

THE 5 STAGES WHITE PAPER SERIES

## **The 5 Stages as a Ministry Framework**

*How Faith Church in Dyer, Indiana  
built a Disability Ministry Using The 5 Stages*

**the 5 stages**  
*changing attitudes*

A RESOURCE OF ELIM CHRISTIAN SERVICES

**Interviewee:** Vinnie Adams,  
Worship Leader and Special Needs  
Ministry Director at Faith Church (Dyer, Indiana)

**By:** Dan Vander Plaats

*The following interview was conducted on July 7, 2014. Vinnie Adams is the Special Needs Ministry Director and Dyer Campus Worship Leader for multisite Faith Church, headquartered in Dyer, Indiana. Vinnie sat down with us to talk about how Faith Church's multifaceted special needs ministry was built in part on the framework provided by The 5 Stages.*

**T5S: What drew you into a passion for Special Education and the disability community in general?**

Adams: My family really drew me into this area. My folks worked at a group home in Oostburg with adults with pretty significant disabilities. Being around someone with disabilities was pretty much never uncomfortable for me. We would go over there for dinner all the time. When I was in 4th grade, we took one of those adults into our house and she became part of our family. Her name is Kris. She has very little independence and needs quite a bit of help. I remember early on, when we would go out to Wal-mart and Piggly-Wiggly I would turn my head, like in shame, like I don't know her. And then I developed this 'righteous anger' to be a voice and advocate for her. I would get in people's faces. Our Home Christian Ministries was a residential facility in our town, and it was normal for adults with special needs to be in our church. So, I kind of grew up to have this passion.

**T5S: You first heard of the 5 Stages tool before you joined the staff at Faith Church. What came to mind for you as you first learned about this tool, and why?**

Adams: There's a couple things that came to mind. This is a direct quote: I remember thinking, 'This is so good.' It is this unspoken mindset. Everyone is somewhere on there (the spectrum of attitudes). And I don't think anyone has ever really considered where they are in their attitudes.

And then there's the personal piece of being challenged by it. Up until then, I felt like I had arrived, and then suddenly being like "I have definitely not arrived." There's this personal conviction associated with it.

The 5 Stages is such a great framework for disability theology. Most of the world is doing Stage 3, but it's still the negative view that 'they have needs and I need to be there to help.' Stage 5 is so radically Christ's Kingdom. It's one thing to say that He uses the weakness (which is a worldly term), but it's another thing to seek to live it out, which is what The 5 Stages challenges you to do.

**T5S: In what ways did you use the 5 Stages tool as you began your work at Faith Church?**

Adams: It was literally the first document that I brought to Pastor Bob (Bouwer). It was my third day in the office, and we did a peer-learning day downtown Chicago. It was me, Ryan (Matthysse), and Bob. When I shared it with him, he just said "This is it."

I used it to show Faith leadership the framework for how we wanted our ministry to work. Then,

even before we launched anything, the Treasureland (kid's) program wanted me to share something. So I presented the 5 Stages to them.

I was at the Joni and Friends Family Retreat recently, and it stuck with me how your disability is so secondary to who you are. As I was explaining The 5 Stages to a family, they were just replying, "Yeah, yeah." It's like this lightbulb thing. Everyone can relate to it, because they're somewhere on that spectrum. There's nothing disagreeable on it. It is convicting though.

So, short answer to the question: I didn't know where we would go with this ministry idea, but I knew this would be the framework.

**T5S: How do you use it on a regular basis now, if you still do?**

Adams: Specifically, I use it every time we train new volunteers for one of our ministries. Every time I talk with people from another church, especially about our ministry, I talk about The 5 Stages or use that language. It is part of our every day conversations as a ministry. It still provides a framework, because it reminds us that we still have a tendency to constantly assess things out of human ability.

**T5S: What does the 5 Stages provide for churches that might otherwise be missing? Does the 5 Stages tool provide an 'entry-level' resource for equipping people to pursue disability ministry? If so, how?**

Adams: This is what I've loved most about the The 5 Stages. A lot of churches will look at Faith Church and say, in comparison, we don't have the resources, the manpower, or the space to do disability ministry. And I say, good, because you don't need those things.

I know of this church in the west suburbs. There's a family there now that had decided a few years ago to find a church with their son who had autism, They started with the closest church. By the end of the service, everyone within 10 feet had moved away. Next two weekends, they do the same thing with two different churches. Fourth weekend they went out again, sat down, and all the people around them stayed. That's all it took for them to say 'This is our church.'

Your church can have all the resources in the world, but if your church doesn't have the attitude for this, it's all for naught,

What the 5 Stages brings is that church-wide assessment tool to say 'we have to do this together, change our whole church attitude.' It's almost scary to think about a church without the right attitude. Imagine the experience of that family, and all they could think afterwards is 'this is how the church responded,' if they don't have the right attitude, what does that mean for all our churches and how they are responding to families who want to be there.

Here's The 5 Stages in a nutshell: act like Jesus.

That's all there is to it. Churches might strive to have a disability ministry, but if they don't have the attitude and the mindset, they're missing it. It's the pre-assessment tool for every church before they do anything with disability ministry.

It provides a framework to think big-picture about each aspect of your ministry. Is this exemplifying care or pity or co-laboring something else?

**T5S: What ministries at Faith Church best exemplify “5 Stages” thinking?**

Adams: Over the last almost two years, we've put the following in place:

1. Reflectors ministry - provides a safe place for worship and scripture lesson and social time as an alternative to the regular worship service
2. Prayer partner ministry - part of Reflectors ministry, it is truly a co-laborer ministry because you partner off (a person with disabilities and someone who does not identify as disabled) and you pray with and for each other
3. Respite and Parent Support - Co-laboring with and empowering families to raise kids to know Christ
4. Frontlines team - This is a greeter team comprised of people with different abilities
5. Treasureland - full inclusion of students with different abilities (seeing true mutuality and gift using by people with special needs)

I intend to spend more of my time meeting with our other ministry leaders to bring The 5 Stages to them. It's not going to get into the DNA of Faith Church if am trying to accomplish everything on my own, but if I can help other ministry leaders make Stage 5 a goal of their ministries, that is a great direction for us to go.

**T5S: How would you recommend other churches utilize the 5 Stages tool?**

Adams: You can use it generically, for your framework, or as your end-goal. Because we use this as our framework, our end-goal is to make our church one where we are co-laboring, where we recognize each person's value and use their gifts.

I would think any church or ministry could use The 5 Stages as a frequent assessment tool for individuals or the church as a whole. You could even use it a small group study or a Sunday school course.

The 5 Stages ([www.the5stages.com](http://www.the5stages.com)) is a resource developed at Elim Christian Services ([www.elimcs.org](http://www.elimcs.org)), a comprehensive social services ministry in the Chicago area with a vision to equip and support people with disabilities around the world, as well as the organizations who seek to serve them.

Faith Church ([www.faithchurchonline.org](http://www.faithchurchonline.org)) is a multisite Reformed Church with a vision to "reach the disconnected and grow the connected."