

Becoming a Mature Christian – Part I

(Adapted from Raymond Woodward's *Life Course 201*)

"... that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"
(Colossians 4:12).

"That we henceforth be no more children, ... may grow up into him in all things ..."
(Ephesians 4:14-15).

This lesson is the first of several that will help us understand and develop the BASIC HABITS every Christian needs to grow 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).

A simple definition of "SPIRITUAL MATURITY" is "BEING LIKE JESUS CHRIST."

"For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him ... **should become like his Son ...**" (Romans 8:29).

FACTS ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1. IT IS 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).

2. IT IS A PROCESS

"Learn to be mature" (Proverbs 8:5).

"Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

3. IT TAKES DISCIPLINE

"Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit" (1 Tim. 4:7, *Phillips Translation*).

"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7, *New American Standard Translation*).

UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP

1. Mature believers are called DISCIPLES.

2. I can't be a disciple without being DISCIPLINED.



Physical fitness is not automatic – neither is spiritual fitness. Both take hard work.

3. The mark of a disciple is “bearing my cross.”

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

4. Bearing my cross means “denying my own desires” in order to put God first in my life EVERY DAY.

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

The Habits Of A Disciple

To become a disciple, you must develop the habits of a disciple. Some of these habits have already been discussed in earlier lessons. Let's review the habits of a good disciple of Jesus, then learn more about those we have not discussed in depth before.

"... 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. BIBLE STUDY

"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. 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 become my disciples" (John 15:7-8).

3. TITHING

"None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all of his possessions" (Luke 14:33).

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

4. FELLOWSHIP

"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).

5. HOLINESS

"Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be

my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God" (2 Corinthians 6:17–7:1).

WHAT IS A HABIT? (Webster's Dictionary)

- A continual, often unconscious inclination to do a certain activity, acquired through frequent repetition.
- An established disposition of the character.
- A customary practice.

THE HABIT OF PRAYER

"Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come, endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the **habit** of prayer" (Romans 12:12).



God can communicate with us in many ways, but we can only communicate with Him one way – through PRAYER. That's why it is vital that we establish prayer as a DAILY habit.

1. HAVE A SPECIFIC TIME FOR PRAYER.

Reasons for considering an early morning prayer time:

- The example of many Bible characters (Abraham, Job, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Hezekiah, David, Daniel, Jesus, etc.)
- It is logical to begin the day with prayer. The best time to tune your instrument is before you play the concert, not after!
- It demonstrates that meeting with God is your first priority. You give Him the first part of your day.
- You are likely to be more rested and your mind is less cluttered first thing in the morning.

2. HAVE A SPECIFIC PLACE FOR PRAYER.

"Jesus left the city and went, as he usually did, to the Mount of Olives ... to pray" (Luke 22:39).

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place where he prayed" (Mark 1:35).

3. HAVE A SPECIFIC ROUTINE FOR PRAYER.

- **A Bible**
 - use an understandable translation
 - use a Bible with readable print

- use a Bible without distracting study notes
- **A Notebook and Pen**
 - write down anything the Lord speaks to you about
 - keep a personal prayer list
 - write down thoughts for further Bible study later on
- **Other Helps**
 - take the phone off the hook, or use your answering machine
 - play soft instrumental music in the background
 - have tissue nearby, if you tend to weep when you pray
 - have a to-do list nearby, if you are a “type A” personality who can’t stop thinking about the day ahead (when a task comes to mind, don’t do it now – write a quick reminder for later, so you can stop thinking about it and get back to prayer)
 - use anything else that will keep you from being distracted

Jesus taught us to have the right ATTITUDE in prayer (Matthew 6:5-8)

- **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).
- **BE RELAXED**

"But when you pray go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done 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).

Jesus taught us to have the right APPROACH in prayer (Matthew 6:9-15)

- "This, then, is **HOW** you should pray ..." (Matthew 6:9).



SIX WAYS TO GET A GRASP ON PRAYER

"Let us not get tired of doing what is right, for after a while we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't get discouraged and give up" (Galatians 6:9).

RULE #1: Never judge your prayer time by your feelings.

RULE #2: If you miss a day, DON'T GIVE UP.

1. **PRAISE: I express my love to God**

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9).

TWO KINDS OF PRAISE:

- ADORATION: praising God for who he is
- THANKSGIVING: praising God for what he has done

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. Be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Psalm 100:4).

- A. Remind yourself of the promises found in the various meanings of God name, and affirm them as you pray.

- B. Remind yourself of all the blessings God has given to you, and express your thanks for them as you pray.

THE NAMES OF GOD			
God is so magnificent that the Hebrew language uses compound names to describe the many aspects of His character. You can use each of these compound names to focus on what God is really like. Think on the implications of these names and you'll have lots to praise God for.			
Compound Name	Meaning	Scripture	What It Means To Me
Jehovah Shammah	God is present with me	Ezekiel 48:35	You are with me, so I am never alone.
Jehovah Rohi	God is my shepherd	Psalms 23:1	You lead me, feed me and protect me.
Jehovah Jireh	God is my provider	Genesis 22:14	You see what I need before I even ask.
Jehovah Rapha	God is my healer	Exodus 15:26	You can heal my body, emotions and relationships.
Jehovah Tsidkenu	God is my righteousness	Jeremiah 23:6	You accept me and forgive me of my sins.
Jehovah M'Kaddesh	God is my sanctification	Exodus 31:13	You give me the power to live holy.
Jehovah Shalom	God is my peace	Judges 6:24	You give me peace in spite of life's circumstances.
Jehovah Nissi	God is my banner	Exodus 17:15	You are my victory through conflict and confrontation.
All God's attributes are summed up in the name of Jesus.			
Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ..." (Phil. 2:9-10).			

2. **PURPOSE:** I commit myself to God's will for my life

"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Pray for God's will to be done...

- In my family
- In my church
- In my job
- In my ministry
- In my future
- In my neighborhood
- In my city
- In my nation

"Offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer" (Romans 12:2).

3. **PROVISION**: I ask God to provide for my needs

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

WHAT NEEDS CAN I PRAY ABOUT? ALL OF THEM!

"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 don't ask God" (James 4:2).

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PRAYING: BE SPECIFIC: Write down your request, along with a promise you are claiming from the Bible, and expect an answer.

"Don't worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

4. **PARDON**: I ask God to forgive my sins

"And forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12).

Four Steps to Forgiveness:

A. Ask God to reveal my sin.

"Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me" (Psa. 139:23-24).

B. Confess each sin specifically.

"You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you" (Proverbs 28:13).

C. 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).

D. By faith, accept 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).

5. **PEOPLE**: I pray for other people

"...as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Make a list of people you want to pray for. You might pray for different groups of people on different days of the week (missionaries, family, unsaved friends, church leadership, etc.).

"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).

6. PROTECTION: I ask for spiritual protection

"And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

All believers face spiritual battles. Satan wants to defeat you through temptation and fear, but by praying for protection you will have the power to face every situation.

"The Spirit who is in you is more powerful than the spirit who is in those who belong to the world" (1 John 4:4).

7. PRAISE: I end my prayer the same way I started.

"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (Matthew 6:13).

Study Questions

1. Define "spiritual maturity." Write out at least one (1) verse of Scripture that supports this definition. _____

2. List three (3) facts about spiritual maturity, supporting each one with Scripture.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

3. Mature _____ are called "_____."

4. You cannot be a disciple without being _____.

5. What is the mark of a disciple? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

6. What does it mean to "bear your cross?" Support your answer with Scripture. _____

7. List five (5) habits of a good disciple, and give Scripture reference to support why each

of these is so important to the Christian walk of faith.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

8. List the three (3) parts to the Webster’s Dictionary definition of a habit.

- 1) _____
- _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

9. List the four (4) steps to forgiveness with a Scripture reference for each.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

10. List three (3) ways to help make prayer a daily habit.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

11. Mention and briefly explain the two (2) types of praise.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

12. List and briefly explain the six (6) ways to get a grasp on prayer.

- 1) _____
- _____
- 2) _____
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- 3) _____
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- 4) _____
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- 5) _____
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- 6) _____
- _____
- _____