

PAYING ATTENTION TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

What is spiritual maturity? ***“In the unity of common faith, and knowledge of the Son of God, we arrive at real maturity, the measure of development which is meant by the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13, Ph)***

Spiritual maturity is being like Christ. ***“For from the very beginning God decided that those who come to Him...should become like His Son...” (Romans 8:29, LB)***



Facts About Spiritual Maturity

1. It's not automatic.

“You have been Christians for a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others, but instead...you need someone to teach you. When a person is still living on milk, it shows he isn't very far along in the Christian life...he's still a baby Christian.” (Hebrews 5:12-13, LB)

2. It's a process.

“Learn to be mature.” (Proverbs 8:5, GN)

“Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18, GN)

There are no shortcuts.

3. It takes discipline.

“Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.” (1 Timothy 4:7, Ph)

Just as physical fitness is not automatic, neither is spiritual fitness. Discipline is discipleship. The Bible says, ***“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” (1 Timothy 4:7, NASB)*** It requires a commitment to consistency. Most great things that have been accomplished were done by people who did not want to do them.



Understanding Discipleship

- Mature believers are called disciples.
- I cannot be a disciple without being disciplined.
- The more disciplined I become the more God can use me.
- The mark of a disciple is cross bearing.

Jesus said, ***“Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27)***

- The most successful disciple is a disciple maker.
- I have to make this a habit in my life.

“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)



“Cross bearing” is doing whatever it takes to give Christ first place in my life!



Four Habits Of A Disciple

In discussing four habits of a disciple we must define just what a habit is. A habit is:

- A continual, often unconscious inclination to do a certain activity, acquired through frequent repetition.
- An established disposition of the character.
 “Sow a thought - reap an act.
 Sow an act - reap a habit.
 Sow a habit - reap a character.
 Sow a character – reap a destiny.”

“In the past you voluntarily gave your bodies to the service of vice and the purpose of evil. So now give yourselves to the service of righteousness for the purpose of becoming truly good.” (Romans 6:19, Ph)

So, how can I become a disciple? By developing a disciple’s habits.

“...You have put off the old self with its habits, and have put on the new self...which God is continually renewing in His own image, to bring you to a full knowledge of Himself.” (Colossians 3:9-10)

1. SPENDING time in God’s Word.

“If you continue in my Word, then you are My disciples indeed. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free...” (John 8:31-32)

2. SPENDING time in prayer.

“If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it...in this way you will become My disciples.” (John 15:7-8)

3. PRESENTING God’s tithes each week.

“None of you can be My disciple unless he gives up all of his possessions.” (Luke 14:33, Ph)

“The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God first in your lives.” (Deuteronomy 14:23, LB)

If I own anything that I cannot give to God, then it owns me!

4. PARTICIPATING in fellowship with other believers.

“Love each other just as much as I love you. Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35)

➤ **SPIRITUAL HABIT #1: SPENDING TIME IN GOD’S WORD**

How To Hear God’s Word

“Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17)

Problem: We forget 95% of what we hear after 72 hours.

How to improve your hearing?

1. Be ready and eager to hear God. Jesus said,

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 8:8)

***“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”
(Psalms 119:103)***

2. Deal with attitudes that prevent hearing God. (Luke 8:4-15)

“Consider carefully how you listen...” (Luke 8:18)

- A closed mind: Are fear, pride and/or bitterness preventing me from hearing God?
- A superficial mind: Am I really serious about wanting to hear God speak?
- A preoccupied mind: Am I too busy and concerned with other things to concentrate on what God has to say?

3. Confess any sin in your life.

“Get rid of all moral filth and humbly accept the Word...” (James 1:21)

4. Take notes on what you hear.

“We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away!” (Hebrews 2:1)

A suggestion would be to purchase a sermon notebook and keep notes. Have a spiritual notebook for questions and prayer requests.

5. Act on what you hear. We all know more than we act like we do.

“Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourself. Do what it says.” (James 1:22)

“Whoever does not simply listen and then forgets, but puts it into practice; that person will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:25, GN)

How To Read God’s Word

***“Happy is the one who reads this book...and obeys what is written in it!”
(Revelation 1:3, GN)***

You should read God’s Word daily.

“(The scripture) shall be his constant companion. He must read from it everyday of his life so that he will learn to respect the Lord His God by obeying all His commandments.” (Deuteronomy 17:19, LB)

- Get a Bible with notes.
- Read different translations.
- Read aloud quietly to yourself.
- Mark key verses and make personal notes.
- Choose a reading plan and stick with it.

Did you know if you read the Bible approximately 15 minutes a day, the average reader can read through the Bible in 1 year?

How To Study God’s Word

“...They accepted the message eagerly and studied the scripture everyday...” (Acts 17:11, Ph)

“Be a good workman...know what His Word says and means.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

The difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible is that you use a pen and paper to take notes. You take notes in order to ask the right questions:

- Who – Who was the target audience?
- What – What is the principle being taught?
- When – When was it written?
- Where – Where was this in history and location?

- Why – Why was it written?
- How – Does this apply to me now?

Invest in a good Study Bible, a Bible Handbook, a Bible Dictionary, a Bible Encyclopedia, an Atlas of the Bible and a good Bible Commentary. I recommend “The Bible Exposition Commentary” by Warren W. Wiersbe, as a good commentary in which to start out. It is important to learn scripture. Scripture memorization is difficult for many. A method that has changed my life is to read through a book or part of a book each day. For example, read through Colossians everyday for 30 days, and you will learn what it says. Isaiah said, *“We learn line upon line and precept upon precept.” (Isaiah 28:10, NASV)*

How To Meditate On God’s Word

In your devotion time don’t do all the talking; listen to what God may say to you. ***“Those who are always meditating on His laws are like trees along a river bank bearing fruit...they never wither and whatever they do prospers.” (Psalms 1:2-3)***

Meditation is focused thinking about the Bible verse in order to discover how I can apply its truth to my own life.

- It is the key to becoming like Christ.

Jesus said, ***“...Your life is shaped by your thoughts.” (Proverbs 4:23)***

“...Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)

“...As we... contemplate the Lord’s glory, we are being transformed into His likeness...” (1 Corinthians 3:18)

- It is the key to answered prayer.

“If you live your life in Me, and My words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like, and it will come true for you.” (John 15:7, Ph)

- It is the key to successful living.

“Meditate on the Word day and night, so you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” (Joshua 1:8)

Three Meditation Questions

1. What did it mean to the original hearers?
2. What is the underlying, timeless principle?
3. Where or how could I practice that principle?



A daily quiet time is not important; it is essential for spiritual maturity. Your time with God is what brings intimacy to the relationship.

- We were created to have fellowship with God.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

(Revelation 3:20)

- Jesus died in order for it to be possible for us to have a relationship with God.
- It is the secret to spiritual strength.
- Every person who has been effective in ministry for God developed this habit (e.g. Daniel, Moses, David, Paul...).
- You cannot be a healthy, growing Christian without it.

“Man cannot live on bread alone but on every word that God speaks.”

(Matthew 4:4)

“I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

(Job 23:12)

“How can a young man change his way? By keeping to your Word.”

(Psalms 119:9)

What Happens When I Give God Time?

1. I give devotion to God.

“(Hezekiah) was successful, because everything he did...he did in a spirit of complete devotion to his God.” (2 Chronicles 31:21)

- God deserves our devotion. (Revelation 4:11)
- God desires our devotion. (John 4:23)

2. I get direction from God.

“Show me the path where I should go, O Lord; point out the right road for me to walk. Lead me...” (Psalms 25:4)

- You consider your way.

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:6)

- You commit your day.

“Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him to help you do it and He will.” (Psalms 37:5)

3. I gain delight in God.

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalms 37:4)

4. I grow daily like God.

“For as you know Him better and better God will give you, through His great power, everything you need for living a truly good life...He has promised to save us...and to give us His own character.” (2 Peter 1:3-4, LB)
“When the council saw the boldness of Peter and John, they were amazed and realized what being with Jesus had done for them.” (Acts 4:13)

➤ SPIRITUAL HABIT #2: SPENDING TIME IN PRAYER

How To Revitalize Your Prayer Life

1. Approach prayer with the right attitude.

- Be real.

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”

(Matthew 6:5)

- Don't try to impress people.
- Don't try to impress God.

- Be relaxed.

“But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:6)

- Be revealing.

“Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again. Remember your Father knows exactly what you need before you ask Him!” (Matthew 6:7-8)

2. Use the model Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:9-15.

“This, then, is how you should pray...”

- Praise: I begin by expressing my love to God.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”

- Adoration – Praising God for who He is.
- Thanksgiving – Praising God for what He has done.

- Purpose: I commit myself to God's purpose and His will for my life.

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...”

Pray for God's will to be done in my family, in my church, in my ministry, in my future, and my mission to be a world changer.

“Offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him. This is the type of worship that you should offer.”

(Romans 12:1)

- Provision: I ask God to provide for my needs.

“Give us today our daily bread...”

“God will supply all your needs from His riches in glory because of what Christ Jesus has done for us.” (Philippians 4:19)

“You do not have...because you do not ask God...” (James 4:2)

The key is to be specific. Consider using a Prayer Book in which you write down your requests and needs.

“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

- Pardon: I ask God to forgive my sins.

“Forgive us our debts...”

- Ask God to reveal every sin.

“Examine me, O God, and know my mind: test me and discover my thoughts, find out if there is any evil in me.” (Psalms 139:23-24)

- Confess each sin individually.

“He that covers his sin shall not prosper but he who confesses his sin and forsakes them shall have God’s mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

- Make restitution to others when necessary.

“When you remember your brother has something against you...go at once to make peace with him, then come back and offer your gift to God.”

(Matthew 5:23-24)

- By faith expect God’s forgiveness.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

- People: Pray for other people.

“...as we have also forgiven our debtors.”

“Pray much for others; plead for God’s mercy upon them; give thanks for all He is going to do for them.” (1 Timothy 2:1)

- Protection: Ask for spiritual protection.

“...and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”

Satan is our enemy. He wants to defeat us through temptation and fear. I pray for God’s favor on myself everyday.

“Greater is He who is within us than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

➤ **SPIRITUAL HABIT #3: PRESENTING GOD'S TITHES EACH WEEK**

Tithing

Let's consider these examples of Biblical words & usage:

- **Believe – Used 212 times in the Bible.**
- **Pray – Used 371 times.**
- **Love – Used 714 times.**
- **Give – Used 2162 times!**

God is a giver and wants us to become like Him.

Honoring God With My Giving

“On the first day of each week, set aside some of what you have earned and give it as an offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn.” (1 Corinthians 16:2)

How My Giving Reveals My Spiritual Maturity

“Just as you excel in everything else...in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness...see that you also excel in the grace of giving.” (2 Corinthians 8:7)

1. Giving makes me more like God.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son...” (John 3:16)

2. Giving draws me closer to God.

“Where your treasure is there your heart is also.” (Matthew 6:21)

3. Giving is the antidote to materialism.

“Command these who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provided us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them

to be generous and willing to share. In this way they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

4. Giving strengthens faith.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of your income, and He will fill your barns to overflowing.” (Proverbs 3:5 & 9)

“Give and it will be given to you...for with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

“The bigger the cup the bigger the blessing!”

5. Giving is an investment for eternity.

“Give happily to those in need, and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven, it is the only safe investment for eternity.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19, LB)

6. Giving blesses me in return.

“A generous man himself will be blessed.” (Proverbs 22:9)

“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” (Proverbs 11:25)

7. Giving makes me happy.

Jesus said, **“There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.” (Acts 20:35)**

What The Bible Teaches About Tithing

“Tithe” means a tenth part. We bring in obedience to God His tithe, and we also give offerings that are above our tithe.

1. God commanded it.

“A tenth of all you produce is the Lord’s, and it is holy!” (Leviticus 27:23)

2. Jesus commanded it.

“Yes, you should tithe, and you shouldn’t leave the more important things undone either.” (Matthew 23:23)

The only thing Jesus ever commended of the Pharisees was their obedience to tithe.

3. Tithing demonstrates that God has first place in my life.

“The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God first place in your life.” (Deuteronomy 14:23, LB)

4. Tithing reminds me that everything was given to me by God.

“Always remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” (Deuteronomy 8:18)

5. Tithing expresses my gratitude to God.

“How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?” (Psalms 116:12)

“Each of you should bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.” (Deuteronomy 16:17)

6. God says refusing to tithe is stealing from Him!

God says, ***“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ God says, ‘In tithes and offerings. Bring your whole tithe to my house.’” (Malachi 3:8-10)***

7. Tithing gives God a chance to prove He exists and wants to bless you!

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10)

8. Tithing proves that I really love God.

Jesus said, ***“If you really love me, do what I command.” (John 14:15)***

“...I want you to be leaders also in the spirit of cheerful giving...this is one way to prove that your love is real, that it goes beyond mere words.” (2 Corinthians 8:7, 8, LB)

Where And When Should I Give God's Tithes?

- Where I worship.

"Bring your whole tithe to the storehouse (temple)." (Malachi 3:10)

- Weekly.

"On the first day of every week, set aside some of what you have earned and give it as an offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn." (1 Corinthians 16:2, LB)

How Should I Give?

1. Give proportionally and willingly.

"For if the willingness is there, your gift is acceptable according to what you have, not according to what you don't have." (2 Corinthians 9:12)

"Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under pressure..." (1 Corinthians 9:7)

2. Give joyfully.

"...For God loves a cheerful giver!" (2 Corinthians 9:7)

3. Give generously.

"They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in his service." (2 Corinthians 8:3-4)

4. Give expectantly.

"Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and whoever sows generously will reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6)

The Key To Giving

"...They first gave themselves to the Lord..." (2 Corinthians 9:6)

➤ **SPIRITUAL HABIT #4: PARTICIPATING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS**

Participating In God's Family

“Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage each other...” (Hebrews 10:25)

Why Is Fellowship So Important?

1. I belong in God's family with other believers.

“Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10)

“You are a member of God's very own family...and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.” (Ephesians 2:19, LB)

“So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Romans 12:5)

The Christian who is not committed to a group of other believers for praying, sharing, and serving, so that he is known as he knows others, is not an obedient Christian. He is not in the will of God. He may be vocal in his theology, but he is not obeying the Lord.

2. I need others to grow spiritually.

“Let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good works.” (Hebrews 10:24, Ph)

“People learn from one another just as iron sharpens iron.” (Proverbs 27:17, GN)

“Brothers, if someone is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently...carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:1-2)

3. Christ is present when we fellowship together.

“For wherever two or three have come together in my name, I am there, right among them.” (Matthew 18:20, GN)

4. There is power when people pray together.

“Wherever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in Heaven.” (Matthew 18:19, GN)

5. Fellowship is a witness to the world.

Jesus said, ***“My prayer for all of them is that they will be of one heart and mind...so the world will believe you sent me.” (John 17:21, LB)***

6. I am obligated to every other Christian.

“God has given you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other.” (1 Peter 4:10, LB)

7. Fellowship happens best in Sunday School.

- Bible study in an intentional setting.
- Praying for one another.
- Supporting one another.
- Social involvement with people with the same desires in life.
- Outreach to those in spiritual darkness.
- A place to be on mission together.



How To Start And Maintain Good Spiritual Habits

Step 1 – Desire; you have to want it! This is an internal motivation to be a world changer. If you start only half-heartedly, you will never make it to the success point.

Step 2 – Decision; begin right now! Don't wait or procrastinate. You don't drift into spiritual discipline; you have to be intentional. "One of these days" never arrives. It will never be easier for you to break a bad habit as it is today.

“If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.” (Ecclesiastes 11:4, LB)

Step 3 – Declaration; “The power of a vow.” Announce your intentions publicly. Make a covenant. The power of writing down your name, making a commitment, is awesome.

“Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them.” (Psalms 76:11)

Step 4 – Determination; never allow an exception until the new habit is securely rooted in your life. Each lapse is potentially fatal. A single slip unwinds many turns at first. Continuity and success at the start are essential. Never be swayed by “just this once!” The act of yielding weakens the will and reinforces your lack of self-control. It takes at least 3 weeks to become comfortable with a new habit, and it takes another 3-4 weeks doing it daily for it to become a part of your life.

Step 5 – Do it; seize every opportunity to be reinforcing your spiritual disciplines. Don’t operate on feeling; do it even when your heart is not into it.

Step 6 – Double up; get an accountability partner to support and encourage you; someone who is willing to hold you accountable and check up on you, especially in the early days before the discipline is firmly rooted in your life.

“Let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over each other, studying how we may stir up and stimulate each other to...helpful deeds and noble activities.” (Hebrews 1:25, Amp)

“Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, GN)

Step 7 – Depend on God; rely on God’s power to help you establish the spiritual discipline. Remember Satan does not want you to develop habits that will help you grow and mature in Christ. So pray!!

“For the Spirit that God has given us...fills us with power, love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:7, GN)

“For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve His purpose.” (Philippians 3:13, Ph)