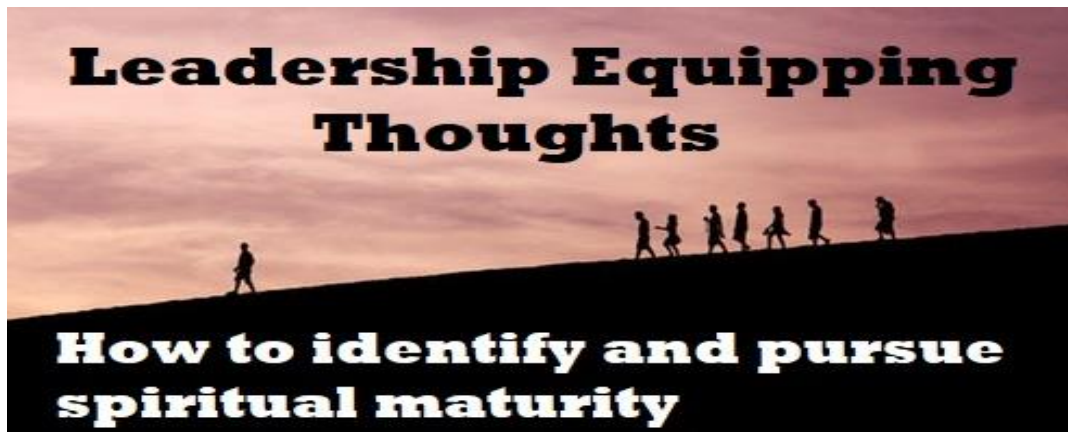


April 9th, 2019



Hebrews 6:1 Let us press on to maturity...

One of the primary callings on leaders is helping God's people in their journey in pursuing spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16). There is often a great misunderstanding of what Spiritual maturity is and is not.

Spiritual maturity is not...

- Being baptized a long time ago.
- Going to church services regularly.
- Being able to move in Spiritual gifts and power.
- Serving in church programs.
- Being responsive to God in worship services and altar calls.
- Being old or serving God a long time.
- Possessing a lot of Bible knowledge and being able to quote Scriptures.
- Being outgoing about your faith.
- Being a "minister" or on the platform during corporate services.
- Having a recognized position of leadership.

Spiritual maturity is not just what you know about God from His word or from experiences; it is how what you know about God affects the way you live.

James 1:22 GNB "Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice."

John 13:15-17 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you... (17) "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

The book of Corinthians clearly reveals immaturity in God's people

Corinthians 3:1 "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly – mere infants in Christ."



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Paul was addressing things in the church at Corinth that caused him to draw the conclusion that they were spiritually immature. Paul acknowledged that they had great skills and giftings. They had the power of God at work in corporate meetings. They had influences from great leaders like Paul, Apollos, and Peter, so they were instructed by some of God's best.

What was the situation in Corinth that enabled Paul to conclude that they were spiritually immature? The thing that marked the Corinthians as immature was the way they related with God's

family. Their Spiritual immaturity was directly tied to their inability to walk in right relationship with one-another. Consider some things he addressed.

- They had rivalries among themselves (1 Corinthians 3:1-22).
- They were arrogant about their standing with God compared to others (1 Corinthians 4:4-21).
- They were having illicit sexual relationships with others in the church (1 Corinthians 5).
- They could not resolve relational differences to the point that they were suing fellow Christians in the secular court system (1 Corinthians 6).
- There were problems in their marriage relationships (1 Corinthians 7).
- They were practicing things without regard to how it affected others in their church (1 Corinthians 8-9).
- They didn't care about serving their brothers and sisters at corporate meals and caused some to go away hungry (1 Corinthians 11-12).
- They were proud and jealous when exercising spiritual gifts in public ministry (1 Corinthians 12, 14).

5 Characteristics to pursue for spiritual maturity

1. Mature disciples speak the truth in love instead of speaking the truth and loving it (Ephesians 4:15 speaking the truth in love we may grow up by it”).

Speaking the truth and loving it is a characteristic of immaturity because it is more about gratifying something in ourselves rather than obeying the Spirit of God. It’s about getting things off our chest. But we are never to speak truth for our own sake or to reinforce something about ourselves. The truth is always about Christ.

When someone needs truth because of their disobedience to Christ and the destruction both to themselves and others that accompanies it, mature disciples seek to bring it motivated primarily by love. They look for the most loving way in which to communicate that truth (1 Corinthians 13 manifestations of love, patience, kindness, gentleness, not seeking its own, not taking into account wrongs suffered, etc.).



2. Mature disciples exhibit the mind of Christ which causes them to be *God and others centered*.

Jesus repeatedly said in the 25 calls to follow Him in the Gospels that a first step is “denying self” and “taking up our cross daily.” Paul said it clearly in Philippians 2:1-11 when he identified what it means to pursue the mind of Christ.

Phil 2:3-5 “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit (ambition), but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...He humbled Himself.”

Mature Christians are less self-focused, and more God and other-focused.

As we grow up in Christ, we move from self-centeredness to God and others-centeredness. This causes us to join with Jesus’ people (the church) and begin to

become a Christ-centered contributor to the health of others rather than just a self-centered consumer only wrapped up in getting personal needs met. Mature disciples have moved from “me to we” and “I to them.” It is not that they think less about themselves, but they think about themselves less.

A mature disciple has quit thinking that Christ and the world center around themselves. They understand that their world centers around Christ. Their first concern is not what they themselves want or think about something, but what Christ thinks about it. To a mature disciple, friendship isn't primarily about our own needs or wants.

2. Mature disciples tend to forgive others quickly and refuse to carry offenses.

Mature disciples are concerned first about the cause of Christ, not their own personal causes. They understand that walking in God's design of love is their calling and is the best advancement of the cause of Christ.

*1 Corinthians 13:1-13... (4) “Love is patient... **does not take into account a wrong suffered (keep no records of wrongs)**, (6) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; (7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8) Love never fails.”*

When others fail and their failure hurts people, mature disciples see a bigger picture. They do not become (remain?) offended but long to see others reconciled to Christ and living according to His will. This causes them to put up with a lot of junk because they want to see others glorify the Lord. Christ has been patient with them, so mature disciples exercise patience and forgiveness towards others for His sake.

Mature disciples have empathy towards others knowing that Christ and others were empathetic towards them. This makes it easier to endure the tests of relationships. They get over offenses, trust again, and do everything they can to make relationships work because they long to see Christ revealed through His people (Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:10-11).

Colossians 3:13 “Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”
Prov. 19:11 “A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.”

4. Mature disciples are submissive to authority out of true humility.

Often the most immature Christians are those who bounce from relationship to relationship and church to church because they don't get their way. In short, they are not humble and refuse to submit to God's rulership expressed through His church. A mature disciple recognizes that submitting to Christ's Lordship means submitting to His delegated authority.

*Rom 13:1 "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." ****

Heb 13:7-25 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (8) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever... (17) Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you... (24) Greet all of your leaders and all the saints."

Unbiblical ideas like "I'm submitted to Christ therefore I submit to no person" are not found in a mature disciple. They know what Jesus said through Paul, "Submit to one another out of reverence to God" (Ephesians 5:21). When you find someone who refuses to place themselves under God's delegated authority, it is because they are not under God's authority either.

Mature disciples are followers and learners of Jesus. They are therefore willing to learn from Jesus through anyone He chooses which is the opposite of immaturity and pride.

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Philippians 2:6 "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges, he took the humble position of a slave."

5. Mature disciples are self-feeders

In raising natural children, we know that part of their development is that they learn how to feed themselves. It is part of growing up and is in the developmental DNA in creation.

Lazy, immature Christians often have the mindset that it is other's responsibility to have good spiritual meals fed to them. "I am seeking a church where I can get fed. That preacher really fed me today." This is not in the mentality of the mature. Rather, they are more concerned with feeding themselves and helping feed and care for others.

As we abide in Christ, we walk in prayer and His word. And as we do, Holy Spirit communicates His word, which is the language of God to us. Jesus said it well, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4, Lk 4:4, Deut 8:3).

John 15:4 “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.”

While these 5 characteristics of the spiritually mature are not a complete list, you will tend to readily find them in the lives of those who are growing in Christ. Let’s pursue these Biblical traits of maturity and help all of God’s people do the same.

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