

# How Do We Mature?

Talk by Matthew Tingblad, adapted for Print

At Josh McDowell Ministry, we do more than simply give reasons to help others be confident that the Christian message is true. We also seek to help believers align their lives to God's nature and character. In other words, we want to help people become more like Christ.

But if our goal is spiritual maturity, we must ask: *How? How do we mature as Christians? What is the journey?*

These questions, though for some seemingly simple to answer, can become very challenging on a practical level. Imagine that you are in leadership at your local church. A friend comes up to you and says, "I need help. I don't love God as I should. I feel like my faith is weak. I have these thoughts and behaviors and attitudes that are not good. I've been trying to fix myself and become a better Christian, but it's just not working. What do I do?"

Perhaps your answer is to read the Bible. That's not a bad response. Indeed, God transforms us through His Word. But what happens if your friend responds by saying, "I'm already reading my Bible!" How might you reply? *Read your Bible more? Read it more intensely? Memorize verses or passages?*

Reading the Bible does not guarantee spiritual growth or maturity. There are atheist and agnostic professors teaching at secular universities who make it their life's work to read and interpret the Bible. But despite their acquaintance with it, they may move even further from God. It's possible to read the Bible in an "unChristian" way. There is a vast difference between reading the Bible as an ancient historical book, and reading the Bible as *Scripture*.

Perhaps you tell your struggling friend to pray and ask God to help him grow in his faith. Again, that's a good answer. But what do you do if your friend replies, "I'm already praying!" Do you say *pray more, pray harder, pray more fervently?* What happens when we finish our prayers and say, "Amen"? Do we then wait on God? Or do we take action?

Another suggestion for your struggling Christian friend is fellowship. You could advise him to go to church and serve others. This, too, is a good answer. Many Christians don't understand the importance of Christian fellowship; they try to grow their spiritual maturity in their own little worlds.

But what if your friend is already involved in the church community? After all, there are people who grew up experiencing good community in good churches, yet still feel far from God. Why is that?

## According to the Spirit

Scripture, prayer, and gathering in fellowship with other believers are essential components of Christian growth. But we can do these things in the flesh (by our own human efforts, apart from God), rather than in the Spirit. It is unfortunate when a new believer is immediately given a to-do list of spiritual practices, without any explanation of how to engage in these practices in a way that stimulates spiritual maturity.

Practices like prayer and Scripture reading, though essential for Christian growth, can be easily turned into legalism. This happened to the Galatians, who became legalistic with Jewish practices. Consider Paul's strong rebuke to them:

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” Galatians 3:1–3 (NIV)

We all struggle in our walk with God. Sometimes the severity of our struggle results from our upbringing in church. Generally speaking, Protestants like myself tend to “front-load” the Gospel. That is, we tend to focus on what happens at the beginning of the Gospel, the moment its beauty first penetrates our lives and we accept Christ. This isn't necessarily wrong; a lot happens the moment we accept Christ into our lives! But we must not lose sight of what the Gospel means for our ongoing life as Christians, in the Spirit, as we become more and more like Christ.

This paper aims to clarify how Christian maturity works, so that we grow in Christ according to God's design. My presentation is divided into three sections. First, we will briefly survey four

inadequate approaches to how spiritual maturity develops. Second, we will discuss what I believe to be the biblical understanding of how spiritual maturity works. And third, we will conclude by examining how prayer, reading the Bible, and other spiritual practices fit into this model of spiritual maturity.

## Part 1: Four Inadequate Approaches to Spiritual Maturity

Each of us is a spiritual theologian. By that, I mean that we all have an idea in our head, an unwritten contract of how we think God is supposed to interact with us. We might, consciously or unconsciously, be using one of these four inadequate approaches with God:

### The Passive Approach

The first is the *passive approach* to God. This is the belief that God does all the work to change us, and we are entirely passive. We consider our actions to be irrelevant to our spiritual maturity. So we might choose to read our Bible—*or not*. We might choose to pray—*or not*. Because we believe God produces our transformation, we think we can just sit back and live our life.

If this approach seems too outlandish, consider how some Christians functionally hold to this passive approach. Perhaps they turn their eyes to heaven and say, "God, take this sin away from me!" But they continue in their sinful ways, expecting God to fix things in His timing. Perhaps their sin is repeatedly viewing pornography. They shrug their shoulders and expect God to remove their desire if He thinks it's wrong.

This is not to say that God *doesn't* directly change us sometimes. We observe that He does work in people's lives this way, especially at the beginning of their Christian walk. It is commonplace for a person to receive Jesus, and then a couple of months in, they find themselves surprised at how much they changed. But this passive approach is not meant to be normative for the Christian life. At some point in our spiritual journey, God expects us to move from spiritual milk to solid food (see Heb. 5:11–14).

## The Willpower Approach

The second is the *willpower approach* to God. This is the opposite of the passive approach. Here, God does nothing to change us, and we do everything. It is *our* job to become spiritually mature. We read our Bible and pray, but we treat these activities as if we are at the gym. If we identify a sin issue in our lives, it is our job to fix it.

This approach reduces spiritual maturity to becoming a “moral” person. But when holiness becomes behavior modification, what is the point of God? At best, God becomes our personal trainer, pointing out stuff we need to deal with in our own power. Many atheists are keen on this bankrupt approach to God. “You don't need God to be a moral person,” they argue.

Indeed, many people who don't know God live in ways our world views as virtuous. But if life with God is going to have any degree of meaning, *it must differ from what is possible without Him.*

The willpower approach is scary because Christians can be really good at it—even as their hearts are far from God. Without proper discernment, we might look up to these people. We might admire them. We might even give them promotions at church.

But we must not assume a person's spiritual maturity by outward appearance.

Let's not forget Jesus's criticism to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.”

What a shock His criticism must have been to them. From their ingrained culture of legalistic moralism, the Pharisees viewed themselves as the truly righteous ones. They *looked* spiritual, but they were spiritually dead inside.

## The Mind-Power Approach

The third is the *mind-power approach* to God. Those using this approach think: “If I can just know enough about God, I'll become spiritually mature.” “If I crack the code between God's sovereignty and free will I'll be spiritually mature.” “If I memorize the book of James I'll be spiritually mature.” “If I write a theological essay describing how various Christological heresies influenced the Chalcedonian definition of 451 A.D., *then* I'll be spiritually mature.”

The mind power approach is very tempting for myself and others who have the privilege to study theology. It certainly became an issue for the Pharisees and Jewish teachers in the time of Jesus. His criticism of them in John 5:39–40: "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

Many who hold the mind-power approach assume that the spiritually educated *must* be spiritually mature. Perhaps this is why so many are shaken when brilliant Christian leaders fall into sin. *Knowledge of God is good, but it is not the same as spiritual maturity.*

I am not advocating that we should carry a pessimistic suspicion of everyone's spirituality. Jesus taught us to recognize false prophets by their fruit (Matt. 17:15–20). We just need to make sure we're looking at the right fruit.

## The Quid Pro Quo Approach

The fourth is the *quid pro quo approach* to God. "Quid pro quo" is a Latin term that means "this for that." It's the I-scratch-your-back-you-scratch-mine approach to God. It's a blending of the passive and willpower approaches to God.

People following this approach use their willpower to read their Bible, pray, and go to church—*as a favor to God*. They work to get on God's good side so that He will reward them with spiritual maturity. *I've been good. God will reward me. He must reward me. God owes me.*

God basically becomes Santa Clause. We see an example of this approach in the Bible parable of the prodigal son, or what I like to call the "parable of the two lost sons."

In Luke 15, Jesus teaches about a son who took his father's inheritance, ran away, and squandered it. Later, steeped in poverty and shame, he returns home. Seeing his son at a distance, the father runs to him, embraces him, and celebrates his return. But his older brother refuses to join the celebration. He angrily says to his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends."

The older son assumed he had a quid pro quo relationship with his father, whom he felt was now failing to uphold his end. His father replies, "My son... you are always with me, and everything I

have is yours.” Clearly, something wasn’t right with the quid-pro-quo approach, and the father was pleading with his son to relate to him in another way.

## Part 2: How Does Spiritual Maturity Really Work?

One reason we so easily fall into these inadequate approaches is that we have not given much thought to the fundamental issues of spiritual maturity. Before we jump into the proper approach, let’s discuss how spiritual transformation actually works in the lives of Believers.

### The Biblical Paradigm of Transformation

When I think of becoming a better doer of God’s word, I find in my own heart that “truth” and “grace” tend to fight each other. I’m left trying not to lean too far in either direction. This balancing act is common among Believers.

On the one hand, we feel the pull to *do* some things—and *stop* doing others. But we also don’t want to be too hard on ourselves because we know that Jesus forgives our sins. It’s like we imagine God telling us, “Do these things! But don’t be a legalist about it, because there’s grace! But you should still do these things! But there’s mercy!” Back and forth we tilt.

We do not solve this struggle by finding a perfect “sweet spot” between grace and truth. When we see Paul and others in Scripture beckoning the church to live in a particular way, they don’t dish out commands and then “level it out” by tacking on grace. Consider this passage in Colossians:

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1–3 NLT)

We may wonder what it means to set our sights on the realities of heaven. For our purposes, notice *how* Paul presents his appeal to the Colossian church. First, Paul says, “set your sights on the realities of heaven.” Why does he say this?

It’s because we “have been raised to new life with Christ,” and heaven is the place “where Christ sits.” Paul is telling us to set our sights on the realities of heaven because that is where Christ has placed us with Himself.

The second imperative of this passage is to “think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.” Why should we think about the things of heaven? Put bluntly, it’s because we are dead! “For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.”

## Connecting Identity With Action

This approach to transformation is quite different from feeling the weight of a command to do something, and trying to balance the weight with a healthy sense of God’s grace. We may wonder: How does Paul’s logic even follow? Why would being with Christ in heaven imply that we should set our sights on heaven?

The answer has to do with our identity as Christians. *Identity is who you are in light of who God is and what He has done for you.* In the Bible, identity is not bestowed on us to improve our self-image (though it certainly can!). Identity functions as a principle and motivator for how we are to live.

Consider how Paul references identity in the book of Colossians as a whole. Chapter 1 is one of the most stunning passages on the supremacy of Christ (who God is). He is the “image of the invisible God,” and the “firstborn over all creation.” Chapter 2 tells us who we are in light of who God is. Colossians 2:10 (ESV) says, “and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Paul adds that we are circumcised with the circumcision of Christ (v. 11), we are raised with Christ through faith (v. 12), and we are made alive with Christ (v. 13). From the end of Chapter 2, until the end of the letter, we are told how to live as Christians.

This is the Biblical approach to transformation. *When you know who you are, you start to behave accordingly.*

The transformative power of identity is not unique to Colossians. There are a striking number of imperative statements in the New Testament that are intentionally situated right next to identity

statements. For instance, 1 Thessalonians 5:5-6 (NIV) says, "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober." The connection: *as we are people of the day, let's live like people of the day.*

Another example is Ephesians 4:1 which says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." Another example is Galatians 5:25: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

As Josh McDowell has noted, *"You don't become a new person by changing your behavior; you discover the person you already are in Christ and behave accordingly."*

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The linkage between identity and application makes sense even on the natural level. For example, if I truly believe that the game of soccer is in my blood, that I am an athlete, and that soccer is a big part of my identity, you could expect that I will play my heart out on the soccer field. If, on the other hand, I don't believe that I can play well, even though I possess the physical speed and coordination, how well do you think I would perform given my negative attitude?

## Transformed Through Identity

Our knowledge of how God uses identity to change us can be applied to practically any scenario where we find ourselves tempted to sin.

What if the next time you felt tempted to look at pornography, you said to yourself, "What a minute. God did not create me to take pleasure in this. What am I doing?" What if the next time you felt impatient with a customer at work, you said to yourself, "What a minute. I have the Spirit of peace inside me." What if the next time you felt tempted to cheat, steal, lie, or act from pride or greed or jealousy, you said, "Hold up!" and quoted Romans 6:2 (ESV): "How can we who died to sin still live in it?"

*As Christians, our identity is so important.* In Josh McDowell's book *See Yourself as God Sees You*, three pages are dedicated to listing out the truth of our identity as taught in Scripture. A sample:

- I have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

- I am a child of God (John 1:12).
- I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16).
- I have access to God's wisdom (James 1:5).
- I am helped by God (Heb. 4:16).
- I am reconciled to God (Rom. 5:11).
- I am not condemned by God (Rom. 8:1).
- I am justified (Rom 5:1).
- I have Christ's righteousness (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21).

*What if Believers lived into these truths? How would that change the fabric of church life? How would that change our confidence to live into everything God has called us to be?*

I remember going out evangelizing as a college student, but the experience of sharing my faith with others felt terribly forced and unnatural to me. But then I recognized my identity: God has made me a citizen of Heaven and an ambassador for His name (Phil. 3:20; 2 Cor. 5:18). When God placed this truth in my heart, I noticed a remarkable difference as I shared my faith.

Sometimes we have a self-degrading mindset that filters how we interpret the Bible. I sometimes hear Christians feeling beat up by their misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (ESV)

Many Christians read this passage and think, "Oh my Gosh! That's me! I'm sexually immoral! I'm greedy! I'm a drunkard!" *No.* If Christ has redeemed you, that is not you. Read the next verse: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11). *That is your identity!*

Some Christian communities have developed a culture that considers it appropriate to lob self-demeaning language upon themselves. They might say, "I am a poor, wretched, broken, sinful worm." This posture seems motivated by the noble desire to remain humble and recognize how sin deeply

affects humanity. But Paul preferred the word “saint” to address his fellow Believers (Eph. 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col. 1:2).

We are not prideful in acknowledging that what Scripture says about us is true. Our identity is entirely funded by the fact that we are “in Christ.” Because of the amazing grace of Christ, who died and was resurrected, His perfect life becomes our own. We are filled with Him.

Do we continue to sin? Yes. Do we confess these things and reckon with our sinful tendencies “that so easily entangles” (Heb 12:1)? Yes, we do. As Christians, we do not deny what is real in our lives. But we fix our eyes on what is even *more* real. We fix our eyes on the new self that is raised to new life with Christ. We set our sights on the realities of heaven!

## How Does Identity Get Into Our Soul?

If knowledge of our identity is crucial for our transformation, are we to simply learn everything we can about identity? This may seem sensible, but it also sounds suspiciously like the mind-power approach discussed earlier. We need to not just know our identity; we need to “absorb” it. Consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:13–14 (NLT):

When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.

Paul is saying that what he and other apostles proclaim with Christ’s authority is spiritual by nature, so it must be understood in a spiritual way. You cannot “educate” yourself into what Paul is teaching. The mind-power approach is about knowledge in your head. *Knowing and living your identity is about truth in your heart.*

Knowledge of God and Scripture is good, but it does not make us mature. We need the Spirit of God to reveal the mind of Christ in us.

## Part 3: A Fifth Approach to Spiritual Maturity

So, how does the truth of God's Word find its way into our hearts? If our identity is a matter of spiritual illumination, what does God ask of us in this process? It's not the passive approach to God. It's not the willpower approach to God. It's not the mind-power approach to God. It's not the quid pro quo approach to God. Let us consider a fifth approach to spiritual maturity: *the relational approach to God*. In John 15:1–4 (NLT), Jesus says,

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 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."

When we abide in the love of Christ, His Spirit works to illuminate the truth of His Word, placing it deep within our hearts. *How do we abide in the love of Christ?* Through prayer and reading His Word. Through fasting, sabbath, generosity, etc. Through community in church.

Additionally, we discover in John 15:10 that we abide in the love of Christ through careful obedience to Jesus' commandments. Commentator Gerald Borchert notes,

In [John] 14:15 it was said that loving Jesus would result in obeying or keeping (*tērēsete*) His commands... But in the present text the order is completely reversed. Accordingly, here obeying/keeping His commands results in abiding in Jesus' love. The only natural conclusion from these virtually reversible statements, therefore, is that they are so interrelated and inseparable that you cannot have one without the other.<sup>2</sup>

The practices of prayer, Scripture reading, keeping God's commandments, etc., are often called "spiritual disciplines." Personally, I tend to avoid this term because the word "discipline" may lend itself to willpower tendencies. The term "spiritual practices" is better. Traditionally, the practices have been called "means of grace." This term can be helpful, though the phrase may get confused with the

false idea that we produce God’s grace over our lives, rather than receive it. My favorite term for these practices is “spiritual postures,” which I first heard from my seminary professor, Kyle Strobel.

Scripture reading, prayer, etc., are the positions we assume to engage relationally with God. Rather than trying to feel God, our posture is simply to be with God, regardless of how we feel. God is always close! He made His dwelling within us (Col. 1:27; 2 Tim. 1:14). How much closer could He possibly get?

Let’s look at four spiritual postures, and how they work with the relational approach to God.

## The Practice of Prayer

First and foremost, at the foundation of our spiritual walk is prayer.

Prayer, simply, is talking to God. It is the act of presenting ourselves before God. It’s the practice of communicating with God through speaking and listening—with or without words. We could offer a lot of words as we bow our heads, but if our words are an outward show for others, or a checklist that we are trying to get through, it’s not real prayer.

Prayer is central to our life with God. Without prayer, we have no meaningful relationship with Him. It is no wonder that Satan tries to prevent us from developing a good prayer habit.

The late theologian Henry Nouwen is credited for calling prayer “an articulate way of being useless in the face of God.”<sup>3</sup> Prayer, by design, is meant to position us in humility and utter dependence on God. So, when we are frustrated that prayer feels like a waste of our time, perhaps that is simply the growing pains of a prayerful Christian. *Perhaps that is all the more reason to press in.*

As we pray, we might feel the temptation to present a cleaned-up version of ourselves to God. We might speak to Him like our spiritual lives are perfect. Or hide the anger and frustration we feel toward Him or others. We might worry that God can’t handle us if we show Him our true selves. But this perspective is not modeled for us in the Psalms.

Sure, some of the Psalms are beautiful praises of adoration to God. But many others are frightfully raw and despairing. Sometimes they sound like the author is complaining to God, or even mad at Him! Consider the famous prayer of David later echoed, in part, by Jesus as He hung on the cross (Psalm 22:1–2, ESV):

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?  
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,  
and by night, but I find no rest.

That's *prayer* modeled for us in Scripture! To be clear, I don't think it's ever appropriate to be mad at God, but if you *are* mad at God, at least be honest with Him about it! To me, that is *real prayer*, because it's the *real you* before God.

Prayer is the key ingredient of every spiritual posture we take. *All other practices are meant to stimulate prayer.*

## The Practice of Reading Scripture

I had a friend who wasn't a Christian, yet he was fascinated by Bibles. He collected them. He would occasionally read them. But then, one day, I had the beautiful opportunity to lead him to the Lord. Shortly after his conversion, I remember telling him, "You know, for the first time, you'll be able to read the Bible, not just as an interesting history book to understand, *but as Scripture.*"

When Christians talk about how to read the Bible, they tend to focus on how to interpret it. No doubt, proper interpretation is critical, especially for teachers (Jas. 3:1). But how should Christians engage with the Bible as God's sacred Word? Non-Christians can study the Bible and apply its moral principles to their lives, to some extent. But Christians have the unique privilege of reading the Bible with God's Spirit.

By engaging with God's Word, we enter His presence. As we engage with Him, we feel various reactions rise within us. Maybe we feel amazed at God. So praise Him! Or we may feel confused at some Bible passage that doesn't make sense to us. So ask Him! Or we may feel disturbed at God killing Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. So tell Him you feel bothered about it! Ask Him *why* you're bothered about it, and be open to His response.

*This is honest prayer before our Lord.* Scripture has a way of pulling things out of which we can bring before God as we notice them.

## The Practice of Christian Meditation

When I refer to “meditation,” I’m not referring to eastern or “New Age” spiritual meditation. I mean specifically Christian meditation—as Scripture uses the term. Joshua 1:8a (ESV) says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.” Psalm 77:12 says, “I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.”

I remember when the band *Jesus Culture* became popular in the 2010s. One of the big complaints about their music was that they excessively repeated their choruses and bridges. Most of their songs were long; some of them extended beyond 10 minutes. This format became a trend among other Christian artists, especially in charismatic churches. Today, we can listen to a live recording of the hit song *Way Maker*, which is 28 minutes long!<sup>4</sup>

Although some criticize these songs for being too long, I suspect these worship artists are trying to bring back a long-lost tradition of Christian meditation. When was the last time you sat with a truth of God and ran it on repeat in your head? When was the last time you really chewed long and hard on a passage of Scripture? There is much value to the simple act of Christian meditation. It is an essential way to be with God and give Him the space in our lives to speak to us. Extended worship songs invite us into this practice.

## The Practice Church Community

We could discuss other spiritual postures such as fasting, Sabbath rest, and generosity. These are all great ways we can engage with God. They all stimulate prayer.

But I want to end our discussion with the practice of Christian community within the local church. I find this practice to be particularly critical for our spiritual maturity. Let me put this bluntly: *If you are not involved in a local church community, your faith will suffer.*

God created us to know Him through the process of mutual upbuilding within our local churches. New Testament Professor Joseph Hellerman points out that in modern seminary classrooms, we tend to treat the study of spiritual maturity and the study of the church separately. But in reality, we can’t understand one without the other. Adds Hellerman, “We grow in our faith as individual Christians to the degree that we are deeply rooted relationally in a local church community

that is passionately playing its part in God's grand story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration."<sup>5</sup>  
Amen.

Many mistakenly think spiritual maturity is solely a private matter between God and themselves. But maturity involves *community* because, again, spiritual maturity is about abiding in Christ, and God is present when His people gather together for the sake of His name. Jesus points this out when He applies this truth to Church discipline: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them" (Matt. 18:20, ESV).

Thus, community for Believers is paramount to spiritual maturity. Scripture echoes this. Paul says in Romans 1:11-12 (NIV): "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Romans 14:19 says: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." Ephesians 4:11–13 says: "So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ 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." 1 Corinthians 14:26 says: "What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up."

These instructions about spiritual maturity are placed in the context of the local church. If the Church is to remain relevant, we can't forget this.

## Defining Spiritual Maturity

These are the postures to take to abide in God. I did not provide an exhaustive list, but I hope you see that the practice of spiritual postures is not just about "doing the stuff." It is about being with God as we do them.

It may be that by reading this paper, your definition of Spiritual maturity has shifted. Spiritual maturity is not about becoming a better person. That should not be our goal. As we saw in John 15, our goal is to be with God; to abide with Christ. *Spiritual maturity is measured by the depth of our relationship with God.*

We may not notice an outward transformation taking place right away, but even in the darkest, messiest moments of our life, we can always engage with God. Again, we don't need to feel Him for this to work. Just engage. He's there.

If you are to remember only one truth about your identity, let it be this: God made us to glorify Himself, through a celebration of life in His presence. We are made for this. We are saved into this. We anticipate this for when Jesus returns. We are people of His presence. This life is the life that God has called us into for now and for eternity. May you enjoy the satisfaction of growing in your spiritual maturity in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Josh McDowell and Josh McDowell, *See Yourself as God Sees You* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 111.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, John 12–21, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 146.

<sup>3</sup> From “Let yourself be useless” by Henry Nouwen.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsypFJ5mNw0&>

<sup>5</sup> Joseph H. Hellerman, *Why We Need the Church to Become More like Jesus: Reflections about Community, Spiritual Formation, and the Story of Scripture* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), xii.