

CHRISTIAN MATURITY

A Christian's level of spiritual maturity is the degree to which God's perspective of life has become the Christian's perspective.

1. What does Growth in Spiritual Maturity refer to?

Growing in Spiritual Maturity refers to the process in which the Holy Spirit transforms a Christian's spiritual understanding in order to increase the flow of His life (His Living Water) through that Christian. As more of His life is free to flow through me there will be an ever-increasing measure of His spiritual fruit in my life.

ABIDING FELLOWSHIP with the Holy Spirit has to do with whether or not His life is able to flow through me at any given moment. (# 3 position on Lesson 3-8)

SPIRITUAL MATURITY has to do with how much of His life is able to flow through me at any given moment (in the context of abiding fellowship with the Holy Spirit).

2. Spiritual Maturity does not necessarily speak of how much Biblical knowledge I possess, but rather of how willing I have been to allow the Holy Spirit to transform my understanding of Him, and of life.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 *Thus says the Lord, "... let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, ..."*

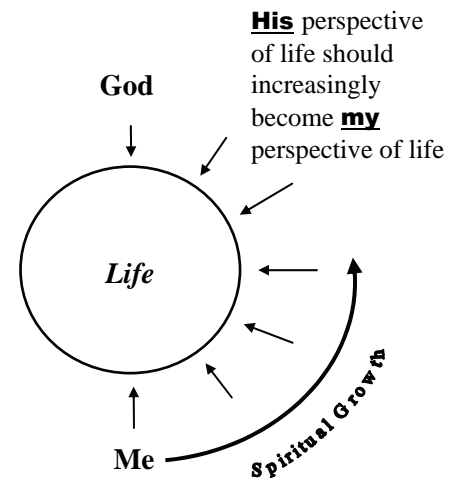
John 17:3 *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, ..."*

Rom. 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

2 Peter 1:5-8 *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Col. 1:10 *...that you will walk ... bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

2 Peter 3:17-18 *You therefore, beloved, ... be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ...*



3. I can limit the flow of His life through me by focusing on my perceived personal capabilities or limitations.

My natural tendency is to limit God according to my personal understanding of Him and how He acts. As He trains me He will speak to me about different areas of my understanding that are restricting the free flow of His life in and through me. I need to continually maintain the attitude of a disciple (an apprentice learner), a child (eager to listen and believe), so as to minimize the time that the Holy Spirit has to expend teaching me in any given area of understanding. I need to consciously allow Him access to any area of my life, aware that He will never make any changes except what is in my eternal best interest.

Look at how we limit the Lord by only remembering what we have allowed Him to do for us in the past. We say, "I always failed there, and I always will." Consequently, we don't ask for what we want. Instead, we think, "It is ridiculous to ask God to do this." If it is an impossibility, it is the very thing for which we have to ask. (Oswald Chambers - My Utmost for His Highest - Feb 29)

As I grow spiritually, my focus will shift from my capabilities to His capabilities.

CAUTION: It is an unyielding "strength to resist" that hinders God, not weakness.

2 Cor. 12:9-10 (Jesus told Paul) *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ... for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

To honestly recognize my own capabilities is okay, but to limit God's power to my perceived personal capabilities is an insult to Him.

4. Spiritual growth (learning process) should continue until I move on to heaven.

A trap that awaits the growing Christian is the illusion that he will somehow arrive at a spiritual plateau after which spiritual growth will continue with minimal discomfort. God wants to exercise my faith and increase my understanding of how He thinks and acts, in order for me to increasingly think like Him, and to bear more eternal fruit. Even though every step of faith involves a "perceived" risk, I can rest in the assurance that I am never out of God's sovereign oversight and care, and He will never allow me to suffer beyond His sufficient provision of grace to sustain me. The process will continue until I leave this earth and step into God's presence. Growing believers find that their life is a constant warfare. There are no plateaus, just "rest stops". Be aware of a tendency to be complacent and satisfied with your level of spiritual growth. We resist change.

Romans 5:3-5 ... *we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

1 Cor. 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

James 1:3-4 *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking in nothing.*

5. Biblical illustrations of the maturing process:

a. **Rivers of Living Water:** A trickle becomes a stream, which becomes a river.

John 7:38-39 (Jesus said) *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, ... (See also John 4:14)*

As I live in abiding fellowship with the Holy Spirit His “Living Water” is free to flow through my life. The volume of His Living Water that is able to flow depends on my spiritual maturity.

b. **A Branch on a Vine:** A twig becomes a branch. Obviously, as the branch grows (matures), more fruit can be produced through it.

John 15:1-2, 8, 16 (Jesus said) *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ... every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*

“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, ...

Romans 7:4 (Paul wrote) *... you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.*

c. **The Growth / Maturing Process:** An infant (baby, child) becomes an adolescent, who becomes an adult.

Characteristics of an infant / baby: (1) hungry, (2) dependent on others, (3) self-centered.

Stages of growth: The immature Christian tends to focus on self needs, then as he grows the needs of others become the focus, and as he matures God Himself becomes the main focus.

Psalm 73:25 *Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.*

➤ **Infants / Babies / Children:**

1 Cor. 3:1-3 *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. ...*

1 Cor. 13:11 (Paul writes) *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; ...*

1 Cor. 14:20 *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.*

1 Thess. 2:7 *But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.*

Heb. 5:12-14 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.*

1 Peter 2:2 *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,*

1 John 2:12-13 *I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. ... I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.*

➤ **Young Adults:**

1 John 2:13-14 (John writes) ... *I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

➤ **Adults (fathers):**

1 Cor. 13:11 (Paul writes) ... *when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*
1 Cor. 14:20 *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.*
Hebrews 5:14 *But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*
1 John 2:13-14 (John writes) *I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. ...*

➤ **All Believers (the Church):**

Col. 1:28-29 *We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete (mature) in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, ...*
Eph. 4:11-15 *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*
Rom. 8:29 *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, ...*

d. The Spiritual Growth of Jesus.

(**Note:** His spiritual growth had nothing to do with sin. He was never disobedient or less than perfect.)

Luke 2:40 *The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.*
Luke 2:42, 46-52 *And when He became twelve, ... they (Joseph and Mary) found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. ... And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*
Heb. 2:10 *For it was fitting for Him, ... to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.*
Heb. 5:8-9 *Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,*