
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Recovering the Lost Art of *Catechesis*

Catechesis — In short, the early church insisted on it. The Catholic church discarded it. The Reformers rediscovered it. The Puritans demanded it. Modern evangelicals have never heard of it.

The practice of *Catechesis*, as a way to disciple new believers, has declined. Yet, for effective biblical church growth to happen, a new *catechesis* is needed.

So . . . how do we recover a biblical and practical *catechesis*? How do we incorporate new believers into a local church in an effective way?

The typical reaction is to look for a quick and easy discipleship program for new believers. But, doing so often ends in disappointment.

It's time to face reality! Quick-and-easy is the problem. Maybe quick-and-easy has to be discarded. Maybe true discipleship is always slow and demanding.

There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity. Genuine spiritual growth always requires a holistic reshaping of the human person: heart, mind, and soul.

What would a comprehensive, systematic spiritual formation program look like in today's world? Here's some thoughts.

1. *Catechesis* is immersive and time-consuming.

If you aim to change someone's entire mindset and lifestyle, it will take a LOT of time and effort. There is no Six-week Seminar for Instant Sainthood. Maybe it doesn't require three years. Maybe it does. (That is, after all, how long Jesus took with his disciples.)

However long it takes, there is no substitute for the slow, long-term, step-by-step work of bringing the gospel to bear on every area of a person's life.

2. *Catechesis* is relational and communal.

It requires ongoing connection with a mentor/teacher and a cohort of fellow disciples. It cannot be done alone. While this process requires some solitary engagement by the individual, it also requires ongoing relationships of honesty, acceptance, and mutual love.

Christianity is NOT a solitary faith. It's a *koinonia*, i.e., a fellowship of like-minded believers united together in a deep commitment to shared faith, love, and support.

3. *Catechesis* is demanding and action-oriented.

It requires the learning of new actions, new practices, and new behaviors — not just new doctrines.

We cannot just teach people about prayer and evangelism in a classroom. We must show them how to do it, require them to do it together, and then offer feedback.

4. *Catechesis* is experiential and emotional.

It should change what people feel and love—not just what they think. Our aim should be, in the words of Dallas Willard, “enthraling the mind with God” so that these new Christians desire God’s goodness and long for his will to be done in their lives. This will require, not just teaching truths, but unhurried reflection, meditation, discussion, and prayerful wrestling with God. Until their values, feelings, and desires start to shift, any changes in behavior are only superficial and temporary.

5. *Catechesis* is informational and theological.

Yes, there is an intellectual component to our disciple-making process but that should not be the only tool in our toolbox. Effective discipleship will include, not just the learning of a few biblical truths, but the construction of an entire biblical worldview from the ground up. The teaching curriculum must integrate all the other dimensions mentioned above. So what should be included in a curriculum of a *catechesis*?

A) What We Believe – Christians need to

see the world differently. Traditionally, this has included teaching on the Apostles’ Creed, the attributes of God, the creation and fall, the person of Christ, the order of salvation, and the last things.

B) How We Love God and Others – Christians need to learn to connect to God and one another. Traditionally, this has included teaching on the Lord’s Prayer and other spiritual disciplines like Bible reading, meditation, conversational prayer, contemplation, and the practice of the presence of God. It should also include practices of participation in a faith community.

C) How We Live – Christians must learn a new way of life. Traditionally, this has included putting on the virtues of Christ described in the Fruit of the Spirit and putting off the vices of sin, as described in the Ten Commandments and the seven deadly sins. It should also train disciples in living out the mission of the kingdom through practices that reach out to meet the practical and spiritual needs of their neighbors.

How might you begin to design a new *Catechesis* for your local church? Why not begin this month?

Bio: Dr. Joel Elies serves as assistant director of doctoral program at Talbot School of Theology. He is the author of *Christ-Centered Spirituality: A Catechesis for Today* (available on Amazon.com; for bulk discounts, email info@sanctusbooks.com).

Growth Points is published twelve times a year. Subscription price is \$29 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained.

Copyrighted 2025 ISSN 1520-5096