

Development Phase Selected: Exploring

You selected the statement, "I am curiously drawn to Christians who graciously accept me as if I belong with them already."

This is a great place to be! You are exploring a relationship with God and have found a group of disciples who are living out God's love in a very practical way. They are an expression of God's loving acceptance of you (Interpersonal Hospitality).

The good news for you is that you are loved and accepted. This is the beginning of an exciting journey into the fullness of an amazing relationship with the people God has called to be an expression of God's love in the world. The fact that you are 'curiously drawn' to this group of people is an indication that God has already been at work in your life in ways of which you were probably not even aware.

As you become more connected to the people gathered to celebrate and follow Jesus, you begin to experience more of the love of God for yourself, and you begin to develop an awareness of opportunities to share God's love with others.

What's Next?

Since God has already begun to draw you into a relationship through disciples who have already made you feel like you belong . . . go with it!

This is a great time to explore the possibilities for your life. Consider the following quote from Bishop Robert Schnase, author of *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*: "As a school for love, the church becomes a congregation where people learn from one another how to love."

Henri Nouwen (priest and theologian) describes hospitality as 'making space' for someone in our lives. Notice the implications of this idea. There are no expectations for the person receiving the hospitality to have to earn the hospitality—they are simply welcomed as they are.

As you begin the journey as a disciple it is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the hospitality you are receiving:

Ask lots of questions. Take time to observe how this group of disciples 'does life.' Enjoy building a relationship with your new friends. Respond to invitations for fellowship (recreation, meals, and informal gatherings).

As you participate in worship experiences, pay attention to the ways in which this gathering of believers seeks to engage those who are not yet in a relationship with God. For example:

- How does this congregation seek to make sure everyone feels welcome?
- For whom does this congregation pray?
- What kinds of life crises is this congregation ministering to?

If this body of believers has persons available to support newcomers (e.g. sponsors, mentors, hosts/hostesses) take advantage of the opportunity to get to know the congregation better and discover how you can become better connected. When you are ready, think about joining a small, organized group of disciples as they explore how God is inviting them to 'become more like Jesus'.

Suggested Resources

If you want to read about the relationship God offers to you, we suggest the following resources:

Following Jesus, by Carolyn Slaughter

A Disciple's Path, by James Harnish and Justin LaRosa

Foundations, by Phil Maynard