

Pursue Christian Maturity
July 10, 2016

I was off a few weekends ago and enjoyed spending time with my extended family. We especially enjoy watching and hearing about Maggie, the 15 month old. She is developing quite a character and showing her intelligence. It has us wondering what she will be like when she reaches maturity.

I imagine that all of us here have an idea of what maturity consists of. We know this by experience or observation. You may know some adults who have reached their full height who are not yet mature in other ways. Maturity is more of a process than an event.

Maggie is in that first stage of human development. We could classify this as ages 0-5 years. In this stage we see a child learning to walk, talk, run, control bodily functions, and learn basic manners such as using please, thank you, yes ma'am, no sir, etc.

The second stage is the Elementary stage. Here we see children with more discernment of right from wrong, speech ability becomes complete, they become aware of social cues and have a desire to fit in.

The third stage is adolescence, roughly ages 11-18. In this stage the person undergoes puberty physically, and a the beginning of emotional and intellectual separation from parents. The person begins asking questions such as "Who am I apart from parents and family?", "What do I believe about God?"

The final stage is Adulthood. Here the person reaches their full height, develops a personal morality, decides about career, marriage, and family.

In the same way, the Christian life has different stages. The conversion stage a person gains a new understanding of God, self, sin, and salvation. The person begins learning to pray, read the Bible, tell others of their faith, and become part of a church family.

The second stage is a moving beyond the basics stage. In this stage the person grows in their ability to pray, learning to listen to God as well as addressing God. Their understanding of Bible teachings moves beyond the Gospel truths to second and third tier Christian teachings. They start to see connections between different passages and different doctrines. It is also in this stage that the person gains an understanding about how a local church works together, how it is organized and functions.

The final stage is the maturing stage. I don't call this the mature stage, but the maturing stage. I don't believe we will ever become fully mature in this life. The reason for this is based on the definition of Christian maturity.

We start with the question: What is Christian maturity? For the answer to that question I would have you examine with me a passage in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV) It was he (Christ) who gave (to His church) some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and

teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ ([the church](#)) may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Romans 8.29)

What do we learn about Christian maturity in this passage? To put it plainly we see in verse 13 that **Christian maturity is to be like Jesus**.

Verse 13, condensed says, "**until we all... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**"

Christian maturity is to become like Jesus. Let me give you several important things about Jesus that will become increasingly true of us if we are growing toward Christian maturity.

> **Jesus had an intimate prayer relationship with God, the Father.**

Jesus' disciples were amazed by the prayers of Jesus. They were not just amazed by how much he prayed, which He did a lot of. They were also amazed by His prayers themselves. Jesus prayed like no one else they had ever heard. And they sensed that Jesus had a unique connection to God in prayer.

I have experienced something similar on occasion. When I was in seminary, two other students and I would sometimes pray together in the evenings. I will never forget the first time I prayed with one of them, a man by the name of Dan. When Dan prayed, I felt like Jesus was sitting in the room with us. I have rarely sensed that since.

I believe Jesus' disciples felt that way when Jesus prayed. And so they asked Him to teach them how to pray.

For an answer, He told them to pray to God as Father. This was an intimate way of addressing God. This was new to them. Jesus also taught them to pray simple prayers of praise, commitment, gratitude, and petition to their heavenly Father who loved them.

As your pastor my main priority, after your conversion is to help you grow into such a prayer relationship with God. This is my priority goal as your pastor. In such a relationship the Holy Spirit will guide you in following Jesus.

> **Jesus had a Holy Spirit informed understanding of God's revelation.**

We see this first when Jesus was only 12 years old. In Luke 2 we see him at the Jewish temple listening to the religious teachers and asking them questions. See how it describes their reaction to Jesus.

Luke 2:47 (NIV) Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

For centuries the Jewish religious leaders had drifted from the truth as God had revealed it. Yet they knew it what Jesus spoke it. They saw a wisdom and insight in Jesus that

their best teachers did not have. Jesus had made the connections in God's revealed will that most others had missed.

Where did He get such knowledge? Was He born with it? No. It was taught him by the Holy Spirit. That is what the Holy Spirit does in us too.

My second priority as your pastor is to help you grasp the teachings of the Christian faith. That is why most of my time is spent in prayer, study, preaching, and teaching. As you pray, you learn to hear God. And then as you spend time in the Bible, the Spirit interprets to you a right understanding of the spiritual truth that is there.

> **Jesus treated all people with God's love with humility, gentleness, patience, compassion, kindness, and mercy.**

Jesus stood apart from all the other religious teachers because He genuinely cared about people. This was revealed in His every encounter with others. Every kind of person was received well by Jesus, including the young and old, male or female, good or bad, Jew or Greek.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He said as much.

John 14:9 (NIV) Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

God's perfect character was lived out in a person in Jesus Christ. It is this character that the Holy Spirit is working to develop in us. Look at God's plan in Romans 8.

Romans 8:29 (NIV) For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Obviously, we cannot all look like Jesus. So the phrase "conformed to the likeness of His Son" does not mean to look like Jesus physically. Rather, it means to be conformed to the character of Jesus. Jesus shows us God's character in a human. It is this character that we are to be aiming at as Christians.

Now, none of us will reach full Christian maturity before Jesus comes back. None of us will become perfectly like Jesus. But that is the target for us to aim at. That is the definition of Christian maturity.

So how do we become mature followers of Jesus?

Reaching Christian maturity is not automatic. Christian maturity is not related to physical age or spiritual age. It does not depend on how many years you have been alive on earth or how long you have been a Christian. You can be a Christian for decades and not be much closer to Christian maturity than when you got saved. It does not happen just because you are a Christian.

It is something God does instead of us. We don't make ourselves mature. Instead, it is the Holy Spirit of God in you that makes it happen. Only God can grow a tree and only God can make you like Jesus.

The right habits contribute to the process.

Only God can grow a tree. But, we know that trees need water, sunlight, and good soil in which to grow. God uses these conditions to grow a tree.

Similarly, there are conditions that we must provide for the Spirit to do the work of maturing us in Christ Jesus. You must make these to become habits in your life. You must give yourself to these activities, praying that the Spirit will bring you to Christian maturity.

Habits that contribute to maturity in Christ:

1. Pray yourself into the hands of Jesus.

Communicate your life to Jesus. Communicate your trust in God, your commitment to Him, your need for His presence, your need for His provision to your needs. What Jesus taught His disciples about prayer, should become our lesson too.

2. Study/read/discuss/pray/listen to understand the Bible.

The apostle Peter writes the following to us today:

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV) Like newborn babies, crave (**long for**) pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,...

Notice the emphasis he gives this. He says to crave the spiritual truth you need to grow up in your salvation, to grow towards Christian maturity. You may not yet be craving this. But you can start craving this. How do you get yourself to crave something? By giving it lots of thought and attention.

About 12 years ago I decided I wanted to get a motorcycle. Fortunately my sons were still teens, the youngest still in high school. So I decided I needed to wait until he finished high school, got a car and started college, so he wouldn't think he needed a motorcycle too.

But in the meantime I became focused on motorcycles. I started reading motorcycle magazines. I became attentive to every bike that came down the road. I started shopping about how to purchase one, taking the motorcycle classes, getting a license, etc.

Before too many months had gone by I was craving a motorcycle. It had become a big part of my thinking and my heart. I realized that this craving was not a good thing to be taking place in me. That was one of the major reasons for deciding not to get one. I ended the craving, and it slowly died out.

It may be that you have no craving today to understand the riches you have in Jesus Christ. I hope that is not true, but it is true for some people.

You can intentionally develop a craving for anything. **You can intentionally develop a craving for spiritual truth that will enable you to grow up in your salvation.**

Reading, studying, thinking about, and discussing with others, the Bible, informs every aspect of the Christian life. Crave to understand the Bible.

3. Serve others, like Jesus, with humble, sacrificial acts of compassion, kindness, and mercy.

To love each other through humble acts of compassion, kindness, and mercy is the new command Jesus gave His disciples the night He was arrested. This was a key expectation of Jesus for His church. This is what the apostles were looking for in the churches they planted. Paul commends those churches that live out such love and rebukes those who fail to do so. The subject of this love is emphasized more than 50 times in the New Testament.

Do these three things. Make them the three key habits of your life, of your week, of your day, of your thinking. Grow up into Christ Jesus.

The process of maturing requires the Holy Spirit working under the right conditions. Do your best to provide those right conditions for the Holy Spirit to mature you. Make them habits.

Some of our church family are involved in the martial arts. Others are involved in cheerleading, softball, or swimming. Some are learning to play a musical instrument. All of these activities take practice to hone skills.

Similarly, for the Christian, the more you live out your knowledge of Christ, the more mature you will become in Jesus. Do it today so to honor Him.