1. SPEND TIME WITH GOD

This is an obvious one, right? It's so obvious, in fact, that sometimes it's the only spiritual habit we can name. After all, isn't "growing spiritually" synonymous with "spending time with God"? Well, not exactly. Spending time with God is a big part of growing spiritually, but it's not the whole picture. That's why it's just the *first* of *four spiritual habits.*

Spending time with God may not be the only spiritual habit that exists, but it's still a pretty important one. After all, if kids are ever going to learn to live out their faith, they've got to start spending time with God on their own. It means opening the Bible, having conversations with God, and discovering how they best connect with God through worship on their own.

2. SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS

Engaging in healthy community can, and should, be a spiritual habit we help kids develop. But "healthy community" doesn't just mean hanging out with Christians. **This spiritual habit is about growing in Christlike relationships with — well, everyone. Christians and non-Christians, too.** Because, sometimes, it isn't another church potluck or Bible study with our fellow Christians that will grow us the most. It might be a friendship, an investment, or a challenging conversation with someone who doesn't believe the same things you do that makes the biggest difference in our faith.

We see this most clearly in Jesus, of course. When he discipled his followers, he didn't disciple them in one-on-one conversations in the privacy of their homes or the nearest Starbucks. He discipled them in real life, in the context of relationships that were real, challenging, and imperfect. In Jesus' ministry, it was often his disciples' interactions with each other, or with people who didn't follow him, that prompted some of his most significant teaching opportunities.

3. USE YOUR GIFTS

Kids need to know that God made them unique, special, and with really specific gifts, talents, passions, and resources. They also need to ***use those gifts*** **to love God, love others, and make a difference in the world around them.**

When we use our gifts, we acknowledge that the things we've been given weren't by chance. Everything is a part of God's design. Using those gifts can become a spiritual habit. When kids begin to discover who God made them to be, and then use their unique identity to make a difference in the world, to serve others, and to give back to the God who made them, they grow.

4. SHARE YOUR STORY

Here's the fourth and final spiritual habit: kids need to learn how to talk about God and who God is to them. But this spiritual habit is way bigger than just knowing how to talk about your relationship with God or why they made a decision to follow Jesus – although that's part of it. **Sharing your story is the spiritual habit of making faith a regular, everyday, go-to topic of conversation in our lives.**

It's about discovering God in every aspect of your story and then sharing what you've found with other people. When we talk about God and our place in God's story, it

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helps us believe, understand, and share about how we live out our faith. That's why sharing our stories is such an important part of growing spiritually.

HOW DO I TURN THESE HABITS INTO AN ANNUAL STRATEGY?

When planning your year of ministry, we always recommend you begin by planning your discipleship strategy. That's because we believe spiritual growth should be the lens through which we see everything else we do in our ministries. Here's how we approach it …

- **Divide** the year into quarters.
- **Assign** one spiritual habit per quarter.
- **Create** one experience or activity each quarter that will help kids put that spiritual habit into practice.
- But before you do any of that, if you want to make sure your discipleship efforts actually stick, make sure your ministry is set up in a way where you can **connect** every kid in your ministry to:
  - More than one caring adult who can invest in them (like their teachers or small group leaders).
  - A community of peers who can grow alongside them (like a small group).

If you're using the Grow Annual Strategy to plan your year, here's how that could look …

FALL: SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS

Every fall, we focus on the spiritual habit of **spending time with others** because it's so important for kids to build strong relationships and community at the beginning of the school year. These relationships will help them stay connected throughout the year and will help them feel safe enough to be honest and open during discussion times. To help kids practice this spiritual habit, you might …

- Create **small group party kits** to help small group leaders have fun and build deeper relationships with the kids they lead.
- Hand out **small group or family conversation starters** to help kids have better and more meaningful conversations.
- **Give a challenge** for kids to make a new friend, have a specific conversation with a friend, or reach out to someone who might need a friend.

WINTER: USE YOUR GIFTS

Every winter, we focus on the spiritual habit of **using your gifts** because the holidays are a perfect opportunity for kids to serve others in a meaningful way. To help kids practice this spiritual habit, you might …

- Create a **fundraiser or collection** to help kids make a difference in someone's life.
- Hand out **gift assessments** to help kids figure out how God has made them and how they can use their gifts to make a difference.
- **Give a challenge** for kids to serve somewhere alongside their friends, families, or small groups.

SPRING: SPEND TIME WITH GOD

Every spring, we focus on the spiritual habit of **spending time with God** because it's Easter time, and that's a great time to help kids better focus on who Jesus is and what he's done for them. To help kids practice this spiritual habit, you might …

- Create **a special prayer or worship event** for kids to participate in.
- Hand out **devotionals or Bible reading plans** for kids and families to do at home.
- **Give a challenge** for kids to practice a new spiritual habit with their friends or families.

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SUMMER: SHARE YOUR STORY

Every summer, we focus on the spiritual habit of **sharing your story** because many churches are already thinking about mission experiences and, with the new school year about to begin, it's a great time to challenge kids to think about the difference they can make around them. To help kids practice this spiritual habit, you might …

- Create a **storytelling segment in your weekly program** to give kids, student leaders, or adult leaders a chance to share their stories of faith.
- Hand out **faith conversation starters** to help kids talk about who God is to them in small groups or at home.
- **Give a challenge** for kids to write and then share with someone their faith story so far.

Okay, maybe this seems like a lot to do, but it doesn't have to be! Like you, we know that our time each week is limited, and no one has endless hours to spare — not even on something as important as discipleship.

That's why, if you're using Grow Curriculum, you know we've already done a ton of this work for you! For every quarter of every year, we provide an activity or experience that corresponds with that quarter's spiritual habit, and we include everything you need to make it happen — supply lists (with links to purchase the supplies), instructions, graphics, handouts, and more!

And here's the good news: there is a way to structure your discipleship strategy so that you do **the least amount of work** for **the biggest impact**. That's what the Grow strategy is all about.

In case you missed it, check out this article about planning an entire year of ministry. It'll show you how all seven of these methods for investing in parents might look on your annual calendar, alongside an annual strategy for your:

- Teaching
- Weekly Environments
- Events
- Volunteers
- Families

We've said this before, but we've got to say it again! These ideas we've talked about are nice … but **these *ideas* only become a *strategy* when you put them on your calendar and turn them into actions.**

When you have an annual plan to turn your ideas and goals into a strategy, you'll make a much bigger impact.

So whether you use Grow Curriculum or not, **we hope you'll** steal our strategy! We developed it over lots of years of ministry, with input from lots of church leaders and lots of trial and error. Take it, tweak it, and make it your own. We really hope it helps you be just a little more awesome at what you do this year!



For even more resources like this one, try a free trial of Grow Curriculum and Annual Strategy for your children's or youth ministry. It's everything you need for a more strategic year of discipleship, teaching, environments, events, volunteers, and families!

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