

GROWING TOWARD *Spiritual* MATURITY

A. The Purpose of this series:

The purpose is the same goal that Epaphras had for the Colossian Christians. He prayed for them,

“That you may become mature Christians and that you may fulfill God’s will for you.”

[Col 4:12](#) (Phillips)

That’s what God wants for us. He wants us to grow up. You can circle the word “mature” and “God’s will”. They are both in the same sentence. It is God’s will that you grow up. Listen to this verse from the Apostle Paul:

[Ephesians 4:14-15](#) “We are not meant to remain as children but to grow up in every way into Christ.” (Phillips)

Did you realize that God wants you to grow up? I have a friend who works at the Medical Lake facility for those with developmental disabilities. I went out there one day with him and saw men and women with mature bodies, but immature minds. It was tragic. One young man looked to be in his late 20’s, in a wheelchair. The aide would place a plastic ball in his lap, and he’d try and try to knock it off with his hands. Sometimes it would take him a full minute. Sometimes it would take him 3 or 4 minutes.

If we look at arrested development mentally, physically, and think, “How tragic,” what must God the father think when he looks at arrested development spiritually? Here’s a question for you...

B. What is Spiritual Maturity? Being like Christ

[Eph 4:13](#) until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.(NLT)

According to this verse, you can define spiritual maturity in one phrase. That phrase is this: Spiritual maturity is being like Christ.

Most of us want to grow. Most of us want to mature. Most of us want to be like Christ. Many times, we don’t know how to get started.

C. Overview: Seven Habits of Maturing Christians

We will focus on the **Seven Basic Habits** every Christian needs to develop in order to grow to spiritual maturity. My goal is to...

Equip you with the **skills** you need to begin these habits

Explain the **tools** you need to continue these habits.

1. In order to grow we need to eat—The Bible
2. In order to grow we need to breathe—Prayer
3. In order to grow we need good spiritual hygiene—Confession of sin
4. In order to grow we need a caring family—Fellowship
5. In order to grow we need regular exercise—Service
6. In order to grow we need protection—Temptation
7. In order to grow we need to give—Stewardship

D. Facts about spiritual maturity

1. Spiritual maturity doesn't happen automatically

Did you know that you can be a Christian and you can never grow up spiritually.

[Hebrews 5:12-13](#) “You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures. You are like babies who drink only milk and cannot eat solid food. ¹³And a person who is living on milk isn't very far along in the Christian life and doesn't know much about doing what is right.” (NLT)

Arrested spiritual development. They should be mature. They've had enough time. But tragically, they're not! Spiritual maturity is not automatic. It takes time, effort.

2. Spiritual maturity doesn't happen quickly

The Bible says in [2 Peter 3:18](#), “Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our savior, Jesus Christ.” (GN) That indicates a process. It takes time. It's not instantaneous.

9th grade algebra. The formula for distance. Anybody remember?

r x t = d

Rate x Time = Distance

That formula means that if I'm going 5 miles per hour, it will take me 1000 hours to cover 5000 miles.

That formula means that if I'm going 50 miles per hour, it will take me 100 hours to cover 5000 miles.

That formula means that if I'm going 500 miles per hour, it will take me 10 hours to cover 5000 miles.

There are some Christians that have known Christ for 50 years. By now they should be mature. But they are poking along at 1 mile per hour. Or some of them have stalled out. Not going anywhere. Just sitting there, causing a traffic jam behind them.

Theme Verse: [2 Pet 3:18](#) *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

There is no shortcut to spiritual growth. There's no instant pill I could give you that today you could take and tomorrow you're going to be spiritually mature. It takes time. It takes an intentional pursuit. It won't come automatically or quickly.

People try a lot of shortcuts. Some people look for an emotional experience — "If I just get this 'certain experience', then all my problems will be solved and I will be a mature Christian." Other people say, "If I just go to this seminar.... If I just read this book... If I just listen to this tape..." Other people say, "If I just keep a certain set of rules, then I could be all God wants me to be."

But the Bible says, no. It's a continual process. You have to learn to be mature. But there are some skills that you can learn that will help you grow.

3. Spiritual maturity won't happen without discipline

[1 Timothy 4:7](#) *"Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit."* (Phillips) Is physical fitness automatic? No. Neither is spiritual fitness. It takes time and trouble. Just like to be physically fit you've got to exercise, develop some basic habits. That's true in the Christian life. The Bible says, *"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."* That's the NASV of the same verse. It takes discipline.

When you talk about discipline you need to talk about discipleship because the two go together. There are **six key truths** I want you to understand as an overview to where we're going.

1. The Bible teaches that mature believers are called disciples. That's the term that the Bible uses for a mature believer — a disciple.

2. The Bible teaches that I cannot be a disciple without being disciplined. In fact the two words go together — disciple and discipline.

3. The Bible also teaches that the more disciplined I become the more God can use me.

4. The mark of a disciple is cross bearing.

[Luke 14:27](#), Jesus said, “*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*” God wants us to bear our cross. We’re going to explain what that is.

5. How often am I to do this? The Bible says daily.

[Luke 9:23](#) Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me. (NIV)

That’s what we’re going to talk about. What does it mean in a practical sense to bear our cross.

6. What is involved in cross bearing? Stated up front: Whatever it takes to give Christ first place in my life.

E. The Goal: That I will commit to the habits necessary for spiritual maturity.

II. Reasons Why You Need Your Bible

A. The Bible is like an instruction manual for a car owner. Without it life is hard at best, impossible at worst.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do. [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)

If you have a new car, one of the first things you do is read the instruction manual. Find out how often the tires need to be checked, rotated. Find out how often the oil needs to be changed. Find out how often it needs to be serviced. Find out how fast you should drive it for the first 500 miles. If you fail to do this, you can ruin the engine and wreck the car.

Someone has said the Bible stands for **Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth**.

God cares enough about us that he didn't just plunk us down here on the earth and say, "Do the best you can! Hope you figure it all out! Good luck!"

He gave us an owner's manual. It tells us everything we need to know about Him, about us, and about life. But it doesn't do us a bit of good unless we read it! **Read God's instruction manual!**

B. The Bible is like a flashlight for a camper. Without it you'll stumble and get hurt, or wander and get lost.

Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. [Psalm 119:105](#)

You're in a new campground. It's the middle of the night. You feel the call of nature. You step out the back door of the camper without a flashlight, and bang into the picnic table. Trip over tree roots, fall into the stream. Without a light, you stumble and get hurt or wander and get lost.

Life can be like that. You feel like you're stumbling, you're wandering. You're hurt, you're disoriented. God didn't intend for life to be like that. He gave us a flashlight. But it doesn't do us a bit of good unless we use it! **Turn on God's light!**

C. The Bible is like a weapon for a soldier. Without it you'll be captured or killed.

Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. [Ephesians 6:17](#)

I've taught a number of Bible classes over the years. Sometimes you get students who are eager to learn, excited, motivated. Other times you get students who are bored, disinterested, detached, unconcerned.

I've often thought, "They don't realize that they're in a battle. They don't realize that this book is their only weapon. They don't realize that unless they learn it, and learn how to use it, they're history. They're dead. We'll read about them on tomorrow's casualty list."

We're in a spiritual battle. If you're a Christian, you're a target. And unless you know how to use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, you're dead! God never intended for you to be a casualty. God wants you to be a conquering soldier, not a casualty. God gave you a sword, but it doesn't do a bit of good unless you use it! **Master the use of God's sword!**

D. The Bible is like a mirror for an actor. Without it you'll never know what you're like or change how you act.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it— he will be blessed in what he does. [James 1:22-25](#) (NIV)

What's a mirror do? Show you what you look like. This morning I spent some time in front of a mirror. Some of you are thinking, "Not enough time!"

In this passage James specifies that it is the man who looks and walks away and forgets what he looks like. A woman would never do that. She'd do whatever it takes to restore her face to the original glory God intended!

The function of a mirror is to show us accurately what we look like, so that we can make any necessary changes. The function of the Bible is to show us accurately what we look like so that we can make, with God's help and enablement, any necessary changes.

It's tragic when everyone else knows that Bob gossips, but Bob doesn't know it. It's tragic when everyone else knows that Betty has a tongue like a razor, but Betty doesn't know it. It's tragic when everyone else knows that Burt's spending far more money than he should, but Burt doesn't know it.

The Bible is like a mirror. It shows us what we're like. It shows us where we need to change. It not only points out the need, it helps us change! But a mirror does you no earthly good unless you use it! **Look in God's mirror!**

E. The Bible is like nutrients and water for a plant. Without it you'll be stunted and starved.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. [Psalm 1:1-3](#) (NIV)

Let's go back and take a look at my poinsettia here. Doesn't look too worse for the wear. But if I left it here till next week, just like this, without water, without access to nutrients, you know what? It would be dead and ready for the garbage.

Here's the tragedy. There are some of you who are trying to live like this. Each Sunday you're trying to get all the spiritual food and water you need for the entire week. You can't do it. It's not possible. It would be like this plant, only putting it in the pot, only giving it water and nutrients for one hour a week.

What would that do to the life of this plant? What does that do to your spiritual life? Here's the tragedy. Many of you today are more concerned about this plant than you are about your own spiritual life. You're thinking to yourself, "I hope that poor plant survives."

If you're concerned about this plant, how much more should you be concerned about your soul. Your soul needs the water of the Word. Your soul needs the nourishment that only this Book can provide. And you're trying to survive on starvation rations! You only eat once a week, and then wonder why the spiritual life is so difficult! Wonder why you continue to fall into sin. Wonder why you can't make much progress. I'll tell you why—you're soul is starving to death! I could have a table set with the most nutritious food imaginable, but it does you no earthly good if you don't eat it! **Eat God's food!**

[Matt 4:2-4](#)

2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (NIV)

Eat God's food!

III. Conclusion

I'd like to challenge you to take the next step, ratchet up your commitment to the study of God's Word. Here's a list of possibilities. Would you be willing to check at least one of these things, and then do it this year?

A. Suggestions for individual growth

1. Beginner

__ I will pick-up a Daily Bread booklet and read it and my Bible __ days a week

__ I will read my Bible __ minutes a day, __ days a week this year

__I will listen to the Bible on cassette tape __ minutes per week this year

__I will memorize __ verses of Scripture each week this year

__I will buy a different translation of the Bible and use it this year

__I will begin attending a Adult Elective class on Sundays at 9:45 a.m. on Sundays

__I will join a Small Group and ask them to help me achieve my Bible study goals this year

2. Intermediate

__I will plan to attend the “Open Book” Bible Study seminar on March 3, 9:00 to noon, and practice some new methods of Bible study this year (register by calling 924 4525)

__I will read a book this year on how to study the Bible

__I will eliminate some non-essential activities from my schedule and spend __ hours per week in Bible study this year.

__I will study and practice the art of Scripture meditation ___ minutes a week this year

__I will register for a Bible study course at Moody Northwest

__I will write out my Bible Study objective on a 3x5 card, give it to a friend, and have him/her ask me regularly how I’m doing (for example, “My goal: 15 minutes a day, 5 days a week”)

3. Advanced

__I will record my insights from the Bible in a journal __ days per week this year

__I will purchase and use a Bible study book/tool this year (Bible Dictionary, Bible Encyclopedia, Bible Commentary, Bible Concordance, etc.)

__I will attend a Bible study group (Precept, Bible Study Fellowship, Women’s/Men’s Bible study) and participate this year

__I will buy a Bible Study program for my computer and use it this year

B. Suggestions for family growth

We will do the Family Time Bible study this week

We will begin a family Bible Library

We will memorize a passage together each week this year

We will read through a book of the Bible this year

We will ask each other once-a-week, "What have you learned from the Bible this week?"

We will attend a family Bible camp or conference this year