

Discovery Series



SECTION FIVE



Discovering Maturity

Hope Christian Fellowship

"Making disciples who live & love like Jesus"

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FEATURES OF THIS WORKBOOK

So, you have decided to continue your discipleship journey! We have prepared this workbook for you to help you along the way. As with all our curriculum, there are several features built into this workbook you should be aware of.

- 1) It is designed for self-study. Although someone may help you through it, you will be doing most of the work yourself. The material is arranged so you will cover one topic each week. You may either complete all five pages of this weekly material at one time or you may easily break it up and do a page of work on five separate days.
- 2) Most of the Bible verses are cited for you to look up rather than being quoted in the text for you. This is intentional in order to help you learn how to find your way around the Bible for yourself. At first you may need to look up each book of the Bible in the table of contents of your Bible. But as time goes on, you will find yourself becoming more and more familiar with the Scriptures and easily turn to any book of the Bible.
- 3) The workbook is based on the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. There are several good translations of the Bible available, but we chose to use the NIV because of its contemporary wording. If you do not already have an NIV Bible you should get one to make your studies go smoother.
- 4) When you have completed the material for a topic, someone in your small group (who has already gone through it), or some other kind of mentor should review it with you. They will be available to answer any questions you have. Their main purpose will be to help you see the importance of what you learned for being a more effective disciple of Jesus Christ. You can also complete the test in the back, turn it in to the office & receive a certificate of completion.
- 5) Don't be alarmed at the length of time involved in completing these studies. You can proceed one step at a time and at your own pace so you will not be overwhelmed. And remember, you have a lot of ideas, desires, and habits left over from your old life must be overcome if you are to be an effective follower of Jesus Christ. It is a process, a journey of discovery and decisions and change.

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The Process



Original drawing by Rebekah McIntosh

I am writing to you who are God’s children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus. I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one. I have written to you who are God’s children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God’s word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one. 1 John 2:12-14

In this scripture, we see a specific description of certain levels of growth – children, young, and fathers. Let’s explore this further in both directions, going back to infancy and on to fathers.

Babies

(Greek word – *Teknion*) or infants. Both spiritually and naturally, we’re talking about newly born people. Infancy is a time of dependency – and it is meant to be a very short time. After only a few weeks, a baby rolls over, then after a few months, he begins to crawl. At about one year of age, that baby starts walking. He may need help to walk for a short time, but soon he is walking on his own.

1 Peter 2:2-3

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual _____ so that you will _____ into a _____ experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.

Spiritual infancy is the time immediately after a person receives their salvation. He is so joyful over the simple fact that God loves him. Because of that fact, he has given his life to the Lord. Beyond that, he may not have much of a ‘vision’ of what his life will be like now that he has become a Christian. So let’s summarize this stage by saying that an infant’s **vision** is that “**God loves me.**”

Children

(Greek word – *Paidion*) or half grown boy or girl. Childhood is a time of learning and character development. This is also a time when a child learns how to function within a family, obeying his mom and dad and others in authority over him. He learns how to relate to others outside his family.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn’t talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though . . . you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you _____ for anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. . .

1 John 2:28-29

And now, dear _____, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame. Since we know that Christ is righteous, we also know that all who do what is right are God’s children.

John 13:34-35

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: _____ each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my _____.”

Spiritually, the growth process is very similar. A young Christian also needs to learn to function within the family of God. He needs to see older, more stable Christians as examples. He needs encouragement, correction, and comfort. It is during this time that he realizes that God is at work in his life to change his character, making him more Christlike. Summary: A child’s **vision** is “**God can work in me.**”



Young Men

(Greek word – *Neaniskos*) – a youth under 40. We would probably look at teenagers in this light. Jewish tradition holds that a child becomes a man at age 13. This young man then enters a time in his life where he is becoming more responsible. He is able to do most things on his own. This time is usually a struggle between independence and submission. This young adult needs deeper discipleship. He needs to willingly submit himself to those who are older and wiser, and yet he needs to learn to seek wisdom from God on his own. He may make many mistakes, but he can learn from them.

2 Timothy 2:1-3

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many

_____ witnesses.

Now teach these truths to other

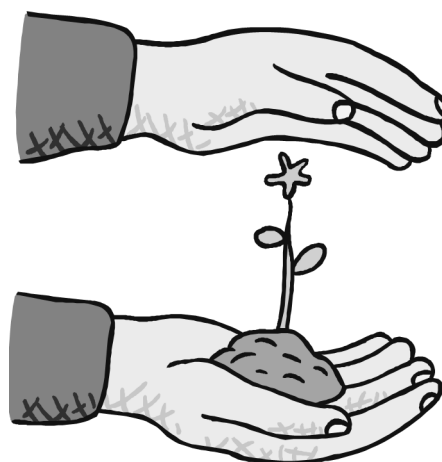
_____ people who will be able to pass them on to others. Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 14:20

Dear brothers and sisters, don't be _____ in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but be _____ in understanding matters of this kind.

I John 2 indicates that these are those who have learned to overcome the evil one. Overcoming Satan is the most important part of this phase. Satan will work overtime to get a young person to rebel against any authority figure that God has placed in his life. He will do his best to tempt and seduce a young person away from a pure life before God. Satan knows that if he can draw a young person into sin, that young person will reap the results for many years afterward. Hopefully, the young person will resist such influences and *willingly* submit himself to the wisdom and guidance of those who are older and wiser than he.

A young man (or woman) progresses from realizing that God is working in him to the understanding that God can also use him to affect other people around him. He begins to understand his own influence. Summary: A young man's **vision** is **“God can use me in the lives of others.”**



Fathers

Greek word – *Pater*) literally – nourisher, protector, upholder. Specifically here: Those who through Christ have been exalted to a specially close and intimate relationship with God and no longer dread Him as the stern judge of sinners, but revere Him as their reconciled and loving Father.

Instructors

(Greek word – *Paidentes*), a tutor; a guide and guardian of boys. Among the Greek and Romans, the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood. The name carries with it an idea of severity (as the stern censor and enforcer of morals) as distinguished from the father who is milder.

1 Corinthians 4:15

For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual _____. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you.

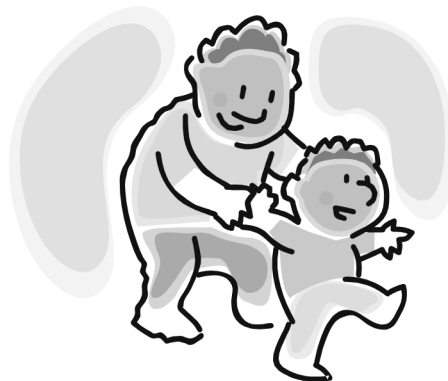
Sad to say, there are few ‘fathers’ or ‘mothers’ in the church today. There is a great *need* for lovingly firm fathers in the faith. These are those that young people can admire as heroes. People who can truly be admired for their character and faithfulness in God. People who stand securely and steadily through adversity – who extend grace, mercy, and a helping hand to those who are struggling. Where are these great men and women of God? Today, as you commit to complete this section, pray to God that He will help you to become a father or a mother in the faith.

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don’t seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you _____ to be _____ others. . . . Solid food is for those who are _____, who through _____ have the _____ to recognize the difference between right and wrong. So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding . . .

This scripture indicates that there is a need to learn more and more from God’s Word, to put it to use in our lives. Then we will have an answer – a word of encouragement from God to give to those who are struggling. In I John 2, fathers are described as those who have “. . . known Him (God) who is from the beginning.” We really need to *know* our God. The way to get to *know* a person is by spending time with them. God truly is our refuge and strength, especially during times of trouble. Commit yourself to spend time with your God, learn to truly *know* Him. Let Him be your strength and shield. Then, when you become confident of His constant presence in your life, you will be ready, willing, and able to encourage others of God’s faithfulness.

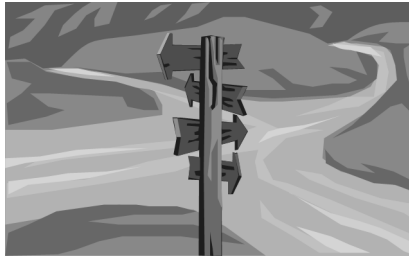
Summary: A Father’s **vision** is “**God can use me to love others and to affect the generations.**”



When you're driving along the highway, you come across certain signs that let you know you're getting closer to your destination. You might be driving along and see a sign that says "My City, 60 miles ahead," then later, you'll see, "My City, 25 miles," then "My City, 6 miles." Sometimes it's hard to see that God is working in our lives because we change gradually. It's good to see some signs, or milestones, because then we can recognize, "Hey, that's something God is doing in my life, I really am growing!"

Colossians 1:28
 So we tell others about Christ,
 _____ everyone and
 _____ everyone
 with all the wisdom God has given us.
 We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ.

God wants us to be totally complete in Him. That's the purpose of all our teaching and all of our warning – that every person we can influence will be complete and mature when they stand before the Lord. If we allow ourselves to remain stagnant or become complacent, we're missing what God has for our lives.



HINDRANCES:

Unbiblical Thinking. You might think, "I'm too young to be used by God." Or, "I'm too old . . .", "I'm too weak. . .", etc.

1 Timothy 4:11-12
 . . . Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an
 _____ to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

Job 32:6
 Elihu . . . said, "I am _____
 and you are old, so I _____"

_____ from telling you what I think.

Like many people, Elihu thought he was too young to speak. But we see in verse eight and nine that he had gained a better understanding.

Job 32:8-9
 But there is a _____ within people, the breath of the Almighty within them, that makes them intelligent. Sometimes the elders are _____ wise. Sometimes the aged do _____ understand justice.

If anyone receives any ministry from us, it is because the *Spirit of God* works within us, reminding us of things we barely know – to affect others in a powerful way. He takes our small insight and empowers it. When Paul got saved, he immediately started preaching. He didn't go away to Bible College! He didn't sit back and think, "I'm just a new Christian, I can't have anything important to say." God used him in a powerful way.

Slothfulness. Many people are too lazy to meditate on God's statutes – to press in to obeying His precepts. You can have more understanding and insight than your pastors and elders!

Psalm 119:98-100
 Your commands make me
 _____ than my enemies, for they are my constant guide. Yes, I have _____ insight than my teachers, for I am _____ thinking of your laws. I am even wiser than my elders, for I have kept your commandments.

So we see that it is obedience to God's precepts that gives us understanding, insight, and wisdom.

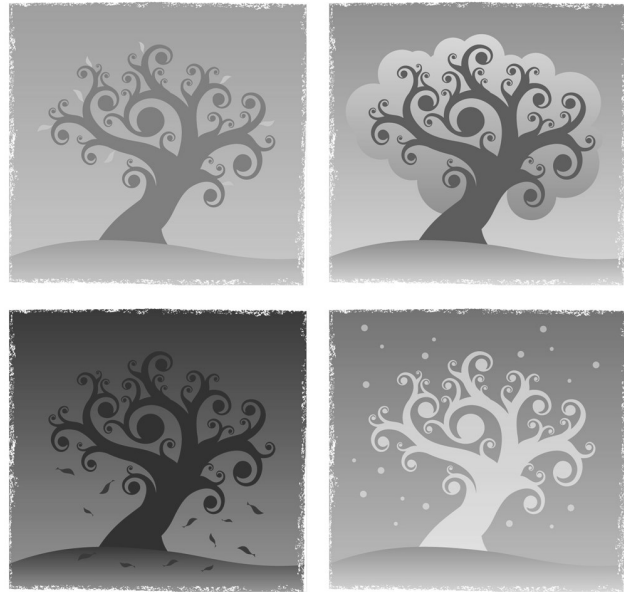
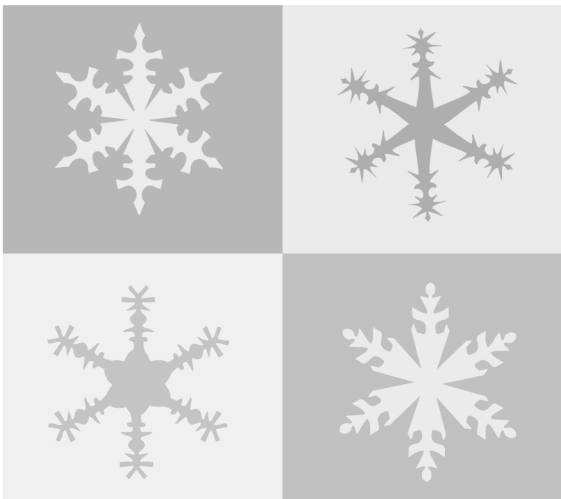
Seasons

A Good Work has Begun in You

When we get planted in the Lord, we're like a seed. We need to be continually growing, bringing forth fruit in our lives. Fruit is planted, grows, matures, and is harvested season by season. There are seasons in our life just as there are seasons in nature.

- There's a **springtime** when everything is obviously growing and blooming and fruit is being produced.
- In the **summer**, some of the fruit isn't harvested yet, but you can see that it's growing and you can protect it from insects and other damaging things.
- Then comes the **autumn**, a harvest time, when we gather all the wonderful crops.
- We go through the **winter** where everything seems dead – you see no life, but God is doing something underneath, where no one can see, to prepare for the coming spring.

There are things that happen during the winter that are absolutely necessary. Did you know that in order for there to be a good apple crop every year, there must be a certain number of days when the temperature is below freezing? God is always busy working in your life. "He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He's doing the work, all we have to do is cooperate.



Ecclesiastes 3:1
For everything there is a _____, a _____
for every activity under heaven.

Philippians 1:6
And I am certain that God, who _____ the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally _____ on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

If you come to this church, you are taught fifty-two times per year in church services alone. If you go to a home group, you're taught one hundred four times per year. If you go through our curriculum series or pursue other studies, you learn even more. Some of you are just full of the word of God. You have so much to share.

Sometimes people will come to us with questions we can't answer. There is nothing wrong with not knowing everything! Just tell them, "I don't know, but I'll find out for you." Then go and study it out or ask someone else who might have an answer. It's another sign of maturity to not expect yourself to have all the answers.

About Maturity



What Maturity is NOT

Funk & Wagnalls' dictionary says mature is to be "completely developed; highly developed in intellect, outlook, etc.; thoroughly developed, perfected, etc."

Going to Church. Merely going to church every week does not make a person strong in the Lord. Don't misunderstand – going to church can *help* you grow, but going to church does not *make you mature*. There are people who have gone to church consistently all their lives, but they have never grown up in God.

Hebrews 5:11-13

There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you _____ to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is _____ an _____ and doesn't know how to do what is right.

Becoming dull or boring. Becoming dull is definitely not being mature. The Bible calls dullness "complacency". Our growth in Christ should be exciting!

Proverbs 1:32

For simpletons turn away from me—to death. Fools are destroyed by their own _____.

Amos 6:1 (NIV)

"WOE to you who are complacent in Zion . . ."

Woe is bad! Woe is to be avoided! I don't want any woe on *me*! So I will avoid complacency!

Knowing more than other people. Some people have a great deal of knowledge. They have studied

the Bible and learned many things. But perhaps they have not learned how to be humble or how to interact with people. They may even enjoy arguing with others about what they consider the deep meaning of scripture. By their actions you can see they are immature. It's not wrong to grow in knowledge, but we must take the things we've learned and put them into practice.

1 Corinthians 8:1

. . . Yes, we know that "we all have knowledge" about this issue. But while knowledge makes us _____, it is _____ that strengthens the church.

James 1:22

But don't just _____ to God's word. You must _____ what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

Being "Hyped". Occasionally, we go to a special event, such as a concert, or a retreat, and we come back pumped up with excitement and spiritual fervor. This is not a bad thing, but it's dangerous to consider this as a sign of strength in God. It's wonderful to get excited and to have enthusiasm. But God wants us to be **built** up, not hyped up. Ask yourself, "Is my fervor for God continuing, or is it just something I'm in the mood for right now?" Serving God is not an emotional roller coaster.

Acts 20:32

And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to _____ you _____ and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

So encourage each other and _____ each other _____, just as you are already doing.

What Maturity is NOT

Pleasing People. We need to come to a place of decision, asking, “Who am I going to please?” If we live our lives trying to please the people around us, we are really giving in to peer pressure. We need to care more about what God thinks than what other people think. We shouldn’t be “spiritual” only when “spiritual people” are with us. Christianity is like our skin – It’s not something we can take off and put back on, we live in it *all the time*. We don’t just do things to look good in front of other people.

Galatians 1:10
Obviously, I’m not trying to win the _____ of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.

Acting different at special times or places. Is your most spiritual day Sunday? If so, ask yourself why! Do you feel closer to God because you’re going to church? Or on the day of your life group meeting? Again, Christianity is like our skin – on us *every day, everywhere*. God is with us at all times, not just when we’re in church or at life group or at some concert. And our relationship with God needs to be consistent, not just noticed at Christmas or Easter.

Being led by your emotions. Those who react to situations or make decisions based upon their emotions are very unstable. They are easily disappointed in others – even in God (if they don’t get their own way in a situation). An emotion-led person has a hard time controlling anger, and it manifests itself verbally and sometimes even in physical violence. It is also hard for this type of person to acknowledge their own faults, because they “feel right” about nearly everything they do. This is a dangerous way to live.

1 John 1:8

If we claim we have _____, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.

Being like other people. Even as Christians, we can seek to be like someone we admire. This is not always a bad thing. It is always good to follow good examples, but we cannot make ourselves into an exact replica of another person as if we should be formed out of some Christian cookie-cutter. God has created each one of us to be unique. We cannot measure ourselves against one another, but we must always measure ourselves with the example of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:12

. . . they are only _____ themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant!

Be careful not to measure yourself against other people. If you measure yourself against someone like Mother Teresa, you’ll end up feeling like the scum of the earth. If you measure yourself against someone like Jack the Ripper, you’ll feel mighty proud of yourself. While it’s good to look at the examples of others and either accept or reject that example for ourselves, it’s also very important to realize that each of us is a unique creation of God. You will not be exactly like any other person on the face of the earth. The best person to measure yourself against is Jesus Christ.

Growing out of Dependency

What would you think of a fourteen or fifteen year old boy who refused to eat anything unless his mom prepared it for him and his dad spoon-fed him? You would think, "That's absurd!" And you would be right! Yet, that's how many Christians are. They sit back and wait to be fed by more mature Christians.

If a person's growth in God is totally dependent upon other people, he or she becomes a "spiritual leech". Sometimes they may get a good point from the pastor on Sunday morning, or from someone quoting a Scripture somewhere. But they're not seeking God on their own, and their growth is so slow it can barely be seen.

Psalm 34:8

_____ and see that the LORD is good . . .

You have to decide to taste it. You have to see for yourself that God is good. You have to learn to get some spiritual food for yourself. Many times people complain about not being "fed" when they are really old enough to feed themselves. There comes a time when we must decide, "I'm going to learn. I'm not going to continue to rely solely on others." Of course, we *do* learn from the lives of others, and we *do* learn from our pastors, but we all need to take some responsibility for our own growth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Work hard so you can

_____ to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

1 Timothy 4:7

. . . train _____
to be godly.

1 Timothy 4:12

Don't let anyone think less of you because you are _____. Be an _____ to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

We must **want** to take responsibility. We must **want** to learn how to live a godly life. We must **want** to learn to be part of the family of God. Of course, we may still be young, still needing some provision and good examples to follow. But a person who truly desires to become mature will take responsibility for his or her own growth, seeking out good examples to follow.

Proverbs 13:20

Walk with the _____ and become _____; associate with fools and get in trouble.

A good paraphrase of Proverbs 13:20 is "If you *hang around* with wise people, you'll become wise too!" That's good advice to follow. That's why small groups are so important. If you belong to a small group, you have a place to learn, to share your problems, to receive good advice, to build solid relationships, to receive vision for who you can become in God, to become accountable for your attitudes and actions. So decide for yourself that you will become an asset to your group. Help in any way you can. Decide to give as well as receive. Become an encourager of others.

Learning to Resist Temptations

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. 1 Corinthians 10:13

It is not a sin to be tempted. We will be tempted for the rest of our lives. Satan will make every effort to trip you up and make you fall. The real question is, how are you going to handle those temptations? Jesus set us a fine example for handling temptations. Read Luke 4:1-13, paying special attention to the following verses:

Luke 4:4

But Jesus told him, “No! The _____ say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’”

Luke 4:8

Jesus replied, “The _____ say, ‘You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.’”

Luke 4:12

Jesus responded, “The _____ also say, ‘You must not test the LORD your God.’”

Notice each time the devil tempted Jesus, Jesus quoted from the Word of God. He didn’t try to “figure his own way out.” He was familiar enough with the Bible so He could use it to resist His enemy. You can’t strike back at the devil by saying, “You big mean man – stop doing that!” You need to be “full” of the Word of God. Jesus also taught us to pray, “. . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13)

Luke 4:13

When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him _____ the next opportunity came.

Notice also after Jesus had resisted him, the devil left – but only until a more opportune time. We all must be aware that Satan will return again, especially at times when we are weak and vulnerable. Don’t justify yourself by saying, “Well, this is just my weak area.” If you are weak in a specific area, get a concordance and look it up. Study what the Bible says about it, then the next time temptation comes, you’ll be much better prepared for it.

Joel 3:9-10

. . . “Get ready for _____! Call out your best warriors. . . . Train even your weaklings to be _____.”

For example: There was a young wife who struggled with envy. She was jealous over things that were happening in another person’s life. So she got a concordance and looked up *envy* and *jealousy*. She looked up the scriptures concerning those words. Those scriptures led her to a solution. Again and again, she found the words, “put it away from you.” That taught her to take responsibility for her own emotions. Then every time she felt envy rise up within her, she would say, “NO! I am not going to be jealous of that person, I’m going to be happy for them. I will rejoice that this other person is blessed.” The result of her study, and her obedience to what she found in the Bible is: She no longer has a problem with envy or jealousy! It is something in her life that has been overcome! She is now strong in an area that was once weak.

Salvation

. . . **Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.** Matthew 28:18-20

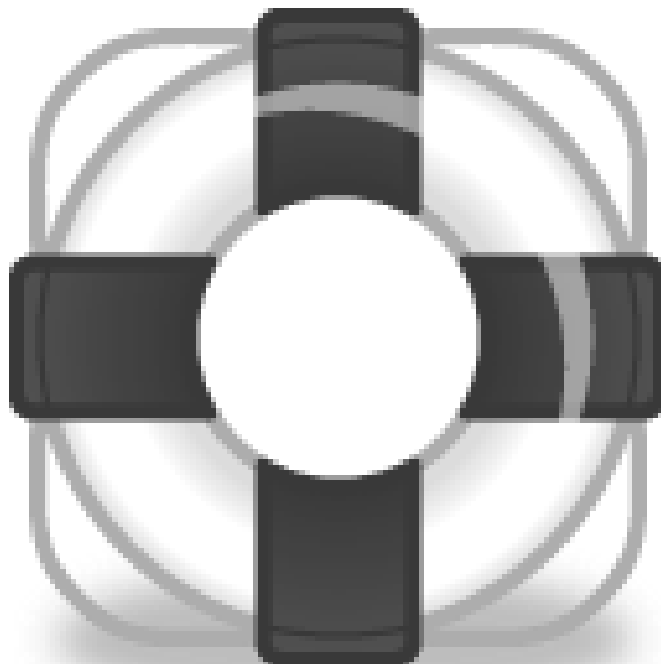
Many times, young believers in Christ start reading their Bibles and praying because they know it is the right thing to do. This is a very good thing. However, later on, they may find themselves just going through the motions. Taking an hour a day to read and pray doesn't necessarily produce maturity. The thing that makes the difference is obedience.

Obedience to the Word of God is simply taking what we have learned through our reading and prayer time and *doing it!*. For instance, Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." You read that. Then you pray, "OK, Lord, help me to practice this truth in my life." Then, the next time you have a

disagreement with someone, try answering them with a gentle answer, instead of continuing the anger cycle of the argument. You will find it really works! And the more you practice it, the better you get at handling arguments. What a wonderful reward!

Some things are harder to obey than others. It's like walking. If you're out for a walk and come to a steep hill, you have a choice. You can 1) sit down and refuse to deal with it, 2) try to get around it, even though it takes longer, or 3) make up your mind to climb that hill and CLIMB IT!

Newborn babies cannot walk yet. Usually a child needs to be about 1 year old before he starts walking (some are older, some younger). Even then, it takes a lot of practice. Mom and dad sit on the floor, coaxing the child to "come to mamma!" He falls down many times before he gets the hang of it. But he cannot give up! If he stops trying, he'll never learn how to do it! Then he takes baby steps, waddling for awhile before he develops a more graceful stride.



Infancy



Learning to Obey

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” John 3:3

A Pharisee named Nicodemus had come to Jesus in the night to ask about the miraculous signs He had performed. When Jesus made this declaration, Nicodemus didn’t understand and asked, “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.” Jesus is speaking here of a *spiritual birth*. We are born naturally when we emerge from our mother’s body, but we must be born again *spiritually* to enter the Kingdom of God. We call this birth point **salvation**.

1 Peter 1:23

For you have been _____, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.

The Bible teaches that before we receive our salvation, we are “dead” in our sin, and blind to the things of God. We just didn’t “see it” and had no way to understand it. We were all going our own way, oblivious to the fact that we needed a Savior. The book of Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 1-5 says, “Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)”

2 Corinthians 4:4

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are _____ to _____ the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

Romans 3:23

For _____ has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.

We receive our salvation by realizing we are sinners in need of a Savior. We repent, turning from our own way to God’s way. We receive the initial forgiveness for and cleansing from the sin that has had us tangled up for so long. Jesus, then, is both our Savior (He died to save us from sin) and Lord (that means He’s the Boss!). We begin to live for Him instead of ourselves. Now we are spiritually “alive”.

Romans 6:11

So you also should consider yourselves to be _____ to the power of sin and _____ to God through Christ Jesus.

From this point on, we begin a lifelong spiritual growth process. The more we know about our God, the more we can see the change that needs to take place in our lives. And the more we learn about His Word, the Bible, the more we can see just how ignorant we really are.

1 Peter 1:14-16

So . . . Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better _____. But _____ you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

Dependency

When a baby is born, it needs a lot of love and attention. It needs to be cared for in literally every detail. When it makes a mess, someone else needs to clean it up. When it's hungry, someone else needs to feed it. If the infant were left alone to fend for itself, it would die.

Fortunately, this state of dependency does not last long. The baby drinks milk for a few months, then mom starts giving him cereal with a spoon. As soon as he is able to sit in a highchair, she starts giving him soft foods he can swallow without choking. Before long, he develops some motor skills and grows a few teeth, and he may receive some tiny little tidbits on his plate. He can pick them up and put into his mouth by himself. Mom still has to fill his bottle, but he can hold it and suck on it by himself. Soon, his motor skills become more finely tuned and he begins to use a spoon by himself – it might be messy, but he's going to sharpen those skills until he's more self-sufficient.

He starts by rolling around on the floor, and soon he begins to crawl. Then approximately one year after his birth, he starts taking a few tentative steps. Suddenly, he's walking on his own. Amazing!

Hebrews 5:13

For someone who lives on _____, is still an _____ and doesn't know how to do what is right.

Anyone who has ever been around a baby knows the "milk" stage is very, very short. God never intended us to stay infants for very long. If an average life span is 70 years, and only six months of it is spent in the milk stage, that means less than 1% of our life is spent drinking only milk.

Consider your life right now. How would you enjoy having **only** milk to drink? No meat, no bread, nothing to chew on. No textures or other flavors to enjoy. You see, God has put an innate desire in

each one of us to desire growth, to go beyond where we have been before. It is not only for our nourishment, but for our enjoyment as well. Growth can be both painful and gratifying at the same time. It hurts a baby when he's developing his teeth, but without them, he will never be able to enjoy the additional foods those teeth enable him to consume. Getting up off the floor and learning to walk involves a lot of falling down. But the added mobility of walking and running is certainly worth any minor pain he endures during the learning process.

It's the same with our spiritual growth. We are going to make some mistakes. We are going to have to put forth some effort. But the things we learn and the character that will be developed in us are worth any struggle we face. And even in those struggles – we are not alone!

Matthew 11:28-30

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me _____ you, because I am humble and _____ at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Jesus is truly a gentle teacher. He does not drive us with a whip or a rod, like a herd of cows. He leads us like a flock of sheep, walking before us, showing us the way. We never need to fear because He is faithful to guide us to our destination – which is to be like Him and to see Him face to face! "Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is." (1 John 3:2)

Milk—Foundational Teaching

You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong. So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don’t need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. You don’t need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding. Hebrews 5:12 - 6:3

After reading this portion of scripture, we can see what are considered the “basic teachings” or the “milk” of the Word of God. New Christians must be taught these basic truths:

- repentance
- faith in God
- baptisms
- laying on of hands
- the resurrection of the dead
- eternal judgment

If you are a part of this church, you have heard about our curriculum process. These series of study books contain a section called *Discovering our Foundations*, which include these vitally important teachings.

Some people will come in to our church and be halfhearted about pursuing their Christian growth. Others will come in, see what is offered, and run after it. We encourage

you to devour these teachings. They have been carefully developed to help you lay a good spiritual foundation so you can go on to maturity.

The different sections of our curriculum have been designed for self-study. You may have someone helping you through it, but you do most of the work yourself. You’ll be looking up Bible verses yourself. The more verses you look up, the more familiar you will become with where things are in the Bible. Any questions you may have can be answered by someone in your home group, a mentor, or one of the elders.

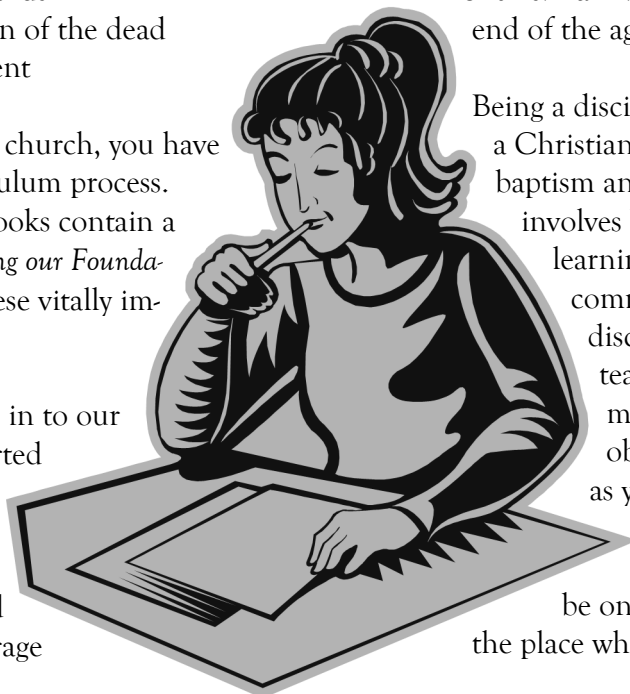
Becoming a Disciple. To better understand what is meant by the word “disciple”. We’ll look at another portion of scripture.

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make

_____ of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. _____ these new disciples to _____ all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Being a disciple is more than just becoming a Christian. It includes learning about baptism and being baptized in water. It involves being teachable. It includes learning to obey everything God has commanded. It also involves making disciples yourself – baptizing them, teaching them to obey Jesus. Commit yourself to learning, and to obeying what you learn. As soon as you learn one truth, you are able to lead someone else into that same truth. You only need to be one step ahead to lead someone to the place where you are.



Gaining Vision

Babies have very cloudy vision when they're first born. They see only light and shadow. They're used to living in the darkness of the womb. In a few days or weeks, they see more clearly. They can distinguish shapes and colors, and faces.

In our spiritual lives, we need to have spiritual vision. In Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) we read, "Where there is no vision, the people perish . . ." In simple terms, it is discouraging to us when we have no vision, no hope for the future, no fresh revelation from God. The word **vision** means, "the ability to anticipate and make provision for future events."

Vision is something we can gain by knowing God, by reading His word, or through other people. Many times, another person has a vision for their life, or their family, or their ministry, and God causes that same vision to burn within the hearts of others. So they join themselves together for the sake of that common vision, knowing God has brought them together for that purpose.

Our "Welcome" booklet contains the mission, vision, and values of our church. It also describes some of the structural concepts we need to understand when we're becoming a part of the family of God, or a specific church family.

Luke 16:10-12

"If you are faithful in _____ things, you will be faithful in _____ ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with _____ people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your _____?"

Many times, when an individual joins himself to another man's vision, and he is faithful to it, he is given a vision of his own. So if you're wondering what your purpose is in the kingdom of God, it's simple, just be a disciple, find a place to serve, be faithful in your service there, and God will show you greater things you can do.

There was a young girl who became a Christian at age 16. Excited about knowing God and living for Him, she found a church home and asked the Pastor what she could do to help. He asked her to work in the nursery once a month. She agreed. She made up her mind to be the best nursery worker she could be. She wanted to be faithful to her task. She showed up on time, she forced herself to have a kind, loving attitude — even when the children were deserving of a different attitude! She sat and rocked babies to calm them. One day, the worship leader heard her singing and asked her to audition for the worship team, and she ended up being a vital part of the worship ministry in that church. So don't despise small beginnings! Be the best you can be wherever you are, and trust God for the rest.

David started in the sheep pens, faithful to protect, feed, and care for his father's herd. Eventually, he became King over all Israel. Was it because he pushed his way to the top? No! It's because God saw his heart and his faithfulness. David did his best no matter what position he held.

Psalm 78:70-72

He chose his servant David, calling him from the sheep pens. He took David from tending the ewes and lambs and made him the shepherd of Jacob's descendants— God's own people, Israel. He cared for them with a _____ heart and led them with _____ hands.

Growing Up in God

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness. (1 Peter 2:2-3)

How interesting that this scripture refers to "taste" and the process of "eating". From our spiritual births until our deaths – or until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will need to "eat" spiritually. This is an on-going process. We *need* food for our sustenance. Without it we would die. The same is true of our spiritual life. We *need* spiritual food or we will die spiritually. In order to feed ourselves spiritually we must have a hunger for the Word of God. If you don't have a desire for God's Word, pray and ask God to give you that desire. Just start reading. Find a Bible reading plan and follow it. You'll be amazed at how much richness it brings to your life. God will give you a growing desire for His Word the more you pursue it.

A baby is cute while it's a baby. But when a man is 35 years old and still needs to have his diaper changed – he has a big problem in his life! It's good to be a baby when you ARE a baby. But that's just the beginning point. God wants us to grow up and mature spiritually

It is also fitting that salvation is described as being "born again".

John 3:3 & 7

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are _____, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.⁷ So _____ be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'"

1 Peter 1:23

For you have been _____, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.

When you receive your salvation, you are a spiritual infant. Think about babies for a moment. What happens when they are not fed? They CRY! They *crave* milk. They *want* to be fed. They are *hungry*. Babies cannot eat solid food. Their mouths and their digestive systems are not ready for meat. This is also a good thing. As infants grow, they are given soft foods, like cereal, or pureed vegetables. If a baby is deprived of the proper nutrients, his ability to grow his teeth could be hindered. Children need to grow teeth to be able to handle meat and tougher vegetables. God's desire is that we "grow up" in all things.

Ephesians 4:15

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, _____ in every way more and _____ like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

Many Christians remain babies their whole lives. You will see them, they are shallow, surface Christians. Others receive Christ, become hungry for the Word of God, drink all the "spiritual milk" they can get and spend time in fellowship with older, more mature Christians. They take what they learn and apply it to their lives. They learn to walk by themselves, and become "potty trained". They continue to seek out and apply God's truth. When they get their "teeth" they seek out the deeper principles (meat). Eventually, they accept responsibility for their own growth, being less and less dependent upon others and more and more dependent on their own relationship with God.

Hebrews 5:14

Solid food is for those who are mature, who through _____ have the _____ to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

Childhood I

Walking



Learning to Stand & Walk

There comes a time in every baby's life when he looks up and realizes the people around him are not crawling, as he is. He sees they are standing up and walking. Something in that baby says, "Hey, I want to do that, too!" So he starts to try to pull himself up, holding on to furniture. Then he starts taking baby steps, holding on to his mom's hand or going from chair to table to sofa, etc.

Then his mom & dad sit on the floor, facing each other, and encourage him to "come to mamma!" and then back to daddy. Mom & Dad move farther and farther apart, still encouraging baby to walk. When he falls down, they encourage him to get back up and try again. He becomes very determined that he WILL WALK. This is not just a good idea, this is a vital part of this child's growth. If he is still crawling at age eight, it's no longer cute. It is a burden to all those who have to carry him.

Too many Christians have been crawling their entire life. They have never learned to stand on their own or learned to walk. They haven't taken responsibility for their own spiritual growth or spiritual strength. Isn't it amazing that a tiny baby can have a stronger determination than most Christians?

When an athlete is getting ready for a game or a contest, he needs to be focused. He needs to have the desire to win, to want to be better than he was before. He has the drive to be the best and to practice, improving his skill level. It starts in his heart. It's the same in our Christian life. How much do you want to walk, to be strong, to be free from sin? When coaches of championship ball teams are asked the most important ingredient of a good player, the vast majority say, "It's the heart, not the ability." Many people are born with natural skill, but they never develop it to achieve their full potential.

1 John 1:7
But if we are _____ in
the light, as God is in the light, then we

have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Christians need to start **living** like Jesus. Wearing WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelets, and Christian T-shirts has become a popular thing to do these days, but if it doesn't become a reality in the life of the wearer, what good is it? Consider your heart. Do you really want to be like Jesus? If necessary, ask God to change your heart, to give you the desire to be more like Him. Ask Him to give you the heart of a child - to really want to stand up and walk.

Matthew 18:3
Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like _____,
you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

See, a maturing person can fall, but he gets back up and tries again! This can be hard work. Sometimes when a person falls, he feels like it would just be easier to stay there on the floor. But he needs to learn to pull himself back up again. That means pulling out of the world, out of ungodly habits, away from ungodly friends, out of lukewarm Christianity.

I Cor 9:25
Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict _____.
They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

We're talking about strict training here. You can't just pray for it, hope for it, and ask for it. You don't get yourself on the right team so you can sit back and relax and let everybody else carry you. You have to make the effort. You may have to work harder than the average Christian if you want to **be** more than an average Christian.

Work at Standing

Ephesians 6:13

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be _____
_____.

After you pull yourself up, it's time to learn how to hold your balance. At first, a child needs an adult to help them, but after a while he learns to balance himself and stand. Many Christians barely get up and they begin to think they're a tower of strength. Then the wind of temptation blows against them and they topple over. They wonder if they can ever get up again, but they CAN! Sometimes we need help from our pastor or more mature Christian friends to help us maintain our balance for awhile, but one day, if we continue, we'll be able to stand and balance on our own.

Many Christians hold on to other Christians for a long, long time, not learning to stand on their own, depending on the strength of others to hold them up. They are like leeches, sucking the life out of anybody who is around them. They rely on others to keep them balanced. Instead of learning how to plant their feet and stand firm like the Bible talks about, they rely on others to keep them standing. Get your feet established in the Word of God. Then when the storms of life come, they won't be able to blow you over. Don't make the mistake of thinking the only people who need to be strong are the pastors.

Matthew 7:24-27

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and _____ it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and _____ it is _____, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the

rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

When you're learning to stand on your own, it helps considerably to have firm, solid ground to stand upon. You will probably hear a lot about building on a good foundation like the two men compared in Matthew 7:24. One built his house on a foundation of sand, the other on rock. The difference in foundation made ALL the difference when the storms came. Spiritual foundations are built by spending time in prayer, reading the Bible, and in fellowship with other Christians. Make sure you build yourself a good, solid, spiritual foundation. If you don't, the storms of life, and the temptations of sin will come against you and you will not be able to stand up against them.

1 Corinthians 10:13

The temptations in your life are _____ from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a _____ so that you can endure.

Temptations are nothing unusual. This verse says they are "common." Don't think you're strange, or feel like you're losing your mind when you're tempted to do wrong things. We must remember we have an enemy who is trying everything he can to cause you to stumble, to keep you from following the Lord.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Stay alert! Watch out for your great _____, the _____. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

Learning to Walk Takes Determination

3 John 1:3

Some of the traveling teachers recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are _____ according to the truth.

After a child learns to stand, he'll start taking his first few steps. These are the first steps of what will be millions, perhaps billions of steps.

Learning to walk spiritually is basically putting into practice what you have learned about God. We all know people who can "talk the talk, but they can't walk the walk." It means they talk about Christianity, but they don't live it. The world calls these types of people, "hypocrites," - the same word Jesus used to describe the Pharisees in the Bible.

Taking your first steps might require some help. We need our pastors, godly teachers, and parents to help us. They will help us learn how to apply godly principles to our lives so we're not just talking, we're actually *doing* what we're talking about.

Being held accountable by others, permitting other people to speak into our lives is very important. It's not a matter of letting someone else *control* you, it's allowing yourself to be *influenced* by the wisdom of another person who may have more maturity than you. Unfortunately, too many Christians abuse accountability. An immature Christian thinks other people are responsible to hold him up and keep him walking. If he falls, he believes it's someone else's fault. He never learns to stand up and accept responsibility for his own walk, or for implementing the Word of God into his own life.

Proverbs 13:20

_____ with the wise and
_____ become wise . . .

In other words, if you want to become wise, or more mature, hang around with wiser, more mature people. Then when you learn truth, begin to walk in it, begin to live it, begin to do what you know is right.

If many of us did physically what we have done spiritually, we would never have learned to walk. We'd be crawling right now. But you were determined. No matter how many times you fell, you continued to get back up.

Proverbs 24:16

The godly may trip seven times, but they will _____ again. . .

Galatians 6:9

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we _____.

Don't ever give up! Refuse to remain seated! We see too many Christians just sitting in church, sitting at home, laying in bed, crawling around. They're not applying what they have learned. We are not supposed to be like the world. We are supposed to show the world the way!

Walking in Obedience is a Sign of Maturity

2 John 1:6

Love means _____ what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to _____ one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

Walking is a sign of a maturing child. When he starts walking, you know he has grown from one stage into another. Walking in obedience is a sign of a mature Christian. When God begins to convict your heart, you need to do everything you can to change that part of your life. You pull yourself up. You walk in obedience in that area of your life. You're not obeying just because your mom screamed at you or because your pastor preached to you about it a thousand times. You change your life because you want to be obedient to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit.

When children grow and develop, suddenly, they don't look like babies anymore. Their whole being changes from head to toe. Their sense of confidence changes, and the whole world becomes available to them. They can walk where they want, when they want, without having a parent carry them. As we learn to walk in obedience, the same thing will happen to us. God sees you are applying

His Word and walking in obedience. He knows He can trust you in other areas. He can trust you to be a leader because He knows when other people look at you they see somebody who walks in obedience. You'll get to do things other people only hope to do. While others are crawling around, crying like babies, hanging on like leeches, depending upon others; you will be blazing a trail for others to follow.

It's time for this world to see a new standard of Christians who can walk in faith. They need to see a generation walking in obedience, walking in the light, walking in truth. You need to be one of them.

Ephesians 6:1

Children, _____ your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.

All children need to learn to obey their parents. If a child doesn't learn this while he is young, it will hinder his ability to handle authority later in life. This could affect his ability to function in the workplace with a boss, as a father in his own family, and even in society. Remember, "If you don't control yourself, someone else will control you."



The War Against Our Nature



I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. (Romans 7:15-25)

Do Paul's words sound familiar? This passage describes the struggle we all live with. There is an actual war going on inside of us - the battle between obeying God or our natural flesh.

As a young child learns to stand and walk, he must 'fight' with the force of gravity. He can't do away with gravity because it is a force created by God. He must learn to deal with it, to work *with* gravity, balancing his body with each step. Soon, he becomes so accustomed to working within the law of gravity, it has become second nature. He doesn't need to think about it anymore. He has 'overcome' that problem.

The same is true spiritually. Because we love God, we want to do right. Our sinful nature works against us, trying to keep us from obeying God. Sometimes it takes a real fight to overcome the 'law of sin.'

Childhood II

Thinking



Growing Up in the Way We Think

1 John 2:13b

. . . I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have _____ your battle with the _____.

The description of children in this passage of scripture seems to indicate that childhood is the time when a person truly comes to *know* their *Father*. This is the time of life when a person learns what the family structure consists of, how it operates, how to love others, how to submit to the authority in his life. This is also the time of life when a person gets the bulk of his education. The parental role gradually diminishes as the child learns to take on more *self*-control and responsibility. The child needs to submit himself to the teaching and nurturing of others so by the time he's old enough to enter the world outside of this parental covering, he's ready – not disabled because of a lack of maturity in his character.

In the *Discovering Discipleship* section of our "Discovery Series", you'll find excellent descriptions of family structure and important truths about building relationships and how to get along with others. You'll learn about families, their structure, how they operate, both in the home and within the church. If you want to progress past childhood, you must learn and practice these truths.

Growth in wisdom comes from learning to obey God.

Luke 2:52

_____ in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

Jesus was the son of God, yet as an example for us, He still had to grow in wisdom. He had to mature in the way He thought about things. The Greek word for "to grow" means to "drive forward, to advance, to increase, to proceed." To become mature, we need to start thinking for ourselves. Often, people are mindless in their Christi-

anity. They don't think about what they're doing or how to grow. They just go to church and go home.

Children are learning how to think for themselves. Early in their life, they need the direction and wisdom of someone in a parental role. As they mature, they will learn how to make simple decisions – like what clothes look good together. At age 4 or 5, you wouldn't expect a child to choose the foods that are best for them, but at age 21, adults don't usually need to run home to mommy and daddy to choose their food for them. There's nothing wrong with *being* a child, needing direction and guidance, when you *are* a child. But most children *want* to grow up. Many people are just like robots. They do whatever they're programmed to do. They keep asking for more direction, and they let someone else tell them what to do rather than thinking for themselves. God wants us to grow up and learn to think for ourselves.

Before they're able to think for themselves, children need a lot of direction. The parents must think for them at first. A mother might tell her son not to touch the stove. He doesn't know the stove can burn him because he has never felt the heat of the stove before. The mother can't let her little boy get close enough to the stove to learn how hot it is. He can't understand the intensity of the heat, so mom tells him not to touch. The little boy doesn't know a car could hit him, so his dad tells him not to run into the middle of the road. He tells his son to hold his hand when he's walking on or near the street. After he reaches a certain age, the boy learns how to think for himself. He begins to understand the rules mom & dad gave him were for his own protection, even though he couldn't understand it at the time. He has to learn to obey even when his parents aren't there making him obey. He obeys not because he is forced, but because he has learned to think for himself.

Learn to Control Your Thinking

We've probably all had times when we hung around with the wrong crowd, and ended up doing something that was not good. Something we know is stupid. When asked why we did it, we can only say, "I just wasn't thinking." Instead of being like a child, following the crowd; ask "WHY am I doing this?" Learn to find answers in God's Word for yourself. If you seek to understand, you'll gain wisdom, and learn to draw the right conclusions for yourself. Too many people go to church their whole life but they're not really thinking.

Romans 12:2

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by _____ the _____ you _____. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

The way you transform your life is by renewing your mind and learning to think differently. You can't let your mind be idle anymore. When you put God's word in your mind, you change the way you think. An old proverb says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." If you think about junk, it's no wonder you do junky things. You may not be a bank robber or a murderer, but you don't do anything great for God, either. If you don't learn to think as a mature Christian, you will never be a mature Christian.

Mature Christians rule their attitudes, they don't let their attitudes rule them. Attitudes are a part of our thought life. So, controlling your thoughts also means controlling your attitude. Sometimes we intend to think the right way, then something happens we don't like, and our attitude changes. We need to realize the devil is going to try to use other people's comments and attitudes again and again to try to incite us to anger or fear. He knows if he can get your *thinking* off-track, he can get your *life* off-track.

Philippians 2:5-7

You must have the _____ 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 _____ and was born as a human being . . .

We need to work at having the same attitudes Jesus had. Attitudes are contagious. People with bad attitudes tend to rub off on others. So be aware if *you* have a bad attitude, *you* might be rubbing off on someone else. It would be an act of kindness for you to get your attitude right before you infect someone else with it. You *can* decide, "I refuse to think that way." – "I choose to think correctly." "I choose to forgive."

How do we think and talk about others? When we see something wrong in someone's life, we don't state the obvious. We deal with it biblically. We don't need to discuss it with others – even if it's true! We don't want to be the kind of people who *spread* bad reports, do we?

Matthew 7:1

Do not _____ others, and you will not be _____.

Titus 3:1-2

Remind the believers . . . They must not slander _____ and must avoid quarreling . . .

What do you want emanating from your life? Do you want joy and peace? Do you want a godly aura of Christian character? You will reap what you sow. If you are the kind of person who spreads poison, then people will say bad things about you as well, and your poison will come back upon you. So be careful!

Choose God's Thoughts

We decide what we think about, what we “put our mind upon.” To have the peace of God, we need to deliberately plant God's thoughts in our minds. Our mind doesn't rule us and tell us what to do. As we grow in maturity, we tell our mind what to think! We *can* control our thoughts. Isn't that good news?!

Philippians 4:8-9

. . . _____ your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. _____ about things that are excellent and worthy of praise . . .

Colossians 3:2

_____ the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

Remember too, peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit. It is something that needs to be cultivated and nurtured so it can grow. So begin to deliberately plant God's thoughts in your mind.

Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose _____ are _____ on you!

How do you continue to get wisdom?

Proverbs 2:1-5

My child, _____ to what I say, and _____ my commands. _____ your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. _____ for insight, and ask for understanding. _____ for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God.

Notice all those verbs – *action* words! “listen, tune, cry out, search, etc.” You can't just hope for wisdom. It says, “ If any man lacks wisdom let him *ask*.” You must have the desire to grow in wisdom and *pursue* it. When King Solomon had a choice to ask for anything in the world, he said, "Lord, give me wisdom." And because he chose to ask for this noble thing, God have him everything else, too!

If you've come this far in this section, you must be a no-nonsense Christian. You want to make a difference. You want your life to count for something. The most important thing is to grow deep in godly things, so as you begin to do great things, you'll have deep roots on the inside to match what you're doing on the outside. Grow deep in the Word of God. Train your mind to think the thoughts of God. Pursue wisdom with all your might.

Ephesians 4:29

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you _____ be good and helpful, so that your _____ will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Philippians 4:8

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. _____ your _____ on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

"Foul or abusive language" can include a lot of different areas. It can mean cursing or vulgar jokes. Consider your thought life. Are your thoughts true, lovely, worthy of praise, uplifting? Or are you thinking things you'd be embarrassed to say in front of Jesus?

Become Responsible for Yourself

Parents normally have to dress a child until he reaches approximately three years of age. Then he starts learning to put on his own pants, and shirt. Around 6 or 7 years, he learns to tie his own shoes. By the time he's eight or nine he is picking out his own clothes, and his parents expect him to know how to match colors and patterns. He is taking responsibility for dressing and feeding himself. He can't walk around in his underwear all day long because nobody took the time to get him dressed. That's silly! He knows, the family knows, everybody knows that he is responsible for dressing himself.

So many Christians come to church for years who have never been responsible for their own spiritual growth, for getting themselves dressed. They've never been responsible for their own actions.

Luke 2:52

Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in _____ with God and all the people.

Your behavior is a reflection of your heart and your life. Having favor means that people like and enjoy you. Your behavior is acceptable and pleasing. It gives you favor with other people, and gives you favor with God. When you take responsibility for your own actions and do the right things, others will take pleasure in you. They take pleasure in what you did and how you acted without their even asking you to do it. This is a sign that you're beginning to be responsible.

How pleasurable it is for a parent to see his child thinking and doing the right thing without having to be told. And remember, a happy parent is a generous parent. A happy parent longs to give blessings to his child. Many young people want the blessings — a car, a stereo, new clothes, but they forget the scripture that God promised Abraham, "If you are *obedient* you will inherit the blessings of the earth."

Leaders in the church are very happy, too, when

they see people taking the initiative to serve without being asked. If you're obedient and responsible, then you're growing in favor with those in authority over you. Then, because they're more pleased, they're going to want to bless you in some way. We need to be on a quest to grow in our maturity as believers, to grow in favor, and to grow in responsibility.

Responsibility is doing the right thing without being told.

Colossians 3:22

Slaves, obey your earthly _____ in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord.

This verse is talking about how to be a faithful, responsible servant, or employee. It even speaks about how a child should be in the home of his parents. You know it's the right thing to get dressed, so you do it. Mom doesn't have to tell you to do it. One way of showing maturity and demonstrating how well you handle responsibility is by doing what you're asked to do or what you know is right even though no one else is around. Be honest with yourself and think about some wrong or irresponsible things you may have done when no one was around. Hopefully, you have already dealt with those kinds of actions, thoughts, and behaviors. We're talking about working in a restaurant and stealing a meal when your boss wasn't looking. We're talking about watching something on TV that your parents told you not to watch. We're talking about stopping at a stop sign in the middle of the night when there is nobody around to see you.

Matthew 25:21

"You have been faithful in handling this _____ amount, so now I will give you many _____ responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"

Learning Self-Control

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)

In this scripture, there is a great description of growing up. The subject of the sentence is understood to be the word "you". So to restate it, "You make every effort to . . ." The responsibility to add these things is upon you. You will begin to get knowledge, you will add self-control. You will learn to persevere, and you will choose to become godly.

We have all heard people say things like, "I just can't help myself" or "That's just the way I am." Those phrases are commonly known as "cop-outs". They might as well be saying, "I need someone else to change my diaper." With a baby, that might be true, but as the baby matures, he learns to control himself even though he didn't know he could do it at first. The same is true about you. As God teaches you things about your life, he expects you to begin to control that area of your life.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and _____

_____ . . .

Self-control is one of the *fruits* of the Spirit. Fruit does not just accidentally or spontaneously appear on trees. It has to grow. We look at a cherry tree in the springtime and we see blossoms, but it takes time for the fruit to actually come forth. The

cherries have to grow. First they are just tiny hard buds. Then they ripen and develop until they become edible. Just try eating one of those blossoms, or one of those hard pre-cherry buds — it won't be a pleasant experience. We can't even pray for any of these fruits, "Lord, give me self-control." as if it will just suddenly appear in our lives. No, this is **fruit**, and the Lord works along with us, but **we** must do the proper nurturing to make sure it grows in our life.

If we're going to have fruit, we need seed. We must plant the seed, water it, fertilize it, make sure it gets enough water and light. In spiritual terms, the seed is God's Word. We plant it in our hearts, we learn it, meditate on it, nurture it with praise and worship, cultivating a humble heart, adding to our wisdom and knowledge. We put into practice the things we have learned. Then one day, someone says to you, "You have really grown." You might not be able to see it yet, but others can see it in you! In areas when you used to be rebellious, they'll see a heart of submission. In circumstances when you used to fall into temptation, you'll notice you are able to stand up against it.

Dealing with emotions. Consider how we behave when we're angry. What comes out of our mouths at a time like that? We begin to argue and start throwing fuel on that fire and before you know it, it's out of control. Our actions and our attitudes are out of order. We say things we don't mean because of emotion. Everybody always wants to get the last word in! That's pride — we want to know we're right, and we want everybody else to know we're right, too!

When we're young, our emotions are up on the mountaintop one day and down in the depths of despair the next. We all must go through hard times, but we can *learn* to trust in God. We must stop living from one emotional extreme to another, and become emotionally stable, even-keeled Christians.

Childhood III

Eating



We Need “Parents”

One characteristic of babies is they are curious about everything. They want to taste everything, touch everything. They are fascinated by color and taste. Everything they find goes straight to their mouth. That’s one of the first places they begin to learn about things - in their mouth! If it tastes good, they’ll keep it in there, if not, they spit it right out!

1 Peter 2:2-3

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a _____ of the Lord’s _____.

Newborn Christians have tasted that the Lord is kind and good - but that’s about all they know at this time. They can be in love with Jesus, but they are also very vulnerable to deception. That’s why they need spiritual “parents” to help them and protect them from things that could be harmful to them.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be _____, just as Eve was _____ by the cunning ways of the serpent. . .

The devil is so tricky. He even came to Jesus to try to trick Him. He will do whatever he can do to turn Christians away from the truth of Christ. There was a pastor who had a dream. In this dream, he saw himself preaching to millions of people in India with this godly young Christian girl by his side. That pastor woke up and left his godly, Christian wife for this young Christian girl, because he interpreted that dream to be a message from God.

We need to KNOW the Word of God so we are not deceived by such things. A baby has so little

knowledge and discernment, he might be drawn to a warm furry animal, but he wouldn’t know a lion from a lamb. Who is more vulnerable than a baby in this way?

1 Peter 5:8

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He _____ around like a roaring _____, looking for someone to devour.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn’t talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren’t ready for anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are _____ of one another and _____ with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?

Another trait of babes is selfishness, which the Bible calls carnality or worldly. Have you ever heard a child say, “I get the front seat!” They say that because they are grasping a *position* they don’t want anybody else to have. How about this phrase, “. . .that’s MINE!!!” - they are very concerned about their *possessions*, and not very willing to share anything. And also, they are jealous over *prestige*. We know this because they say things like, “My daddy can whip your daddy!” They want others to know how big and tough they are, or how wonderful and sweet they are. They will do things to draw attention to themselves, some by being loud and obnoxious, and other by being so shy that others will try to draw them out.

Submission is not a Dirty Word

The new testament uses the word “submission” as a protective term. Whether or not we prefer it, we all need protection at certain times in our lives.

Parents don’t let their kids eat just anything. Adults are more aware of what is nutritious. A child would not have the wisdom to know that a steady diet of Twinkies and ice cream is not going to benefit his health. Mothers and Fathers don’t allow their child be “creative” out in the street with 18-wheeled trucks. If a child does not submit to this protective authority, the parents need to apply the board of education to the seat of learning!

Love isn’t always this sweet, lovely, thing. It is sometimes a corrective thing - for our own good, for the building of our character. God created us as eternal beings. We are going to live on the earth for a time, then we’ll either live in Heaven or Hell. The authority God has placed in our lives is to prepare us to live our lives, both on the earth, and throughout eternity. If we reject that authority, we will never learn the important truths or have our character built properly.

An immature person only sees the present situation. He lives in the moment. A mature person, a leader sees the outcome, the long-term consequence of present actions. Here’s a quote from the great coach Tom Landry, “A coach is somebody who makes you do what you don’t want to do so you can be what you want to be.” The same thing is true of leaders, pastors, parents - any kind of good leadership.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are

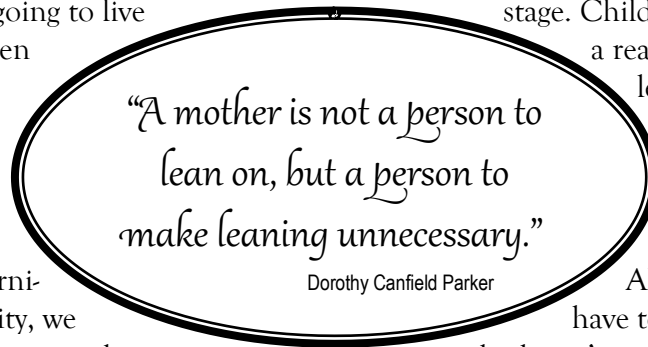
_____ to
God. Give them reason to do this with

joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

We need to obey our leaders, both in the home (our parents) and in the church so their work will be a joy. It wouldn’t be advantageous for you to be a difficult child, rebellious and unwilling to learn. It makes it harder for you and it also makes it harder for them to work with you. They will have to give an account for you and their work with you. They need your prayers.

As a babe or a young child, it’s very important that you attach yourself to a local church and sit under the care and nurture of a local church pastor, elders, and other leadership. People who drift from place to place never mature. They never build their relationships beyond a superficial stage. Children grow up in families for a reason - because they need to learn how to relate properly to others. Children have parents for a reason - so they can learn how to relate properly to authority. All through our lives, we will have to deal with authority, whether it’s on the job, in the church, or in the government. If we don’t learn properly in our childhood, we will have problems as adults.

Parents know when their child is beginning to mature. They can see that child making choices about what is good for them to eat - wiser choices. They see the child begin to make wise decisions about who their friends should be and what kinds of influences will be accepted or rejected. The point is, until you can control yourself, someone else will have to control you. During childhood, it’s your parents. Later, it may be a boss at work, or some governmental authority.



Feeding Ourselves

When babies are born, they need to be fed. They must have milk to live, and they must depend upon others to feed them. They are incapable of feeding themselves. As they grow and develop their teeth, they begin to have little bits of chunkiness added to their food. It's all done a little at a time so the child can get used to each new stage.



Many times, babies try to feed themselves, but they really make a mess! They play with their food and even throw it on the floor, and they get it all over themselves. But at some point, they'll actually get food into their mouth, chew it, and swallow it. It's funny to watch a young child go through all these stages, but after a time, it's not funny anymore. At nine or ten, if a child is still making a mess, insisting on having his own way ("I don't like this." or "It's too hot or too cold.") and needing to be fed, it's a nuisance, and it's rebellion.

Many Christians have not learned to feed themselves. They sit in church their whole life demanding that their pastor or elders feed them. When they do get food from a sermon or teaching, they listen to part of it and throw part of it on the floor. They smash it on their faces and talk about it for awhile, but they don't really digest it because they aren't applying it to their life. As baby Christians, we need milk, but there comes a time when we need to learn how to digest more solid foods,

and then meat. We need to dig into the word of God for ourselves to get meat.

1 Peter 2:2-3

Like newborn babies, you must _____ pure spiritual milk so that you will _____ into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

Do you really crave spiritual food? Many people just go to church out of tradition, they aren't really hungry for God. What are you filling up on? Has your food become television, movies, novels, fantasies? Or are you desiring the truth of God's word? If you don't have a true hunger for the Word, ask God to fill you with a supernatural desire for it.

1 Corinthians 3:2

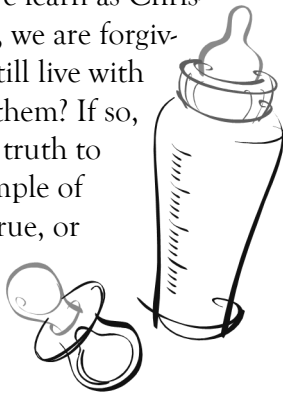
I had to feed you with _____, not with _____, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,

What Paul is saying here is these people are still acting like babies so he can't give them anything more solid than milk. This is not a compliment! God wants to teach us deeper things with more substance. He wants us to understand how to live our lives, to grow and prosper, and to be an influence in our world. There are amazing, wonderful things in the Bible, but if we can only handle milk, we will never even recognize them.

Sometimes, people go to church for years, hearing sermon after sermon, and they think to themselves, "Yeah, yeah, I've heard all this before (yawn)." It's all milk to them because they've never made the choice to grow up. There's no effort to apply the milk to their lives, obeying these simpler truths, so God can trust them with more. If you can't do anything with the milk God gives you, he won't give you solid food - you can't handle it.

From Milk to Meat

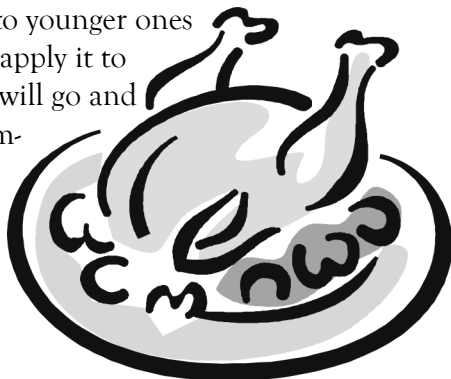
One of the first basic truths we learn as Christians is when we receive Jesus, we are forgiven of our sins. Now, do you still live with them, punishing yourself for them? If so, you haven't truly applied that truth to your life. This is just one example of many. Either God's word is true, or it isn't. If it says you are forgiven - then you ARE forgiven. Get over it, and travel on.



Hebrews 5:14
Solid food is for those who are _____, who through training have the _____ to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

A sure sign a child is growing up is when we see he can handle solid foods. How do you respond to meat? When you hear a sermon, or someone confronts you about something in your life - like attitudes. How do you respond? If you want solid food, you're not dealing with big immorality issues like murder and drunkenness. You're dealing with more subtle issues, heart attitudes such as envy, fear, etc.

Solid food is for the mature. A sign of maturity is the desire to eat solid food. Mature people will judge themselves, deal with their own lives, no matter what anybody else is doing. They develop their own personal relationship with God, no turning back. If their pastor preaches a milky sermon, they realize younger Christians are present who need that milk. Instead of complaining about the lack of meat in the message, they will be an encouragement to younger ones to receive it and apply it to their lives. They will go and get meat for themselves and not wait for the pastor to do it for them.



What can you do to feed yourself?

2 Timothy 2:15

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who _____ explains the word of truth.

Try taking notes on the sermons you hear. Don't just sit there! Chew on the meat that is given to you. Writing what you hear helps you to remember the important points more clearly. If you hear something that strikes your heart, be ready with pen and paper, don't just let it go and forget it. You'd be amazed how you can even go back to it and study it more.

Find Christian books that help you to grow, perhaps you can find books dealing with some of the problem areas of your life. When you read, get a highlighter pen, and highlight some of the points that hit your heart. After you finish the book, go through it again and re-read some of the points you highlighted, letting them hit your heart all over again.

Listen to Christian audio recordings. Sermons and other teachings are good. Christian music also has very good messages in the lyrics. Music helps us to memorize important points and portions of scripture. Just think of all the worldly songs you know by heart. You can hear that old song twenty years from now and you'll still remember the words. Christian music works the same way, only the message of the lyrics has a life-changing effect. Try to learn something from the message of the song.

Worship is extremely important. Worship helps you to have a right perspective of who God is. Worship is part of spiritual warfare and helps you to overcome the enemy. Christian videos work in the same way. Take notes on what you learn. Help to feed the hunger you have for God.

Make an Effort

Make plans to become mature. Decide to take notes during sermons. Make an effort to screen your listening and viewing habits. Find a Bible

reading plan. Commit yourself to reading the Bible through in one year. You'll be amazed at the growth and the stability it will bring to your life.

Why people don't feed themselves. . .

- they are selfish, they want other people to wait on them.
- they are proud and think they know everything they need to know.
- they are picky eaters, they want it their own way, taking only what they like
- they pay more attention to the messenger than the message, finding fault with the preacher
- they are just plain lazy.

All these people are stunting their own growth.
What a waste of people with such a great potential!

Childhood IV

Talking



Learning How to Talk

We've all seen it, and we've all been amused. A young toddler will babble and act as though he knows full well what he is saying! We've all seen little children imitate their parents. Mom says, "Say, 'I love you.'" and the child repeats, "I wu-vooo." But at this point, the little one has no true comprehension of what he is saying. New Christians will come into the church and sing songs of worship. They see the words projected on the screen and they will sing them, but they may have no true comprehension of their true meaning. BUT, this is still a very important time of growth in the life of a new believer. It is a time to plant the Word of God into their hearts.

A young girl grew up in the church. She was in junior choir and then adult choir for many years. The choirs performed many songs containing lyrics straight out of the Bible. Lyrics such as, "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble." and "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near." and "Be still and know that I am God." The words meant nothing to her while she was young. But later, a tragedy occurred in her life, and all those words came back to her, to comfort and encourage her. She turned her life over to the Lord during this crisis, and she's been walking with Him ever since. So don't despise these early times of growth. Rejoice in them! Go ahead and repeat the encouraging words you receive from worship, from your Bible reading, from other believers. Enjoy this time of planting and become richly nourished by it.

We learn to talk by first *hearing*. We need to have something to imitate. If we don't hear, our ability to learn to speak will be severely handicapped. So put yourself in a position to hear the Word of God. Attend church, listen to the preaching. Put yourself in a position to worship God and learn about Him. Hang around with other Christians who are more mature than you are, so you can benefit from their wisdom. Read the Bible for

yourself, and plant the word in your heart. If you have a hard time understanding something, ask your pastor, or elder, or an older friend in Christ to help you.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from

_____ . . .

Luke 6:45

A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say

_____ from what is in your

_____.

You see, we need to store up good things in our heart. Then out of the "treasure" of what we have stored there, our mouth will speak those good things. We will become an encouragement to others because of the good things we have to say. There are so many benefits to living this way. We can actually become a source of refreshment for other people. And by doing so, we get refreshed ourselves.

Proverbs 11:25b

. . . those who refresh _____ will _____ be refreshed.

Even a child, or a very young Christian, is known by what he says and does. It doesn't matter how young you are in the Lord, you can still be used by Him to be an encouragement and a delight to other people. They will rejoice when they see your growth in God.

Proverbs 20:11

Even _____ are known by the way they act, whether their _____ is pure, and whether it is right.

Controlling our Speech

Our culture has become corrupt in the way people relate to one another. You see it everywhere, it's become admirable to "trash talk" another person. People love to tell "Yo mama" jokes, like "Yo mama so fat, she uses the driveway for an ironing board!" Snootier families practice the fine art of sarcasm until it's honed to razor sharpness - and they're very proud of their achievement!

Colossians 3:8-11

But now is the time to _____
_____ of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.
Don't lie . . .

Here again, the responsibility is upon you. It says, "get rid of . . .". When you think about filthy language, you need to realize it's not just swearing, it's also constant put-downs, and malicious gossip. It's garbage coming out of your mouth. It might be trashy jokes, garbage gossip, rubbishy rebellion, putrid put-downs, or scummy sarcasm. It's all filth and is not honoring to our God. This verse says to get rid of them"! It can't be more plain than that.

Lying is another filthy habit to get rid of. How does a person overcome the habit of telling lies? - By forming another habit - telling the truth. Decide today to be a truth teller. A young lady I know realized she had a bad habit of exaggerating (another form of lying). She started making a conscious effort to tell the truth. She'd stop right in the middle of telling a story and say, "Wait a minute, what I said just now wasn't quite true, let me say it again . . ." With practice, she overcame this bad habit, and it's no longer a problem in her life.

Ephesians 4:25

So stop telling lies. Let us
_____ our neighbors the
_____, for we are all parts
of the same body.

What's coming out of your mouth? Our words

should show we have substance.

Colossians 4:6

Let your conversation be _____
and attractive so that you will have the
_____ for everyone.

One of the things small children are famous for is blurting out words at inappropriate times. A little girl might scream out loud or say something funny in the middle of a church service. Everybody laughs and understands she's just a child - not old enough to know better. She might be loud, obnoxious, and repetitive, but it's acceptable because she's just a child.

Many Christians who have been around church for a long time are just like little children. They are loud and obnoxious. They say things that don't make any sense. They repeat themselves. At first, their funny statements or jokes might be clever, but after a while it's usually a demonstration that they just want to draw attention to themselves. It's the same way a child becomes obnoxious and shows her immaturity. It's a sign of insecurity.

Ephesians 5:4

Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are _____
_____. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.



Positive or Negative

James 3:5-6

In the same way, the _____ is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a _____ of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

Here, the Bible is telling us the direction of our life is set by our tongue. If you say positive things, you plant a positive seed, and positive things will come your way. Your tongue can be used to ruin people's lives and reputations or it can be used to be a blessing to people. You can't make excuses for it, the use of your tongue has a lot to do with your destiny.

Many of us can barely control our tongue in church, much less the rest of the week. We wonder why our life seems to be falling apart, why so many bad things seem to happen to us. There are people you just love to be around because they say things to inspire, encourage, lift, and exhort you. You can't wait to be around them because they make you feel like you can do anything. That's the kind of person you need to try to be. Mature believers don't wait for people to encourage them. They look for people to encourage.

Maybe you haven't realized how much power your tongue has in your life and the lives of those around you. You can set the pace for the day in a positive or a negative way. Try this some morning with your family. You'll be amazed. It's YOUR tongue, you can CHOOSE how to use it. A mature believer chooses to use his or her tongue to point people toward God, toward hope, toward doing what's right.

James 3:8

. . . but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and _____, full of deadly _____.

Your tongue is not your boss. You are the boss of your tongue. Decide ahead of time how you will treat gossip, no matter who it is about. Are you going to say, "I don't want to hear that." or are you going to repeat it to somebody else? That's what taming the tongue is all about - planning in advance what you're going to say and how you're going to respond so you don't accidentally get yourself in trouble or let your tongue run out of control.

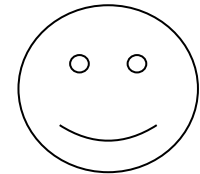
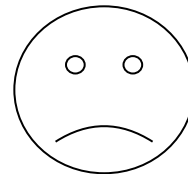
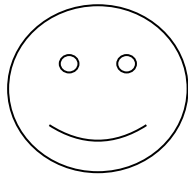
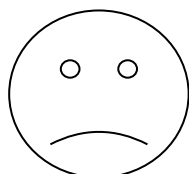
Proverbs 18:21

The tongue can bring _____ or _____; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

1 Peter 3:10

For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, _____ your tongue _____ speaking _____ and your lips from telling lies.

If you want a full life, a great life, then you must learn to control your tongue. If you keep your tongue from evil, you'll have a life worth living, and people will love to be around you. There will be joy and hope on your lips. You'll be an encouragement. Keeping evil from our lips is not something that happens by accident; it doesn't come naturally. You have to decide to do it, then make yourself do it. The more you practice, the better you will become!



Keep Your Tongue Pure

Keeping your tongue pure when others just don't seem to care is a sure sign that you are an exceptional Christian. You don't just accidentally say what you say. You decide, first, in your heart what you will allow yourself to say, just like Jesus did.

John 12:49

I don't speak on my own authority. The _____ who sent me has commanded me _____ to say and _____ to say it.

A certain man was loud and obnoxious. He talked too much. One day he decided to close his mouth and learn to listen to people. He decided to use his tongue carefully and say only what would be pleasing to God in public. This man grew very quickly. His testimony in the workplace became, "That guy never says anything bad about anybody." Do you realize how RARE this is? That is one GREAT testimony!

Another part of controlling your speech is becoming a good listener. If we're listening to what others are saying, we are actually making them feel important - as if to say, "What you say *matters* to me." If you notice it's always you who's doing the talking, check your heart to see if you're really considering others better than yourself.

James 1:19

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to _____, slow to _____ . . .

Philippians 2:3

Don't be _____; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of _____ as better than yourselves.

James 3:2

Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For _____ we could _____ our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every _____ way.

Here, the word "perfect" is the same Greek word meaning "mature." Usually when a person has a personal offense against someone, it's not because of something they *did*, it's about something they *said*. Our mouth always ends up getting in our way, and we end up offending people over and over again. This scripture seems to indicate that if we can control our tongue, we can control our entire body. Our tongue seems to be a major area of concern in the Kingdom of God. So as we're pressing on to maturity, one of the things we need to learn is how not to offend people with our mouths.

Proverbs 12:18

Some people make _____ remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

Proverbs 15:4

Gentle words are a tree of _____; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

You've all heard the nursery rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." That's not true! Words can cause wounds deep in the heart of a person. We, as the people of God, have a responsibility to be different. We can bring a tree of life or crush someone's spirit.

Proverbs 18:21

The tongue can _____ death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

Death and life - the choice is ours. Decide today that you will be a person who brings life.

Promises—to Vow or Not to Vow

Have you ever noticed that people usually make vows (promises) during two extreme times of their life? They do it at a time when they're very discouraged, or when they're very elated. For instance, a person might go to a crusade and perhaps he is touched emotionally – and may even begin to weep. The speaker calls people to the front to make a commitment to Christ, and he responds. He has had a great emotional experience. But it doesn't take long for that emotion to wear off. Most people who make an emotional commitment don't last because they haven't considered the cost of the commitment.

A man fell off his fishing boat in the freezing waters off the Alaska coast. The waves were dragging him out to sea instead of in toward the shore. He cried out to God, "God if you save me, I'll serve you for the rest of my life!" Suddenly a boat comes by and he is rescued. What is God expecting now? He's expecting this man to fulfill his vow. But as soon the man's feet hit the shore, he forgets the promise he made to God and lives his life as though nothing had happened. Sometimes we say words we don't mean. We make idle promises like, "I'll never be late again!" Then we're late for the very next meeting we go to. While this is a normal thing that happens, we need to guard against those kinds of idle promises.

Ecclesiastes 5:2-7

Don't make _____ promises, and don't be _____ in bringing matters before God. After all, God is in heaven, and you are here on earth. So let your words be few. . . . When you make a _____ to God, don't delay in following through, . . . It is better to say nothing than to make a promise and not _____ it. Don't let your mouth make you sin. . . .

Making a silly promise to God (or to anyone else) is called a "sacrifice of fools." Be careful not to

make emotional decisions or promises. Wait until you are in a stable emotional state. How many times do words fly out of our mouth and one second later we wish we could reel them back in again - but it's too late! Once it's out, it's out. Be careful with the words you speak.

In Judges 11, a man named Jephtha made a vow to the Lord, "If you give me victory over the Ammonites, I will give to the Lord whatever comes out of my house to meet me when I return in triumph. I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." Guess what walked out of the door to meet him when he returned home? His daughter. That was a pretty foolish vow, made during a stressful time of his life. He didn't control his emotions or his tongue.

James 5:13-14

Are any of you suffering hardships? You should _____. Are any of you happy? You should _____ praises. Are any of you sick? You should _____ for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, . . .

What are you supposed to do when you're in trouble? - - Pray! Don't make promises, just pray. What do you do when you're happy? Praise God! Don't make promises because you're happy. Wait until you're emotionally stable. In Acts 23:21, the apostle Paul was planting churches, many people were getting saved, and a lot of wonderful things were happening. A group of Jews were angry with Paul. In their emotional stress and anger, they made a vow, ". . . more than forty of them . . . have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. . ." These silly men promised not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. Paul slipped out of town and lived on, but what happened to these guys? Be very careful when you find yourself in one of these emotional situations. Guard the words that come out of your mouth - not just with vows only, but all your speech. Be sure to speak life, not death.

Young Men

Overcoming



Overcoming our Emotions

When a young child cries because someone screams at him or pretends to be a monster, we might hold him and think, "That's so cute - what a soft and tender heart he has." But if someone screams behind an eighteen-year-old and he breaks into tears, something is wrong! He is not yet adjusted emotionally. It's not cute anymore.

The emotional life is probably one of the slowest areas to develop as Christians. Outwardly, a person may feed themselves, dress themselves, and take themselves to the bathroom. They may appear to be well-adjusted, yet emotionally they are still developing. They cry at the drop of a hat, or become angry over trivial things. They may want their own way a lot, and have childish temper tantrums (outbursts of anger) if they do not get it.

Some people will look at their emotions and if they run high, they'll read their Bible, get close to God, and hang out with their Christian friends. But if their emotional tank is empty, they won't do any of those things.

If we start relying upon our emotions for our Christianity, then when our emotions are high our Christianity will be up. When we are emotionally down, our Christianity will be down. We should be stable in all our ways. That is, we walk on an even keel. We are not 'hype-oriented' Christians.

A mature Christian doesn't rely on emotions to determine his relationship with God. He evaluates himself in more mature ways, such as how he handles a crisis, or how he treats other people. He is concerned about feeding himself spiritually with the Word of God and spending time with the Lord in prayer and worship. He is concerned about how much he has grown in the past week, month, or year.

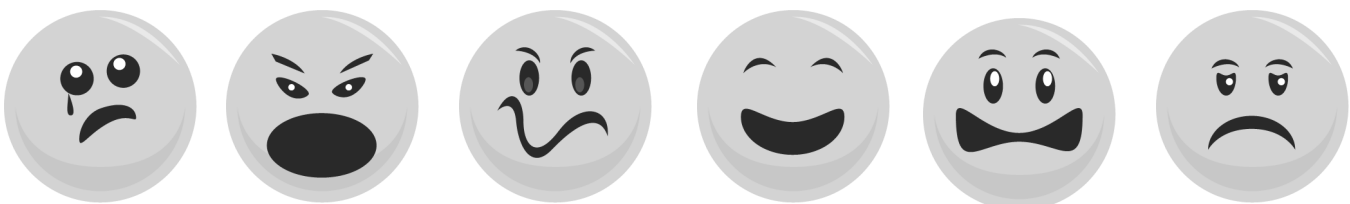
So much happens in our society to mess up people's emotions. There are physical, spiritual, and emotional abuses. There are those who have been beaten by their parents, who have been sexually abused, whose families have gone through a divorce, and whose parents have used words to make them feel like nothing their whole life.

Matthew 11:28-30

“. . . _____ to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me _____ you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Jesus said if you are weary or hurting or going through some rough times, you can **come** to Him. **Don't run from Him!** Don't let your weariness guide your life. Don't let all the bad things that have happened to you dictate how you live your life in the present or the future.

You start growing up emotionally and becoming mature when you deal with hurts from the past. The areas of your life that still hurt are those you haven't dealt with yet. Emotionally they are stunting your growth. If you have really been hurt by someone and that's all you can think about, it's keeping you from growing up. Take that part of your life and give it to the Lord. Ask Him to heal your broken heart and your wounded emotions. Seek to forgive those who have hurt you and to let go of the memories that are trying to devour your future.



Overcoming Sin

The hallmark of the young men stage is *overcoming*. In the natural, you might relate this to the teen years. Teens are faced with many temptations. They are growing up, going through hormonal changes, becoming adults, wanting independence so they can prove themselves. At each temptation, they face the decision which way to go - toward the self-indulgent pleasure of the moment, or toward doing what is right for a long term gain.

1 John 2:13-14

. . . I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have _____ your battle with the evil one. . . I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are _____. God's word lives in your hearts, and you have won your _____ with the evil one.

Notice what young men must do battle with - 'the evil one.' Yes, we have an enemy. This enemy is out to steal from us, kill us, and destroy us. He will do anything he can do to take our focus and our direction away from Christ. Satan is no dummy. He uses deceptions, signs and lying wonders, he tempts us to justify sin or to play with sin instead of getting rid of it. He calls sin by different names like *mistake*, *problem*, or *indiscretion* so it doesn't sound so bad. But sin is sin and we have to deal with it as sin.

John 10:10

The thief's purpose is to _____ and _____. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

You see, God didn't set up laws or rules to inhibit us. He set them up because he *made* us, he *knows* us, and he *cares* for us. He knows what will happen to us if we sin and he cares enough to warn

us. He wants us to have a rich and satisfying life, not a life focused on cleaning up the mess we make by sinning.

Everybody thinks a newborn baby is so cute. Even when he does a "doodle" in his diaper, they laugh affectionately and clean him up and travel on until the next time. Later on, this process of dirtying the diaper gets a little old, and it becomes a chore for the parents. Eventually, of course, they get to the potty-training stage, and even though the process is a struggle, the child learns how to control his/her own bowels. When a child is small, we may laugh and joke about this process. But if the child gets to be 4 or 5 - or older, and he isn't potty-trained, it's not funny anymore.

When a person first gives his life to the Lord, he's bound to struggle with old sinful patterns. But if he isn't 'potty trained' after 4 or 5 years, this is an indication of a serious problem. He is still struggling with the same sins, the same

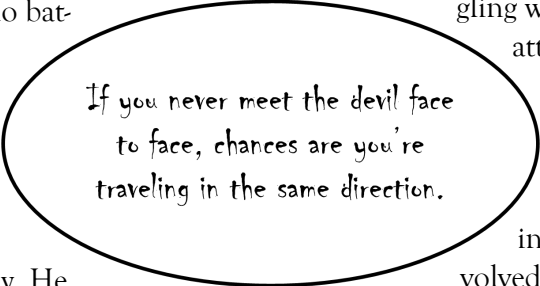
attitudes, the same habits. He still has bad attitudes, is unkind when he speaks about other people, he may be rebellious, or speaking lies, cheating, stealing, and becoming involved in immorality. He continues

to come to church and acts like all is well. But often, people can tell there is an unsavory aroma hovering around him. He might think, "I can't help it, that's just how I am." When you don't accept responsibility for your actions - that's a "cop-out"! When you blame others for your attitudes and actions - you cop out!

Proverbs 25:28

A person without self-control is like a city with _____ walls.

Growth and change is part of the Christian life. Accept it. Embrace it. If you're struggling with change - you know you're ALIVE! If you're not growing and changing, you're dead or dying.



If you never meet the devil face to face, chances are you're traveling in the same direction.

Overcoming Immorality

We have the power to evade sexual immorality. Here, too, our culture has become extremely corrupt. Everywhere we turn, on TV, in movies, books, and real life, we see the effects of this corruption. We justify it by saying, "Everybody else is doing it." It's like saying, "I don't smell so bad because everybody else stinks too!" But the stench is increasingly worse.

1 Thessalonians 4:3
God's will is for you to be holy, so _____ from all sexual sin.

Colossians 3:5
So put to _____ the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

Notice this last scripture says to "Put to death . . ." That's pretty strong language. It's immature to say, "I can't help it." There are certain things you can do to avoid immorality. You can stay away from compromising situations. You can refuse to think of members of the opposite sex in a sexual way.

Job 31:1
"I made a _____ with my eyes not to look with _____ at a young woman."

A covenant is a very strong contractual agreement. Job decided, firmly, that he would not look, think, or act in a lustful way. If you stop it ahead of time, at the eye level, you don't have to worry about your thoughts or actions.

Unfortunately, many Christians, especially young ones, compromise this area of their life. They try to justify it by saying, "Well, if you're in love, it's OK." "We're planning to get married anyway." etc. But the stark reality is, it's pure disobedience toward God. And disobeying God is SIN. How

do you expect to walk in sin and have God's blessing?

1 Corinthians 6:18
_____ from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.

When a person sins sexually, they are actually hurting themselves. They are sinning against themselves - AND their partner. It doesn't matter how they justify it. If they reason, "We're planning to get married anyway." and go ahead and sin, THINK - they are sinning against themselves AND their future spouse. They lay a foundation for their future marriage based on disobedience of God. Here's the bottom line - there is NO justification for disobeying God. It is never right to do what's wrong and it is never wrong to do what is right.

So how do we relate to the opposite sex?

1 Timothy 5:2
Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your _____.

This seems to be directed at males, but the same principle applies to females. Treat older men as you would your own father and younger men as you would treat your own brother.

How does this translate into modern culture? Ask yourself, "Would I hold hands with my own brother?" "Would I kiss and cuddle with my own sister?" Your reaction was probably, "That's gross!" If you're a single person, you treat members of the opposite sex as you would your brother or sister! Think! Don't allow yourself to be pulled into emotional or lustful situations.

Decide today that you will treat members of the opposite sex as your honored brother or sister.

Overcoming Vices

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18)

If you have been a Christian for a while and you are still using an artificial means of attaining "peace", you need to realize God is jealous over you. He wants to be your peace. Turning to other things is like turning to other gods.

Overindulgence in food, alcohol, drugs, and even cigarettes can dull your senses and inhibitions. This dullness makes you open to all kinds of temptations. God wants you to be sharp, not dull. How do we get sharp? Remember, God's word is sharp! It is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. It will make you sharp. It will make you strong.

Luke 10:19

Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the _____, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and _____ them. Nothing will injure you.

Don't cop-out by saying these vices are a 'problem' in your family. You have another family now. You're part of God's family. If you struggle with one or more of these things, get help, strive to be an overcomer. Don't use your natural family or your friends as an excuse to continue in bondage.

There are so many other vices we could discuss here. The Bible has answers for every one of them if you're willing to dig them out. The Spirit of God is working with you to "convict you of sin, righteousness, and judgment." (John 16:8)

Philippians 2:13

For God is working in you, giving you the _____ and the _____ to do what pleases him.

God, Himself, works in you both to desire (to decide) and to do (to act on) what is right, and to choose what is best for the long term, rather than settling for a temporary fix.

Jesus used scripture to fight off temptation. We need to find Scripture that deals with our specific sins, meditate on them, put them into practice, until we overcome that sin.

Romans 12:1-2

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by _____ the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Because of the influence of the world in general, we begin to pick up certain values, ideas, and desires that are contrary to God's plan. When you get saved, your mind needs to become renewed. As you read the Word of God, it's like taking a shower. It begins to wash your way of thinking. Before you know it, you find different values. Change is taking place inside of you. This mind-renewing process enables us to become an overcoming Christian.

Overcoming Complacency

Have you ever felt you'd be willing to do anything, go anywhere, do whatever it took - to be whatever God wanted you to be? For some reason, God singled you out from the billions of people on the earth - he wanted YOU for something. Have you taken hold of this truth yet? Do you know God's call on your life? If you want to become mature, you're going to have to seek for it forcefully, "Lord, why, exactly, did you put your hand on me?" It's so easy to become complacent. It takes a forceful commitment to find, know, and do God's will .

Colossians 4:12

. . . to make you _____ and perfect, fully _____ that you are following the whole will of God.

Why do we need to be strong and confident? Because we have an enemy who is against us. We also have our own flesh, our sinful nature that is at war against the purposes of God.

1 Corinthians 9:24

Don't you realize that in a race _____ runs, but _____ person gets the prize? So run to win!

The word "get" here means: *apprehend, attain, come upon, comprehend, find, obtain, perceive, overtake.* This implies some real strenuous effort on our part. Paul was a man who strenuously sought after the reason why God put His hand on his life. It's very easy to fall into the mentality that God's will for our life is two cats and a dog and a car in the garage, the house with the picket fence - and we see no further. As we get older, we get more settled into that mentality. God wants us to have our hearts always prepared to go when and where He calls us to go.

Romans 6:19

. . . I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this.

_____, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.

What Paul is saying here is - "The way you used to run after sinful things, you need to run after righteous things the same way!" If you find yourself becoming complacent and lackadaisical, reject that and put on the attitude, "I want to STRAIN TOWARD God!" That's the only way we will grow to maturity. It's so easy to allow spiritual laziness to come upon us. We continually need to shake ourselves. The older we get, the easier it becomes to settle back and relax - but we MUST STRAIN forward! Strain toward worship, prayer, evangelism, spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, etc.

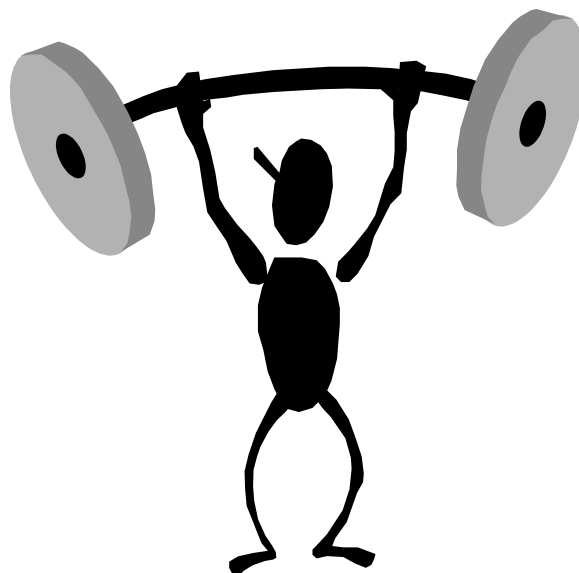
Luke 16:16

Until John the Baptist, the law of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is _____ to get in.

That's the kind of heart we need to adopt, that we are going to *force* ourselves into the principles and the character of God. We need to go out of our way - outside our comfort zone - beyond our own desires. We must embrace the Cross. There are things Jesus talked about in referring to the Cross. It has to do with dying to ourselves and following Him. He said we must "pick up our cross *daily.*" That means EVERY DAY, we must die to our own way and turn toward His way.

Young Men II

Gaining Strength



Becoming Responsible

God wants us to be responsible for our actions. The dictionary says when you are responsible, you are expected to account for something, you are answerable to somebody. You are able to distinguish right from wrong and to think and act rationally. God wants us to be people who are willing to give an account for what we are doing. we don't need to feel threatened or angry when others question our actions. If you did wrong and you're responsible, then confess. If you didn't do wrong, you can explain your actions so everybody can understand. You are accounting for what you've done - that's responsibility. Responsibility is clearly linked to thinking right. It's thinking about what's right and wrong, and acting rationally.

Proverbs 14:15

Only simpletons believe everything they're told! The prudent carefully _____ their steps.

A mature believer starts and plans his day in prayer, giving thought to his steps, deciding how to act, what attitudes he's going to have before he goes on with his day. He may not be able to foresee every situation, but he is a whole lot better prepared! Think about your day, what you're going to do, who you're going to see. Give thought ahead of time if you are going to see friends who always gossip. Think about what you will say and how will you handle yourself. If you're going to baseball practice and you know there will be people there who use foul language, what are you going to do? How will you act? Don't wait until you're in the

middle of it to see what happens. Most Christians live their life without thinking ahead, and that's why most Christians have things just "happen" to them. They come away disappointed in themselves because they didn't behave the way they thought they should.

Matthew 25:21

"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this _____ amount, so now I will give you many _____ responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

Who will ever know if you're not being responsible if no one ever sees what you're doing? If you steal a pen from work, who will know? God will know! God says if you act responsibly in the little things, you'll be trusted with greater things. you can look at bible examples over and over again of God promoting people. David served in the sheep pen. He obeyed his father, Jesse, by protecting and caring for the sheep. He did a great job there - when no one was looking. So God made him king.

Think about things you can be more faithful and responsible with. Things at home, at work, at school, in your church. you might have a little bit of responsibility, a little bit of freedom or opportunity. You may think it's a silly little thing, but if you're faithful in that, you'll win favor and more responsibility later.



Becoming Accountable

Another mark of maturity is to take responsibility for yourself when you know you've sinned.

Whether it's a big sin or a small offense, how long does it take for you to confess? How long does it take for you ask others for forgiveness? How long does it take for you to ask God to forgive you? A mature Christian doesn't try to hide a guilty conscience.

1 John 1:9

But if we _____ our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

God is ready to forgive, but He's looking for you to be responsible when you're wrong instead of pointing the finger at someone else and making excuses.

Proverbs 28:13

People who _____ their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy.

Many Christians start sinning against the Lord and other people, but they pretend they're not. They try to cover it up, thinking they can hide from God and others, and they wonder why their lives get so messed up. Things don't go well for them. There's no blessing on their lives. The point is, when you sin you won't prosper. God's blessing won't be on your life.

Proverbs 13:15

A person with good sense is respected; a treacherous person is headed for _____.

A mature Christian doesn't try to hide a guilty conscience. He is willing to admit his fault and

repent from it. If you resist the conviction of the Lord, pretty soon you can get a hard heart, and you won't even think you've done anything wrong. This is extremely dangerous.

We are talking about personal accountability. Others are not responsible for your spiritual growth. Will you fail to grow in the Lord if the pastor doesn't preach a great sermon? If so, you're still a baby Christian, as if you are saying, "I just can't help it, it's my mom's fault I'm not dressed today." When you sin, do you point the finger at others? Or maybe you think it's not really a sin, it's just a problem you have. You think, "It's not really my fault. If I didn't have this problem, then I wouldn't have sinned." Do not candy-coat sins by calling them problems. We blame our past, or our family history, "Because of what happened to me, I can't help it if I get mad or easily offended." When we blame others, we may think we are justified, but we're simply not taking responsibility for our actions.

People like this never get anywhere in life. They never get anywhere spiritually. They never grow. They don't have a happy, wholesome family. People can't trust them with things. Bad things happen to them, and they're the first to point fingers at other people. They'll lose their job and say their boss is mean. They'll get a bad grade and say it's their teacher's fault. Somebody else will get promoted, and they'll say the boss just favored somebody else more. Whatever happens, it's never their own responsibility.

We need to be the kind of people who show we are spiritually mature by being the first to evaluate ourselves. Before we look at anybody else, we ask, "What could I have done differently? How could I have behaved better? How could I have prevented this situation?" When a person takes responsibility, we can be sure he will do whatever he can to make things right.

Becoming Secure

Those who are immature are tossed back and forth; those who are mature are stable and secure.

Ephesians 4:14-15

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be

_____ and blown about by every _____ of new teaching.

We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

The immature get blown back and forth by a number of things. Sometimes it's temptation. They barely start to get strong, then get with the wrong crowd. Their roots aren't deep enough, so they get blown over. Sometimes they are blown by different doctrines. Somebody will start preaching about some specific aspect of the Bible and the immature person starts thinking it is the most important thing and his life gets out of balance. A mature person is somebody who has studied the word of God long enough to see through deceptions like that. He maintains wholeness and balance in his life no matter what. His theology is not freaked out and his roots are deep enough in the foundation of Jesus so he can be around the world and not get blown over.

You need to become the kind of person who has built up so much resilience that no matter what the world does against you, you can stand strong in your faith, no longer tossed around.

Mature Christians can sense when they are weak, or when they are getting into some kind of temptation or trouble they may not be able to handle alone. They are not too proud to seek help. They find a mature brother or sister to talk to, a pastor or an elder, some kind of counselor. Then they

listen to advice with an open heart and act upon it.

We don't want to be "leech" Christians. These are people who are always trying to get security through the attention of others. They rely on other people's strength to be strong. There is always some problem they need to tell you about, and it seems like there is never any victory in their lives. They are always trying to get the time and attention of a leader. Don't misunderstand, your leaders are there to lead you and to help you grow. You need to listen to them and take their advice. However, your leaders are not tireless, infallible, or all-wise. If we're going to leech on to anybody, we need to leech on to Jesus. He's got enough energy and spiritual nourishment for all of us.

It's time for us to grow up. The spiritually immature person is somebody who wants attention and tries to get answers from others, but won't spend any time in the Word, in prayer, or worshiping God. This person is not serious about God. He just wants attention. He's immature. He is more interested in taking up time than in really developing himself.

If a mature believer has a problem he needs help with, he'll get help and then he'll **do** something with the help he gets. These are the people who are having quiet times with God, taking notes, meditating on Scripture, but are still challenged with something. When they go and get help, they choose not to be a leech. They choose to learn. They apply what they learn to their own life.

James 1:22

But don't just listen to God's word. You must _____ what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

Becoming Fully Assured

A mature Christian **knows** what he believes and why he believes it. He has become fully assured. He doesn't just change his mind because his friends have a different opinion. He stands firm, because he's mature enough to know what he believes. He is a person of conviction.

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras . . . always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully _____ that you are following the whole will of God.

So many Christians go to church every week, but they're not confident. Do you really believe the Bible or not? Is it really true or not? They give mental assent or sort of believe it's the right way to go, but they are not fully assured. When Jesus died on the cross, he was fully assured His blood would pay the price for people so they could go to heaven. He was confident. He knew He was doing the right thing.

Mature Christians have convictions about certain things. They believe in the creator God and that His Son was the only Son of God. They believe Jesus came to redeem all mankind and they are totally free from sin and slavery to it. They won't feel the guilt of all the things they've done and then keep asking God to forgive them over and over again. No, they are fully assured. They are not cocky or arrogant, but they are confident that they have been forgiven. They know their God. They know God is with them. They can face a scary situation and have faith that God will protect them because they know what His Word says. They can pray for somebody who is sick and be confident in God because they know what His Word says - He is the healer.

Something happens when you are fully assured. A deep residing confidence sparkles in your eye knowing God isn't just a Sunday thing. There is a conviction that will live inside of you knowing that you know God, knowing your life is changed, knowing you have met with the Most High.



Becoming Selfless

Babies become the center of attention. Everyone "oohs" and "aahs" at the sight of a newborn. Everybody caters to the baby, feeds the baby, changes the baby, dresses the baby, and pampers the baby. Soon he learns he is the center of his own world. Everyone waits on this baby, and rightly so, because he can't do anything for himself yet.

But there comes a time when parents know they need to stop changing their child and train them to use bathroom facilities. The time comes when parents teach this child to grow up and take care of himself. Parents who indulge and cater to their child raise very self-centered children. Even after they become eight years old they're demanding, "Where is my food?" or "Why didn't you do that for me?" All of us have seen spoiled children and no one enjoys being around them. That behavior is inappropriate for someone who is growing up.

When you first gave your life to God, your thoughts were centered around, "How am **I** going to get blessed?" and "How Jesus saved **me**." You need to understand how much Jesus loves you, how he wants to fill you, feed you, and nurture you. You need to be around people who will constantly lift you and develop you as a man or woman of God. As you begin to grow up, it's time to stop being so self-centered. Everything shouldn't revolve around you, your comfort, your needs, etc. Maturity means, "I am not in the center."

1 Corinthians 13:11

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I _____ childish things.

Selfishness is a sign of immaturity, but *selflessness* is a sign of strength and growth.

Romans 12:10

Love each other with genuine _____, and take delight in honoring each other.



Philippians 2:3

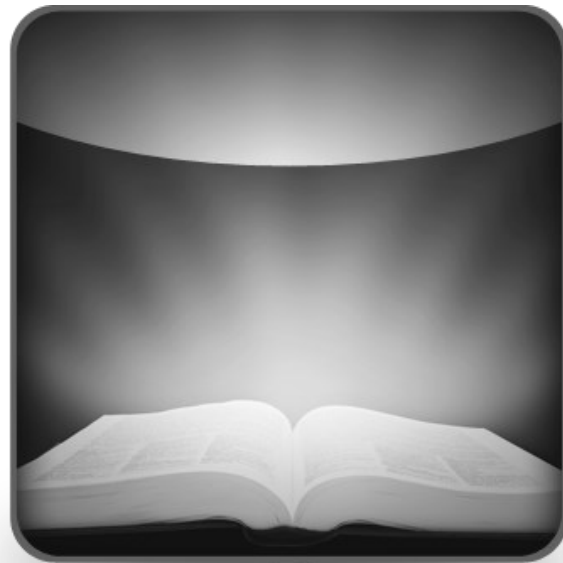
Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of _____ as better than yourselves.

Preferring others is part of what loving selflessly is about. It is a sign of a mature believer. It's not just thinking about your own needs but considering the needs of others. If it comes to a choice between your preference and theirs, prefer them. Let them choose. They may be more immature than you are. They need to know there's somebody out there who cares about them as an individual. Maybe you're dealing with a new believer or someone who's not even saved. Preferring them shows you are no longer self-centered, and that blows their mind because most of this world is self-centered.

Young Men III

The
Word

Living



Tasting the Word of God

Truth tastes good. When you're used to 'eating' truth from the Word of God and you taste something that is not truth - not good, right, and pure - you can taste it is bad. The deeper you get in God, the more clearly you can see right from wrong, and why good is good and why evil is evil. It will be easier for you to see black and white when there is so much difference from the world perspective in what is right and wrong. If you can't see right from wrong, then you will keep doing wrong things 'accidentally' - and you are responsible for that. You can bring destruction into your own life and not even realize it because you're not aware of what's good and what's evil.

In our society, so many wrong things are done that people don't think they are wrong anymore. Everything that was once black and white now looks gray. We get such a skewed concept of what is right and wrong. A woman on a TV show said to a man, "I've got morals! I only sleep with one man at a time."

A mature Christian digs into the word of God to understand the ways and heart of God.

Hebrews 5:14
Solid food is for those who are mature, who through _____ have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

A mature believer uses the Word of God to gain understanding, wisdom, and knowledge, so he can clearly discern good from evil. Sometimes you won't even know why you feel something is evil. It's just in your spirit, you sense it. You know it's wrong and you shouldn't be involved in it.

All maturity is tied to your knowledge and application of the Word of God. The way you related to the Word of God will limit you or help you to break through. You need to understand what your rights and privileges are in God.

1 Peter 1:23-25

For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living _____ of _____. As the Scriptures say, "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord remains forever." . . .

We have been born again through the living and enduring word of God. Somehow, the Word has gotten down into your heart and you started to believe it.

1 Peter 2:2

Like newborn babies, you must _____ pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment,

"Cry out" for it! Learn to be a person who craves and desires the Word of God. If you don't provide a newborn with nourishment quickly, they are going to let you KNOW it! A little baby will even be contented for a few hours, and then hunger comes over them and anything that gets into the vicinity of their mouth gets snapped at like a snapping turtle. If you don't get them a meal - you're going to HEAR about it from them.

One way of discerning if someone has been born again is that they are CRAVING the milk. They are studying and learning and they are excited. They get CDs, mp3 recordings or books, buying all kinds of Christian music and teaching. They can't get enough. Babies grow FAST - very fast. If you will crave the Bible, you will grow. But people somehow stop craving. They get too satisfied, they stop seeking, and they become complacent. Beware of complacency. It's a killer.

Applying the Word of God

Some people get itching ears, they're fascinated by knowledge, but they can't translate their knowledge into application. Learning about the deep truths of the life of Nebuchadnezzar won't help you get your marriage together or help you raise your children. Some people want to study Sargon the II, and the vials of the wrath of God from the book of Revelation. They wonder if Adam had a navel. Who cares??? While those things may be interesting, they are not really important. It's not important what you know - it's what you're applying in your life. In the process of growth, the babe wants to hear; others have to 'feed' him. The little child wants to learn. A young man should be able to apply what he learns because he has had lots of practice.

James 1:22

But don't just listen to God's word. You must _____ what it says. . .

James 1:25

But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you _____ what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

It's not so important what you have heard, it's what you've *done* with what you've heard. How would it be if you got up in the morning, looked in the mirror, and just walked away, out the door, to work? No, we need to use the toothbrush, the brush, the soap and water, before we leave the house. If you read something in the Bible you need to DO it. Until you've *applied* the word you've learned, you've looked at yourself in the mirror and gone on without brushing your hair.

The way you know a person has gone from being a baby to a little child is, they start walking. Even if it's a baby step. It's the action that starts you maturing. Do you know you can't learn how to drive a car by watching car videos? You have to get behind the wheel and turn the car on. You may not be perfect at first, but you'll never learn if you don't try doing it.

You'll never forgive if you don't try forgiving. That's being a DO-er. You can hear a message on forgiveness and walk away from it thinking, "What a nice message that was." but that doesn't mean you're actually going to do it!

1 John 2:5-6

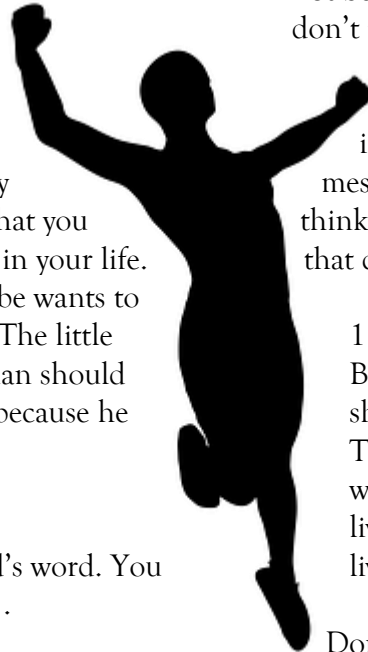
But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him.

That is _____ we _____ we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should _____ their lives as Jesus did.

Don't just **say**, "I like it." Instead say, "I'm going to **try** it." **Decide**, "I'm going to try it until my life changes, my personality changes, my character changes." When you are transformed from one who just hears to one who applies the word - that is a disciple - that is the Young Man stage.

1 John 2:13

I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to **you who are young** in the faith because you have _____ with the evil one.



Look Into the Mirror of God's Word

It is God's desire that you will see Christ formed in your lives. On this page are four principles of growth to press into.

2 Corinthians 3:18

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and _____ the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are _____ into his glorious image.

Look into the mirror of God's Word. When we read the Word of God, it changes us. It causes us to see ourselves in relation to God, or from the perspective of God. This process causes us to evaluate and make a decision to change to be more like God.

John 3:30

He must become _____ and greater, and I must become _____ and less.

He must increase, I must decrease. If we're going to grow, Christ's ways must increase in us and our own way must decrease. We need to "die" to ourselves - and we HATE to die! Either we're going to see the life of Jesus Christ revealed through us, or we're going to see the life of our SELF - *for* ourself.

Learn to cooperate with God and His Word.

Let's not put God in a box, thinking growth must be accomplished our way or within some system. Relax in your walk with the Lord, just cooperate with Him. Don't try to make a formula out of it. Sometimes growth is unrecognizable. It happens so slowly, we can't see it. When you haven't seen a certain family for a year and then see them again, you're amazed at the change in the children, but it didn't happen overnight. It happened gradually. A farmer plants and waters and the field grows, but he doesn't know how. (Mark 4:27) It's God who is working in you, bringing increase & growth. Just cooperate.

Stay in the environment of the grace of God.

Hebrews 12:28

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be _____ and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and _____.

Hebrews 13:9

So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Your strength comes from God's _____, not from _____ about food, which don't help those who follow them.

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to _____ godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God,

Romans 5:2

Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege _____ we now _____, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

Grace is not just a net that covers me so I don't have to *do* anything. The grace of God is working and active! We're saved by grace. We stand by grace. We're sustained by grace. We grow in grace. We're taught by grace. The more we get to know His Word, the more we get to know HIM. Think about how you got to know your other friends - you *talked* to them. You listened to their words and came to understand how they felt about things. You spent time with them. It's the same way when you're getting closer to God.

Prayer & The Word of God

The Mature Christian finds great joy spending time with God, both in reading His word and in prayer.

Mark 1:35

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to _____.

Probably one of the most profound signs of a mature believer can be found in what happens in his everyday devotional life. There are many people who read and pray intermittently. They pray whatever is on their emergency list, whatever is on their need list. They find themselves in deep prayer and intercession only when there is a crisis in their life. This is part of an average humdrum Christian life. A Mature Christian finds himself escaping to be with their Father, like Jesus did.

The most exciting part of reading and praying is just spending time with the Father getting to know Him better. A mature believer understands his time with God is where everything else comes from - his success, his wholeness, the blessings for the day, the wisdom for the day, etc. In fact, the center of his intimacy with Christ revolves around the time he meets with Him. He can't wait to get back to Jesus. He perceives his devotional time as meeting a long-lost love at the end of the day. He

runs into the arms of his Father and grabs hold of Him as tight as he can. He shares his heart with Him and listens carefully to hear God's heart.

The Father can't wait for this time with a mature believer because He has secrets He longs to share and He's waiting for somebody who's really listening and really cares about what He is saying. Jesus often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. . ." in his parables. He was saying, "You can sit here and listen to this, but the only people who are going to get it are the people who really want to listen, people who really have ears to hear." In other words, you might sit through this, but you might not get it because you really don't want to hear it. Mature believers don't habitually forget their quiet time. They would be dying. It would be like forgetting to drink water for a week or forgetting to breathe for a week. To a mature believer, it is unthinkable. Think about it, whenever you don't spend time in God's presence, in His Word, it's just like saying, "I don't need you, God."

Perseverance

1 John 8:31-32

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you _____ faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

The King James version of this verse says "If you **continue** in my word. . ." You don't give up! The secret is for you to get the Word of God and do it, and do it, and do it and do it, until it becomes a part of you, and it changes you. You become strong - you become an overcomer.

When your appetite increases for the word of God you know you're probably going through a growth spurt. Learn what you need to learn and then do it until you're strong.

Maturity is learning how to persevere in every area. Learning to persevere is the same as learning to overcome the desire to give up, or to quit. Mature Christians have already made the decision - I will follow Jesus no matter what anyone else does, or no matter what happens to me.

James 1:4

So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully _____, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

In the process of building maturity into your life, you add one thing to another to another. Finally after you have done it all, learned the self-control and all these other areas we've talked about, perseverance is what makes it last. You make a decision to keep persevering until it perfects and refines you and you become mature.

You persevere in resisting temptation. You might think you have resisted in a certain area for a long time. But if you give in to it, you'll have to start all

over again. You must understand that part of growing and becoming mature is continuing to persevere.

You persevere in faith. Is there something you've been praying for? Something you know is God's will, but you haven't seen it happen yet? Persevere - you know your God - you know His Word. He says He wants you to do this, so you persevere.

You persevere in prayer. When other people are playing, you are praying. Persevere in your quiet times. Persevere in memorizing Scripture. Persevere in longing after the deep things of God. Other people backslide. Other people fool around. Other people are partying and committing immoral acts. Other people have bad attitudes and don't seem to want to grow and change - but you are persevering. There is so much more of God you have never tasted yet, things you haven't yet discovered. How can you let go when you've tasted so little?

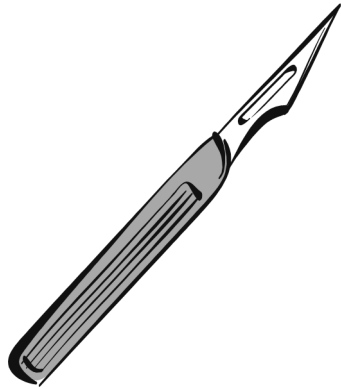
Philippians 3:12-16

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I _____ to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing:

_____ the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must _____ to the progress we have already made.

Young Men IV

Katargeo



Katargeo

Many people think as a person enters adulthood his childish behavior patterns gradually fall away and new adult patterns take their place. This is not necessarily so. Many people who have grown up chronologically are still emotional and spiritual children. Their age in life may be measured by the number of birthdays, but their quality of behavior shows their true stage in life - childhood.

The New Testament tells us we are to *katargeo* (kat-ar-geh'-o) childish behavior patterns and attitudes that keep us from maturity. This Greek word means 'to put away, to render inoperative, inactive, or powerless; to remove the meaning and significance from; to cause a person to be free from something that has been binding him.'

1 Corinthians 13:11

When I was a child, I _____
and _____ and rea-
soned as a child. But when I grew up, I
put away childish things.

“Put away” in this verse is translated from the Greek word, “*Katargeo*,” a very strong verb. We must put it into practice if we want to be victorious and grow up. This requires great effort and struggle. Childish things don't just fall off by themselves. We have to **put** them **away**, *katargeo* them.

Let's look at our lives and identify some of our immature actions and responses. We will suggest ways of breaking the grip of these childish behaviors so we can be “growing in every way more and more like Christ.” (Eph 4:15)

The past is something we all have to deal with. And nobody has the same past as anybody else — even if they grew up in the same family, their personal experience within that family is different than anyone else's. You may not remember all the details of your childhood, but the people and the

circumstances that surrounded you in your past can continue to influence you in the present. If you had a mother who suppressed her anger, becoming very sullen, you will have the tendency to be sullen, or moody too. And you may wonder why you're so depressed all the time! If your family dealt with anger by slamming their fists into walls, you will have a tendency to do the same thing. That is why things like child abuse and drunkenness tend to be passed down from generation to generation.

You may wonder why you are so timid, fearful, defeated, and self-despising - and no matter how much you want to, you just can't force yourself to make friends, or speak up when you have an opinion, or handle heavy responsibility. You may be allowing your past to keep you from attaining your potential. I'm sure you've heard people blame their past, their parents, their childhood, or any number of things for their negative behavior. Let's just deal with that issue right here and now. **There is no excuse for bad behavior.** When we behave badly, we must acknowledge it, ask forgiveness for it, repent of it, and grow out of it! That means we need to **change**. You can *katargeo* the power of your past, break it, render it inoperative! You can be free to grow up in Christ - in every way. It's His perfect love that will make you a victorious and fruit-bearing disciple.

It is in our homes where we feel most comfortable. The hardest place to live maturely is with close friends, family, and spouses. You've heard the phrase, “You always hurt the one you love.” That's only true because when we're in those comfortable relationships, we let down our guard and stop fighting the good fight in the war to *katargeo* our selfish, uncontrolled actions.

Honest Appraisal

If we look honestly at our behavior, we may realize that often we react to a situation because of something that happened to us in our past. This is not maturity. This is just a *reaction*. Maturity teaches us not to merely *react*, but to slow down our emotions long enough to honestly appraise each situation for a correct response.

James 1:19

. . . You must all be quick to _____, slow to speak, and slow to get _____.

Why do you think James wrote this verse? It's because people tend to become angry quickly. So anger is one area we need to evaluate to see if our behavior lines up with the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit will work in your life if you break down your pride and face yourself honestly. Plan to spend some time alone asking the Lord to show you the truth about yourself and how you relate to other people. If you see behavior in your life that keeps happening again and again, responses and habits that continually defeat you in your Christian walk, then you need to take an honest look at them - even if it hurts.

This is not an easy process. It's hard to look at yourself and admit you aren't in control of certain aspects of your character. It may be so painful that you need to go to a *faithful friend* who can help you to see yourself. Don't be afraid to face these things. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." The truth is sometimes painful. But if we never see the truth, we can't be set free. One woman was continually making remarks to her daughter like, "If you don't stop that, I'm going to break your arm." She was only kidding, of course. But one day, a friend heard her say that and lovingly remarked, "That's a terrible thing for a Christian mother to say." This joking pattern of speech had become such a habit in this woman's life that she

didn't even realize what she was saying. When her friend pointed it out to her, she was shocked into examining her behavior. She immediately chose to never speak in such a way again.

Proverbs 27:5-6

An open _____ is better than hidden love! _____ from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

A true friend will love you enough to be honest with you. Those kinds of 'wounds' are the kind that heal. It's like a surgical wound. It's intention is to get that bad thing out of you - so you can be healthy again. So don't despise constructive criticism. A mature person is able to hear things like that, accept the truth of it, make a decision to change, and go on without any feelings of anger or bitterness.

The Holy Spirit will also reveal things to you. He may speak to you in His still, small voice. One Sunday morning, a man berated his family because he couldn't find his comb. He was in a hurry to get ready for church, after all, and somebody had not only used his comb, but neglected to put it back where it belonged. He fussed and fumed for hours over his comb. While he was sitting in church listening to the message, the Holy Spirit spoke to him, "Don't you think you're being a little selfish?" The man was immediately convicted. After church, he went home and apologized to his family. That week, he made a point of going to the store and buying everyone in his family their own comb!

The Holy Spirit also uses the Word of God to reveal flaws in our character or to correct the direction we're heading in. It's truly amazing how God works with us, individually, to make us more like His Son, Jesus.

Katargeo the Past

First, let's understand that not everyone has a horrible past to overcome. Many people actually have wonderful childhoods. If you have had a great childhood, rejoice! - but don't take pride in it. Ever since sin came into the world, there have been 'dysfunctional' families. Every man and woman on the face of the earth is a sinner. When sinners marry one another, there are bound to be conflicts and dysfunctions. So in a sense, every family is a dysfunctional family - because of sin. The first family (Adam and Eve) would have been considered dysfunctional today. After all, Adam and Eve's son, Cain, murdered his own brother, Abel. Is *your* family *that* dysfunctional?

Psalm 19:12-13

How can I _____ all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these _____ faults. Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.

Anything that ever crossed your path lives in your memory, even though you may not be able to recall it at will. It is stored in your mind. This can be both wonderful and terrible, both the misery and the glory of being a human being. But it also means you can let the Holy Spirit reach down deep to cleanse your mind, getting into the very depths of your heart and inside the storehouse of your memories.

We all have busy lives. Time seems scarce. But if you feed ideas, thoughts, and words into your mind, your mind will work on them for you - even when you're busy. A pastor may plan to do a series of messages on a certain topic, let's say the topic is *Marriage*. He plans to do the series on four consecutive Sundays two months from now. So he has 8 weeks to prepare. He doesn't sit at his desk studying for 8 solid weeks. He goes about his regular life, but his mind is working on *marriage*. Every scripture he reads that pertains to marriage is rec-

ognized and stored. Every magazine article, television program, and audio recording he absorbs is filtered through the *marriage* topic. Then, when he does sit down at his desk to study, his mind has things stored up to bring out that will enhance his preaching. Do you see how the Holy Spirit can work in various ways through this process? When God wants to get something through to you, He knows just how to do it!

Many people live with unresolved, painful memories for years. As each year passes, the pain actually increases. If a person like that goes through an emotional crisis, or if he is weakened physically, those hurts he has tried to bury will be awakened. The emotions rise up and express themselves - deep depression, rage, lust, inferiority, loneliness, and rejection. Until a person can overcome these kinds of things, he cannot really mature. His body matures and his mind develops, but that one particular area is still frozen. He remains a little boy, locked in a childhood stage of life.

Psalm 90:2-4

Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end,
_____ God. . . . For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours.

The Lord is not restricted by time. He knows our past, present, and future. He understands the little child who so desperately wanted to be loved but never was, who sought understanding but found none. He can reassure that person with his unconditional, accepting love. He can forgive the guilty, shame-filled person, encouraging him and replacing the feelings of condemnation and filthiness with virtue and cleanness.

Katargeo More Recent Hurts

Many times, pain is more recent, part of our adult life. This is especially true of some of the traumas surrounding modern tragedies involving sex, violence, and the sense of betrayal in a divorce. The same principles apply and bring about release and healing. Our pain, after forgiveness, healing, and restoration take place, is actually used to bring comfort and healing to others. Our pain can end up being our greatest joy.

It is often helpful to write out a list of the areas in your life that need to be cleansed and healed - anything that rises to bother you. Memories can stir up extremely powerful emotions. Omit nothing, however insignificant, petty, or even foolish it may seem. Open your heart to the probing scalpel of the Holy Spirit. Don't be surprised at what comes to your mind. Don't be afraid. Relax in the Spirit. Thank Him for every new insight, however painful.

James 5:16

_____ your sins to each other and pray for _____ so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

While this process can take place when you are alone, it doesn't usually happen that way. It usually requires a deep openness and sharing with another person, and then prayer with that person. Find someone in whom you have confidence, one who knows how to pray. Confess to God every feeling, every emotion you experience as you go through these memories. Remember, Christ is alive. He is here now. Turn each painful experience over to Him. Let Him love, comfort, and forgive you. Let Him cleanse your hates and comfort your hurts and disinfect your lusts and remove your fears. Then specifically forgive others

their trespasses as He forgave you. Let Christ's love take the place of hate. Let Christ's strength take the place of hurt feelings and self-pity. Don't be in a hurry. Allow plenty of time for undisturbed, unhurried prayer.

Don't dictate to the Holy Spirit how long it should take to accomplish this work. It may take time, as He peels away a layer of hurt at a time (perhaps we wouldn't be able to endure all of it at once - let Him decide the timing, He knows best.) It may happen immediately in a great rush of victory. It may take weeks or months. But God desires you to be healed, to be set free from the things that keep you bound up. So keep on seeking Him.

Romans 8:1-2

So now there is _____ condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit _____ you from the power of sin that leads to death.

Romans 8:31-34

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is _____ us, who can ever be _____ us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Jealousy & Quarreling

1 Corinthians 3:2-3

I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. . . . You are

_____ of one another and _____ with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

Jealousy and quarreling are signs of immaturity and selfishness. Jealousy is the desire to have something for yourself, not wanting anyone else to have it. This happens because you think you're more important or worthy than the other person. Quarreling is an indication that you care only about your own opinion, your own perspective. You know you're right and anyone who disagrees with you is wrong.

A mature, selfless believer rejoices when others have something better than theirs. You're happy when others are blessed – instead of being envi-

ous or jealous. You are genuinely joyful and willing to listen when others have something to say that's different from your point of view.

Many people feel they have to be right all the time – and they're ready to argue to prove their point. But a mature believer, who really wants other people to be blessed, doesn't get jealous of other people's "stuff" – or their way of thinking. It doesn't matter to him if he's right or wrong. What's more important is having peace with God and one another, and lifting God up in every situation.

Romans 12:18

Do all that _____ can to live in _____ with everyone.

In the New International Version of the Bible, this verse reads like this: "If it is possible, **as far as it depends on you**, live at peace with everyone." That means we are to take responsibility for our attitudes and actions toward others.



Young Men V

Emotions



Guard Your Heart

Proverbs 4:23

_____ your heart above all else,
for it determines the _____ of
your life.

Romantic Relationships. If you are married, you may not have to battle with this as much as a single person - although many married people still have a struggle because they have not learned to be content with their mate.

A mature believer is not sucked into new romantic flames. Part of growing up is having all kinds of wild emotions. A mature believer can see past all of that. It might look fun, cool, and wonderful to develop a new romantic relationship, but getting involved in a partnership that's not a solid, mature, wholesome, godly romance can be letting your heart get infected by another person's heart who isn't very close to the Lord. And if you are married - this isn't even an option for you. Married people need to build and develop a solid, mature, wholesome, godly romance with their own spouse. No relationship is worth getting out of God's will or taking yourself out from God's covering.

A godly person will only be impressed by godliness and fervor for God. They will not be impressed with muscles, money, cars, or popularity. A mature single person will have the perspective, "If I want a godly spouse, I must concentrate on *being* a godly single person." A mature married person believes, "If I want a godly mate, I must concentrate on *being* a godly mate." The focus is always on your relationship with God, and your obedience to Him, your desire to be pleasing to Him. It's the "not my will, but your will be done" attitude toward God. God richly rewards this kind of heart, and it's worth any wait to obtain that rich reward. Be assured deep within your soul. God loves you, He wants what's best for your life. His plan is to do you good, not to harm you. His word says "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." That includes a good, godly romantic relationship. You must trust

Him with this vital part of your life.

False Teachers. There are many warnings in the Bible about false teachers. Some teach unscriptural things out of ignorance. Others are very intentional and deceitful in their purpose. Still others may disagree with the truth because it doesn't 'suit' them or their chosen lifestyle. These people attract others who would rather agree with them than follow the truth of God. We must be aware of these things.

1 Timothy 1:7

They want to be known as teachers of the law of Moses, but they _____
_____ what they are talking
about, even though they speak so confidently.

2 Peter 2:1

But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be _____
_____ among
you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves.

2 Timothy 4:3

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will _____
their _____
and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.

As we have stated before, the most important thing we can do to avoid being enticed by false teaching is to read and learn the truth for ourselves. Then when we hear unscriptural teaching, there will be a check in our heart, and we'll look it up for ourselves to see whether or not it is correct. (Acts 17:11)

Emotional Moments

Mature Christians see through the emotion of the moment. Perhaps you attend a big meeting at some stadium - and there are thousands of people there. There is a great plea to recommit your life, but you're already as committed as you know how to be. There is no sin in your life. Yet something compels you to go down there. What is that? It could be the Spirit of God, or it could be your emotions getting stirred up. Think it through. An emotionally mature Christian will see through the emotionalism of an altar call and see what God is wanting him to do with the decision the preacher wants him to make.

Ephesians 5:10
Carefully _____
what pleases the Lord.

People go to big events, such as Christian concerts. They get excited, jumping, screaming, and singing along with the group on the stage. Then someone comes out to preach. At the altar call, 6,000 people rush forward. Something isn't right. Some of the fault of emotionalism lies with the preachers. They play the music just right and get their lights just right, but don't really care about what they are asking. They just want an emotional moment. They want to see people respond. They want to see people get down there and cry. It's sad to say, but it's true. Mature believers see through all of this.

Think it through. It's not necessarily wrong to have emotional moments. God gave us our emotions for a purpose. But don't just go up to have an emotional moment with your friends, or to cry just because everybody else is crying. Consider carefully whether the Spirit of God is really speaking to you. If God is really doing something in your life - then go for it! But don't let yourself be dragged into a mere emotional moment.

We also must realize how much our emotions affect us when we are being tempted to sin. Our emotions can weaken our resolve. In Genesis 25, we read about Esau. In *one* moment of weakness –

for *one* meal he sacrificed his future! We must be aware the Satan will play on every weakness to entice us to sin. **One** sin *could* have long term affects. Consider your own life. Have you ever slipped back into one of your old, comfortable sinful behavior patterns? Think about the possible reasons. Were you weary, angry, or hurt? During times of emotional stress you are more vulnerable than at other times. You might think, "I deserve to indulge myself," or, "I'll just give in this one time – it won't hurt anything."

Emotions can be helpful or dangerous, depending upon whether or not you keep them under control. If there is a fire in your home, the healthy emotion of fear causes you to get out! However, if you don't *control* your fear, it could confuse and paralyze you, and you'd be unable to move. Let's consider a different emotion – love. This is a God given, healthy emotion. A man may feel love toward a woman. This love may encourage him to accomplish any feat to see her protected and secure. But if it is out of control, that same emotion could cause him to hurt her through lust, jealousy, and obsession.

Proverbs 25:28
A person without self-control is like a city with _____ walls.

The emotion of anger can also be good or bad. We may be angry about unborn babies being aborted. This righteous anger can cause us to get involved in an organization fighting against abortion. Unrighteous anger may lead us to bomb an abortion clinic.

Proverbs 29:11
Fools _____ their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.

James 1:20
Human anger _____
_____ produce the righteousness
God desires.

No Wimps

Mature Christian are not wimps! Jesus told us in John 16:33, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." So let's be very clear. We are all going to have hard times. The book of James indicates that a man who never offends anyone by what he says is a *perfect* man! We must understand we are all going to offend others and be offended by others. People are not always going to live up to our expectations. We need to learn to walk in forgiveness. When we have expectations of others, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment.

What we can "expect" from people is that they will behave just as the Bible describes. When we realize "The heart of man is fully set to do evil", and "there is no one that does good, no, not one", we don't expect people to behave perfectly - and won't be disappointed when they behave badly. As a matter of fact, we'll be totally blessed when they behave righteously, unselfishly, kindly.

Dick Benjamin once said, "Christians need to have the hide of a rhinoceros and the heart of a marshmallow." What he meant is that we need to learn not to be so easily offended. Mature believers don't let trivial things turn them into a quivering mass of tears. They control themselves and do not allow themselves to react with anger. They have learned to let the insensitive words of others just bounce right off their thick rhinoceros skin, and let their marshmallow heart respond in compassion to the offensive person. And if some of these hurtful things do pierce their thick skin, they go and deal with the offense quickly, properly, and in a compassionate way. They might say, "Hey, what you said really hurt my feelings. Are you OK? Have I made you angry? Is there anything I can do?"

Proverbs 24:10

If you fail under pressure, your strength is too _____.

If you allow yourself to be stumbled by a mere offense, what will you do when true persecution

comes? How can you possibly be ready for something as huge as suffering for your faith if you can't even stand to have your feelings hurt? Decide right now to toughen up! Decide to get over things. Decide not to let things like that stop you in your tracks.

Everything was going wrong while David was off attacking other cities. People came in and attacked his city, taking everything away - including his wives, and children. When David's army came back, at first they were sad and cried. Then they got mad at David. They wanted to stone him. These were the same guys he had discipled, guys he had ministered to and cared for. They were his buddies, his pals. They had been winning wars together all around the region, and now they wanted to stone him, to kill him. He was at the end of his rope, backed into a corner. He didn't have anybody to turn to.

1 Samuel 30:1-6

. . . David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found _____ in the LORD his God.

There are going to be times in your life when you don't have anybody to turn to. People who were your best friends, even your best Christian friends, may turn against you or away from you. People you thought were on your side now want to persecute you or talk about you. You have to decide what you're going to do. If you are emotionally immature, you may just let it overtake you. David went to the Lord, and he found strength. Another translation says, *he encouraged himself*. There will be times when you are going to have to encourage yourself. You'll have to grab the Word of God and get alone with Him. Meditate on His Word, put it down into your heart, and allow God to strengthen you.

Mature Fire

We can't be emotionally crippled Christians, or we will fall to pieces. We have to be men and women who will stand up and do what is right - even when it's hard. Even when we're hurting, we must be the ones who are willing to stand. Even when we feel like we're all alone, and even our Christian friends have let us down, we need to get tight with God. If you can't find encouragement from anyone else, you have to encourage yourself. When you start developing that kind of Christianity, you've just grown into a whole other level. You've just separated the men from the boys. You've just decided that you refuse to be a wimpy, thumb-sucking baby Christian. You're growing up to become all God has called you to be as a man or woman of God.

Deuteronomy 4:24
The LORD your God is a devouring
_____ ; he is a jealous God.

The Bible says God is a fire. He doesn't just have *some* fire, His very Presence *is* fire. He showed Himself this way to Moses in the burning bush. Fire throughout the Bible, symbolizes God.

Luke 12:49
I have come to set the world on
_____, and I wish it were already burning!

Jesus didn't come to bring rules and regulations. He didn't come to bring rituals. He didn't come so you could have a nice little Bible Club. He didn't come so you can sit back and just enjoy your life. He came to bring the fire of His Father's Presence. Many people have gone to church for a lifetime, but they have no fire. With their words, they say they love the Lord with all their hearts. But they seem to just go through the motions, like a drudgery they're forced to put themselves through, rather than an explosive fire that has set their heart free.

Matthew 15:8-9
These people honor me with their lips, but their _____ are _____ from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.

2 Timothy 3:5
They will _____ religious, but they will _____ the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

God wants to burn parts of our lives that have not remained in Christ - attitudes, habits, and sin. He wants to consume those things. He wants us to cut off those dead branches.

John 15:1-6
“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He _____ every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. . .”

How do you cut a branch off? You repent. You make a decision to ask God to forgive you and to cut that part of your life off. Don't allow yourself to be a slave to that sin anymore.

Mark 12:30
And you must love the LORD your God with _____ your heart, _____ your soul, _____ your mind, and all your strength.

Those aren't just some superficial, boring words. It's really what God wants, the kind of love He wants - the very core of who you are.

Psalms 42:1
As the deer longs for streams of _____, so I _____ for you, O God.

Loving Others

God is looking for people who will give themselves away. He may call some of us to step outside our own culture to go to other nations. We may have to leave our comfort zone, give up our bed for a harder bed. Take your whole summer to go on a mission trip instead of a nice fancy vacation.

It might not seem of any benefit to you to give yourself away, but other people will gain eternal salvation. And God will bless you, ultimately you *will* benefit.

Mark 10:28-30

Then Peter began to speak up. "We've given up _____ to follow you," he said. "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now . . . And in the world to come that person will have eternal life.

When you start giving up your own comfort, you are going to be blessed abundantly. He's looking for people to do what seems like the least logical thing - to give up everything - because those are the people He knows He can trust with everything.

Luke 10:14

The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. These were his instructions to them: "The _____ is great, but the _____ are few. . .

Jesus was sending His disciples out on a short-term mission trip!

Jeremiah 1:5-7

"I knew you before I _____ you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and _____ you as my prophet to the nations. . . "

God is speaking here to Jeremiah, but this truth also applies to us. He formed us in our mother's womb. He *knew* us before we were born, and He appointed us for a specific *purpose* in His kingdom. He knew whether or not we'd accept His Son as our Lord and Savior. He knew whether or not we'd choose to obey His Word. He knew whether or not we'd go on to maturity.

Acts 13:36

This is not a reference to David, for after David had done the _____ of _____ in his own _____, . . .

David served the purpose of God for his own generation. Let that become the cry of your heart, "O God, I want to serve Your purpose in my generation. Don't let me miss it!" God will honor this kind of prayer, because it is the kind of prayer that shows your willingness to submit yourself to the will of God, and deny your own will for a higher purpose - the purpose of God on the earth.

Young Men VI

Beyond Yourself



Beyond Your Comfort Zone

Romans 13:8

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your _____ to _____ one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law.

Our maturity is shown when we are more concerned about loving other people than being loved by them. We owe other people love, whether we know them or not, whether we like them or not, whether we agree with them or not. Why? Because Jesus gave love to you first. He has put His love inside your heart.

It's time to pay up. Somebody who's growing as a mature believer understands he owes the world love. He doesn't seek to be served, he seeks to serve. He doesn't seek to receive, he seeks to give. In fact, he *lives* to give. He wants to give his life, his heart, his energy, his strength, and his love away to other people. The opposite of being "me" centered is being "others" centered. It's showing that "I" don't have to be first in everything. In fact, you notice yourself very little because you are putting so much attention on others.

Matthew 9:36

When he saw the crowds, he had _____ on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus saw these people through God's eyes. Even though they were mean to Him, and didn't understand Him, didn't obey Him, and didn't believe in Him. He still had compassion upon them.

When you see people the way God does, you will be moved with compassion. You will do whatever you have to do to reach them. Jesus poured out His life. When you love somebody with God's love, you'll go to the cross for him, just like Jesus did. You'll be very selfless and give yourself away to reach them.

Most people today see other people just as if they are looking at animals. Many people value animals more than they value people. We have organizations to protect spotted owls, eagles, and dolphins, but we allow the abortion of innocent babies. When Jesus looks at the world, He sees people who were created in the image of God.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being _____ for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

As mature believers, we don't just care about what we want, we care about what God wants. God wants people's hearts and souls. God wants them to be with Him for eternity.

The epitome of selflessness is caring for people's souls, caring for where they are going to end up eternally. You reach out, not because you feel obligated, but because your heart is so full of compassion that you can't stand the thought of them not going to heaven.

Love My Enemies?

Loving your enemy is an unnatural thing for most people. You'll find it is the love of God within you giving you the ability to do something you'd never be able to do in the natural. Sometimes Christians walk in the attitude of revenge instead of learning to love our enemy. You'll find as you grow and mature in God that you can make a decision to love your enemies. That's a sign of maturity. You're growing up. You're no longer a baby, holding on to the carnal pursuits of "getting back", and "who do they think they are - hurting me?!"

Matthew 5:43-44

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, _____ your _____! Pray for those who persecute you . . ."

What is an enemy? It is a person who is in direct opposition against you. They think you are detestable. They want to stop you, to put an end to what you're doing.

Luke 6:27-28

"But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. _____ those who _____ you. _____ for those who _____ you. . ."

When someone 'curses' us, our first tendency in the natural is to curse them right back! The Bible says to speak evil of no one. It's a sign of maturity to speak well of those that curse you. In the King James version, Luke 6:27 says "Pray for them which despitefully use you." We live in a world that says, "No one has the right to use you. If people use you, go against them." The Bible says, "Pray for them."

We are to be like "chips off the old block" – to respond as Jesus would respond. Always asking ourselves, "What would Jesus Do?" If we were God, we'd put sunshine on the Christian's hous-

es! If the Christian's needed rain on their garden, we'd send them some. But God sends His rain and His sun on the just and on the unjust. He wants us to be the same way. Loving your enemy shows you are really a child of God. If you don't do this, you're no different than a "publican". We need to step across the line from natural love to **supernatural** love. How is this possible? Because the Spirit of God lives inside of us. He is the One who enables us to do these things. This is letting the life of Christ be manifested in us.

Luke 7:47

"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has _____ me _____ love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

Why are we able to love much? Because we've been forgiven much. We must extend the same forgiveness to others. We sing the song, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a **wretch** like me." We're never going to see our own need for forgiveness of sins unless we see ourselves as a miserable wretch, a person who desperately needs the Lord - even if you were a 'goody two-shoes' type of person before becoming a Christian. But if you don't see yourself before God as a despicable, lost person, you'll never be humble enough to extend love to another lost person. We ALL deserve to be punished for our sins. But Jesus forgave us. If you can walk in that mentality, you'll love much.

Romans 5:5

And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has _____ us the Holy Spirit to _____ our hearts with his love.

The love of God has been poured out freely to us. He wants us to be like Him. To love those who hate us. This is not an impossible thing with God.

Supernatural Love

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.

Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

(Ephesians 3:16-19)

God wants our 'inner being' to be strengthened. That's the spiritual part of you.

Do you realize when you bring a brand-new baby home from the hospital - they don't love you? That's the truth. It's nice to think they do, but they don't. All they care about is themselves. They are selfish individual people. When they are hungry, they scream. They don't know or care that you're trying to sleep in the middle of the night. They don't know or care about your discomfort. All they want is to be taken care of. That child begins to grow up and you tell them, "You love mommy, don't you?" The child repeats, "I love mommy" Dad says, "Say, 'I love Dada'" Child mimics, "I love Dada." Still, that child does not love you. They repeat the words, but they have no comprehension. They feel security. They know you love them, because you're the one who meets their need, but they're really incapable of loving. As they grow, they find out they *can* love - "I love my toys." "No one can have my toys." But they're

learning, and before you know it they become young adults with the capacity to love, able to sacrifice, growing with somebody else. So you see, **as we mature, love increases.**

Someday, someone may come into your life and curse you. That is an opportunity for you to practice returning good for evil. Practice blessing that person.

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, "Father, _____ them, for they don't know what they are doing." . . .

Jesus never sinned. He was totally innocent. He was cursed, He was spitefully used. They were His enemy. They hated Him. What did He do? He forgave them and asked His Father to forgive them.

As Stephen was being stoned to death by people who hated him, he said, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Joseph forgave his brothers after they had beaten him up, thrown him into a pit, and sold him into slavery. He suffered for many years because of what his brothers had done. But when he met with them again he forgave them, saying, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." He did good to those who abused him. He spoke kindly to those who had cursed them.

No Turning Back

None of us have “attained” it all yet. None of us are perfectly mature. BUT - whatever we *have* attained must *stay* there! We don’t want to lose ground or turn back. We want to go ahead.

Philippians 3:16-17

But we must hold on to the _____ we have _____ made. Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and _____ from those who follow our example.

Make sure your examples are walking in this kind of mentality. Don’t follow a bad example - look for good examples to follow.

Philippians 3:18-19

For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose _____ shows they are really _____ of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth.

Now these guys are NOT examples you want to follow. These kind of people cannot die to themselves. They live as enemies of Christ. Their mind is on earthly things - embracing worldly things.

Paul was a man who embraced the Cross. We need men and women in the body of Christ today who will embrace the Cross. When you begin to embrace the Cross on a consistent basis, all those bad things you would like to hang on to start to be eliminated.

Matthew 10:38

If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not _____ of being mine.

What does it mean to ‘embrace the cross’ - or to ‘take up the cross?’ The cross was an instrument of death. It was actually used to put many people to death, but it has become the symbol for Christ’s death. So embracing the cross means dying to our own way of thinking and acting. It means picking up a new way of thinking and acting - the way of Christ. If we don’t learn to take up the Cross, dying to ourselves, we are not worthy of Jesus. He is looking for people who are really committed to Him. Those are the kind of people He can use.

Luke 14:27

And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you _____ be my disciple.

A disciple is one who learns to be like his master. If you don’t carry your cross, you can’t be a disciple.

Galatians 6:14

As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my _____ in this world has been _____, and the world’s interest in me has also died.

When you embrace the Cross, it makes a wide separation in your life between you and the world. Unless you can make that clean break, that wide distinction, you’ll find yourself being hindered from pursuing God with all your heart.

We can become comfortable, secure. or complacent in the state we’re in right now - where we live, the position we hold, the home we live in, the car we have. We could all take it easy. But we need to ask God, “What is Your will for my life?” To do this, we must embrace the cross. The world must be crucified to me, and I to the world.

Ready to Do God's Will

What if God spoke to you right now and said, "Son, rise up and go to Zimbabwe."? What would you do? Are you ready to do God's will, whatever the cost, whatever he asks?

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. ."
." (Philippians 3:3-6)

Paul was one who had a lot of "credentials". He had great zeal, such great fire for the Lord, that he was out to kill this new Christian sect because he thought they were perverting the work of God. When God revealed the truth to him, his zeal turned and he became a Christian himself. He was a man who kept the law.

Then Paul went on to say, "I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith." (Philippians 3:7-9)

But the cry of his heart became: "I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him

from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me." (Philippians 3:10-12)

This word "perfect" in the Greek means "mature." He's saying, "I'm not yet mature, but I am striving to become mature."

Then Paul continues, "No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you." (Philippians 3:13-15)

He's saying if you desire to be mature, you must agree with what he's writing about here. If you disagree at this point in time, God will at some time make it clear to you. This is an act of your own will. It's up to you to adopt His mentality. The word *adopt* implies this way of thinking is not yours, but you adopt it, and it becomes yours and you are responsible for it. God is working in us, leading us to adopt HIS mentalities!

Colossians 3:2

Think about the things of _____,
not the things of earth.

It's a process to learn how to love God. It's a process to learn how to love His people. It's a process to learn how to love those in the world. So what kind of mentality should we be adopting if we want to move on to maturity?

Fathers

The Heart



Who is a Spiritual Father?

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I . . . had to talk as though you were _____ in the Christian life. . . for you are _____ controlled by your sinful nature. . .

What we all need to do is to progress from the point of being worldly to being spiritual. Worldly is the infancy stage. Spiritual is the father stage, or the leadership stage, the highest level of spiritual maturity. When you get to the point when you are putting away childish things such as jealousy, quarreling, etc. and you get committed to the Lord, you are ready to move up into what Paul calls 'spiritual'.

1 Corinthians 3:9-10

For we are both God's _____. And you are God's field. You are God's building. Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very _____.

We are laborers together with God. We are sowing in God's field and building God's building. We need to have our foundation laid properly in our infancy and childhood, continue to build properly throughout our 'young men' stage. When you start taking on other, younger believers to help them in their spiritual growth process, you become a 'father'.

1 Corinthians 4:14-15

. . . even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual _____. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you.

There are natural fathers and there are spiritual fathers. The very next verse is one of the most important keys to growing in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:16

So I _____ you to _____ me.

All children have a tendency to imitate their natural fathers. There's a great scene in the film, "Jaws" where a father and his little boy are sitting at a table. At first, the father is not paying any attention to his son. The son begins to copy everything his father is doing, taking a drink from his glass, smoothing back his hair, etc. Then the father notices, and he begins to do things for his son to copy. He leans back in his chair, the son leans back in his chair. The father makes a "monster" face, and the son copies that, too! No one who has watched this scene could keep from smiling.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. . .

1 John 2:13a

I am writing to you who are _____ in the faith because you _____ Christ, who existed from the beginning.

If you want to grow up in the Lord, get to know Him well. Then the best thing you can do is to father a spiritual son. When you father a child spiritually, they look to you for guidance. They will follow what you're doing. It is not enough to teach them what you know. It is more important to display the *relationship* you have with the Lord so you can introduce them to Him and help them to know Him better.

Some fathers will tell their sons, "Do as I say, not as I do." They will try to get their sons *not* to follow in their footsteps. That is one of the most ridiculous statements you could ever say to anyone. It's a natural thing for a child to admire his father. If the father smokes, that child will someday find a cigarette and try it. Some may end up rejecting the habit - but he will at least try it.

Fathers Have Their Life in Order

Children pick up their parents values, personality, reactions, priorities, decisions - everything they do!

Children are *studying* their parents. The same is true in the spiritual realm. When a person looks at you as their spiritual father/mother, they think you are the greatest Christian to ever walk the face of the earth. They don't know any better yet! They think you know every book of the Bible by heart. They think your life is in order.

Having children actually forces people to get their life in order. Many times, young people are out there flaking off, bouncing off walls like Ricochet Rabbit – up, down, in, out, around. If you've ever seen young fathers - standing at the glass at the hospital, looking down at the little cribs where their newborn child lays - you can imagine what is on their mind at that moment. "I've got to get my act together!" "I've gotta go out and get a job!" "I've got to get a house!"

You can't just give birth and leave that child. They need YOU to help them grow, to mentor them. Have you ever caught a fish and it came out of the water all cleaned and de-scaled, ready to jump in the pan? NO, you caught him and you had to clean him. You are going to have to spend time with young Christians. This is what spiritual fathering is all about. In essence, Paul said, "You've got a lot of teachers, but you don't have a lot of people who have fathered you. I have sent Timothy, who is my beloved son." Timothy was not his natural son, he was a spiritual son.

There is nothing more fulfilling than bearing spiritual children. When you see a person really take hold of God and get their life straightened around and begin to grow and mature and get a vision for ministry - that's FRUIT! And you know you had a part in it - it is so gratifying.

Now let's talk about the fatherhood of God. You need to know that God is your heavenly Father.

Galatians 4:6

And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "_____, Father."

Hebrew boys used the word 'Abba' when they called for their father. This was the familiar term, just like our kids will say 'daddy' or 'dad'. So, in this passage of scripture, Paul is saying that in the old testament, they lived under the fear of God and called themselves servants of the Most High God. In the New Testament, Jesus came along and said "God wants to be a father to you." So, when you get saved, you're not just a servant anymore - you are a son. You have privilege, you have inheritance, you have relationship.

Kids don't go to their natural father and say, "Hey dad, if I go wash the car, would you pay me by giving me supper tonight?" They just eat whatever the family is eating. Everything in our homes belongs also to our children. And that's how we need to be with our heavenly Father. Develop a more endearing relationship with Him - not OVERfamiliar (taking Him for granted and not properly respecting Him), but more intimate. You can go right up and sit on His lap, put your arms around His neck and say "Abba, daddy," You must KNOW God loves you.

Matthew 7:11

So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, _____ much _____ will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

Labor Pains

Paul talks about the fatherhood of God in Galatians 4, then later he talks about his own, spiritual fatherhood of these people in the Galatian church.

Galatians 4:19

Oh, _____ dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor _____ for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.

Paul was actually in anguish of spirit because of his desire to see Christ formed within these people. It is almost like a form of labor, of travail. Your heart becomes heavy and you pray for them, almost groaning over them because you are so concerned for their spiritual life. Paul was concerned these people would fall away from the Lord. This was Paul's life! Too few have this kind of heart, to mentor others, to give their life to discipline others. Their highest priority in life is to transmit those values to others, to disciple others rather than just being a disciple themselves. These people walk in the Spirit. They've conquered greed, lust, envy, strife, bickering, hatred, and anger. They walk in love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, faith, and self-control. Their temperament is controlled. They're not up one minute and down the next. They are stable, even when they are going through difficult times.

The greatest thing you can do in your life is to find your life's mission. You'll never be fulfilled with a hobby. It might be fun, but it won't fulfill your life. A bigger boat or a bigger house or a nicer job will not fulfill you. The only thing that will fulfill you is bearing spiritual children, bearing fruit for God's kingdom. This reproduces our values in the next generation, led by the Spirit of God. Once this lifestyle of godliness begins to

work in you, you start having an impact on others.

You can be a father to others. Your values can be reproduced in others. In the book of *II Timothy*, Paul is writing to his spiritual son, Timothy. He's telling him to reproduce, to give what he has received to other reliable men.

2 Timothy 2:2

You have heard _____ teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to _____ trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

If you have progressed this far in our church's curriculum, you probably know more of the Bible than 99% of the people walking the earth today! Half of them don't even know the name of Jesus. 2.2 billion have never heard His name yet. Only about 500 million (estimated) are true born-again Christians. So you *know* the Word of God, more than you think you do — and you can always learn to know it better. To lead someone else, you only need to be one step ahead of them. Fathering or mothering new believers is the best thing you will ever do in your life.

This present era has been an one of absentee fathers. There's a generation out there right now, under thirty years of age, and they are looking for fathers. They are looking for answers to their questions. Why shouldn't you have some of those answers? Can you take someone under your wing and help them to grow? You don't need a title in front of your name to be a leader, just start leading.

The Father's Heart

A young man rebelled against his parents. He got so wild he came home drunk or loaded on drugs every night. He stole money from them. He got involved in all kinds of wickedness. His parents didn't know what else they could do for him, so they asked him to leave. He got mad and took off, running from the law, got involved in the same things a few states away, and was caught. He ended up in jail. His parents didn't know where he was. They didn't hear from him. Six months went by. . . 9 months, . . . a year. One day they got a letter. In that letter the son wrote, "I have offended you. I have offended God. I ended up in jail. But in jail somebody came and preached here and I decided that if God will forgive me, I'd give my life to the Lord. I'm getting out of jail next month. On (this particular day) I'll be riding on the train that passes behind our house. If you will forgive me, then please just tie a white handkerchief on the limb of that tree behind our house. When I come around that curve, if I see that handkerchief, I'll know that you have forgiven me and I'll get off at the train stop. But if I don't see it, I'll just keep on going and I'll never trouble you again." The day the young man rode on that train, he was so nervous he couldn't stand to look, so he asked another person to look for him, to see if there was a handkerchief on the tree behind his house. When they went around the curve, he closed his eyes and waited. The other man said, "You need to open your eyes, because you're going to see something you've never seen before." So the young man opened his eyes. And he put his head out the train window. He saw a sheet hanging from every limb of that tree, and an old man and woman standing out under that tree with a banner saying, "Come on home, son." That's the FATHER's heart. That's how our heart needs to be.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let's _____ this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. . ."

We must understand there are people who may never ever hear about Jesus except through us. There are people who need to see good examples because they've never had one before. There are wounded, broken, dying people in need. It is not only our responsibility, it is our PRIVILEGE to be a vessel fit for use in God's hand to reach them.

Fathers, both natural and spiritual, need to have a certain understanding. They must know you don't want to break a child's spirit, but you MUST shape their will. When you shape a child's will, you're really delivering them from unhappiness. That's what discipline is all about. A child left to himself is miserable. If he never knows where his boundaries are, he will become very insecure. If a child's will is not challenged, as they get bigger and bigger, their **will** gets bigger and bigger. By the time that child is 17 years old, you could find him at the police station - and the police will challenge his will! So wise fathers know that the most merciful thing you can do is to train up a child in the way he should go.

This is true in a congregation as well. Many people who join a church congregation don't realize what kind of commitment they are making. When a person joins a local church, they're saying, "I'm going to go to church every Sunday. I'm going to sit under the teaching of the Word of God. I'm going to allow this pastor to be MY pastor. I'm going to get to know him and ask him to watch over my soul and help me. My will is going to be shaped, submitted, broken, and then encouraged."

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to _____ over your souls, and they are

_____ to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

Becoming a Teacher

God desires all of us to be raised up to be able to teach. We can put ourselves in a position to learn things so we can minister to other people. The Bible says we are all capable ministers of the new covenant. As you grow in God, you will find a desire and an ability to instruct other people. It may begin with your wife and children, or your close friends - and it *should* begin there, but let it extend out to other people also. Someone might find out you're a Christian and they may ask you, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" You'll be able to instruct them out of God's word because you've been reading God's Word yourself. You're growing!

How complete are we supposed to be?

Ephesians 4:13

This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be _____ in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

How mature? to the **full** and **complete** standard of Christ! That's our goal. Jesus is our example. We need to be more and more like Him. Not striving in our own flesh trying to be like Him, but letting Him live through us. We have the Holy Spirit within us. He desires to do His will in us. As we cooperate with that, we manifest Jesus in our lifestyle.

Not everybody is called to be a pastor or a teacher as described in Ephesians 4:11. These are special gifts we call the five-fold ministry gifts. But everyone should be *able* to teach. Not everyone will be an evangelist, but we can all be involved in evangelism. This is just part of Christianity.

2 Timothy 2:24

A servant of the Lord must . . . be _____ to teach, and be _____ with difficult people.

The Bible indicates that in the last days there will be a famine of the Word of God. It's not really a famine - there's plenty of God's Word around, on the radio, on television, tapes, books, churches on many street corners, thousands of Bibles, etc. In our country, there's a famine of *hearing* the Word of God. We become dull of hearing what God is trying to say to us. That's a bad situation.

Hebrews 5:12

. . . you _____ to be teaching others. . .

Paul is not speaking here about the ordained teaching ministry. There comes a time in your life when you ought to be a teacher. Get that vision for your life. God might want to use you to teach somebody.

Hebrews 5:12-13

. . . Instead, you need someone to teach you _____ the _____ things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right.

Paul is talking about people who are unskilled with the Word of God. God wants us to be skillful with His Word so we can teach. It's OK if a babe is unskillful. But when you've been in the Lord for a time, it's very important that you grow up and become one who encourages and teaches others, that you become skillful - able to use the Word correctly.

Fathers II

Leadership



Understand Worldly Leadership

In the natural world, attaining a leadership position is considered 'climbing the ladder.' With each new position you attain, the more responsibility and authority you have over others. This authority is enforced by some kind of hierarchy, whether it be corporate, political, or social. Hopefully, through hard work and dedication, a higher position is earned. However, sometimes, people actually climb over others, hurting them in the process, to gain a higher position. However you obtain it, when you achieve it, it gives you more power. You may have people working under your authority. So you get to be 'the boss'. You gain prestige, status, and usually a higher paycheck. These aren't necessarily bad things, but if these are your only motivations, something is wrong. The Bible calls these motivations 'selfish ambitions'.

James 3:16

For where you have jealousy and _____,
there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

Unfortunately, the world promotes and even admires these motivations. Therefore, we find people grasping for position, clawing their way up, stressing themselves out to climb higher and higher.

Because we all have a sinful nature, even after we become Christians, we tend to carry these same kinds of motivations into our Christian life and into our churches. But Jesus has shown us a different example and taught us a better way.

Philippians 2:5-7

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 _____ to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a _____ and was born as a human being.

Matthew 20:25-26

But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your _____ . . ."

John 15:13

There is no greater love than to _____ one's _____ for one's friends.

This kind of leadership is called servant leadership. It is motivated by a love of others, not for self-gain. This kind of motivation causes you to lay down your life for others. Laying down your life doesn't just mean being willing to die, it means being willing to set aside (as less important) your time, your talents, your money, your home, your own desires, for the sake of another person.

Part of becoming a mature Christian is that you grow up from becoming a person who is selfishly attending to their own needs to a person who turns outward and looks out for the needs of other people.

Proverbs 11:25

The generous will prosper; those who refresh _____ will themselves be _____.



Counting the Costs

Jesus came not to receive ministry for himself, but to minister to others. He is our example. Some people teach unbelievers that if you get saved, everything is going to be peaches and cream. You have probably realized by now that isn't what happens! We tend to teach people to become "needs centered". We talk a lot about needs in our church. It is important to meet the needs of people. But we shouldn't be a needs-centered church. We need to be outward instead of inward.

Little children are needs and wants centered. But when we grow up and become mature, able to meet our own needs. As parents, we meet our children's needs and even consider their needs more important than our own. The same type of thing should happen spiritually.

Acts 20:34-35

You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply _____ needs and even the needs of those who were _____. And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Paul had been a spiritual father to these people. He had cared for his own needs and the needs of others with his own hands. He had the heart of God for these people.

The older we get in God, the more we understand we will always have newborns, children, and young men among us. We will always have the

weak and the wounded, no matter what stage they are in. We must feed infants, nurture children, and help young men to overcome. We must help the weak to become strong without allowing ourselves to become their strength. **Only God can be their strength.** And so, we must help the wounded run to the Master Physician so they may be healed and rejoin the ranks of those who are growing or leading.

As leadership increases, so do the pressures of serving more people. This can be a very draining thing, as you are called upon to lay down your life again and again for the sake of others. While it is true that the elders, team leaders, mentors, and other leadership help to bear some of the responsibility alongside the pastor, it is still the pastor who bears the weight of responsibility for the direction of the congregation God has placed into his care. He needs your prayers and your support. He needs you to come to him when you have a problem he doesn't see. He does not need you to criticize him and tear him down to others.

While all this may sound negative and it may tend to scare you away from desiring a leadership role, you must understand there is also fruit. It's the fruit that makes all the sacrifice and hardship worthwhile. When you see another person find their place in God, get a vision for their life, and grab hold of the truths in the Word of God and continue to serve Jesus, growing and succeeding - it's worth any price you had to pay. There is nothing more rewarding than that!

Hindrances

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:14 NIV)

Notice that Paul writes that they, “**trained themselves.**” Each person must take their own initiative to study the Word of God. They get teaching from others when available, but they don’t sit around waiting for someone to teach them when they can study on their own.

A few things that hinder us from growing to maturity are 1) Being slow to learn. 2) Becoming lazy. 3) Being self-centered.

Hebrews 6:12

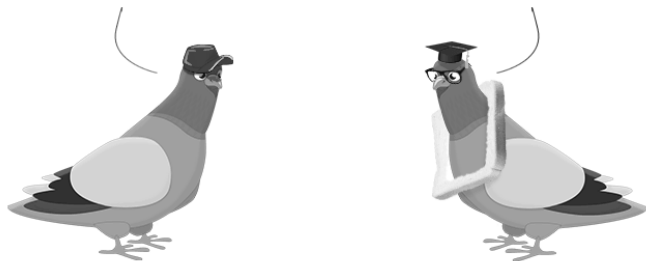
Then you will not become spiritually _____ and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and endurance.

Ephesians 4:14

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by _____ of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to _____ us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

what's the opposite of hindrance?

help, advantage, aid, assistance, benefit, encouragement, boost, opening, advance, expedition



What happens when you’re unskilled in the Word:

1. You’re tossed about, ready to jump on every bandwagon that comes into town. Instead, we need to get ourselves trained so we can distinguish good from evil.” Instead of being tossed, we become mature, unshakable. You don’t truly know something until you are able to teach it. You have a conviction about it.
2. You’re still in need of milk. When you’re 20 years old and still in need of milk, you have a problem. The first two sections of *Discovery Series* is milk. Section 1, *Discovering God*, is an introduction to God Himself. Then Section 2, *Discovering our Foundations*, is basic doctrines of the Christian faith, from Hebrews 6:1-2. If you don’t have a good understanding of those, you’ll never be able to grasp the meatier truths and revelations from the Bible. Some people get saved and they immediately go to the bookstore and get books on the Revelation. They can’t handle it, they end up choking on it! People have fallen away from the Lord because of this. They are unstable, in need of milk.

It’s not the pastor’s job to meet your needs. It’s his job to equip you so you can do the work of the ministry. He teaches you things from the Word of God so you can go out and teach somebody else. If each person takes one other person and teaches them everything they learn about God, they are multiplying themselves. But if we continue to focus on our own needs, we’ll never grow up to teach anyone anything.

Let’s grow up to be MEAT EATERS!

Freely Give

Matthew 10:7-8

Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. _____ as _____ as you have received!

This is the whole reason why we should be teachers. Because God has freely given to me, I need to freely give to others. Take the things that have been deposited into your life, and use them to become responsible, then deposit them into somebody else. We're not here to become spiritually fat. You can fill yourself up with too much. The needs in your life are like a black hole. You'll always have them. As soon as one need is met, you'll find another one. If that's the way you live your Christian life, you'll go down an endless path that can never be satisfied. You'll never find true joy until you become a giver.

Isaiah 30:20-21

Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, he _____ still be _____ to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left.

Even when you're going through hard times, still, you have teachers. God is concerned that you are taught. But then you need to grow and become a teacher. Teaching is one of the ways God uses to win the lost and build the saved.

Matthew 28:19-20

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name

of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. _____ these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

We are part of this great commission. If we spend our lives worried only about the needs we have in East Liverpool, we won't be part of what God wants us to do. God wants to send people out of here, to other cities, to other countries. We must get the mentality that we are teachers. We are people who have been given things so we can give to others.



Teaching is involved in making disciples. ". . . Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded . . ." (Matt 28:20 NIV)

2 Timothy 2:24-26

A servant of the Lord must . . . be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. _____ instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will _____ the _____. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.

There are many people who are trapped. Through teaching, people can recover themselves out of snares. If we don't teach them, the snare has got them. Do you see how important you are? This could be the difference between them going to heaven or hell.

Titus 1:9

He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; _____ he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.

Instructing Those That Oppose

There are going to be people who oppose Christianity. We need to be able to convince them, if they are willing to be convinced.

Acts 20:27-31

For I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know. "So guard yourselves and God's people. _____ and _____ God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

This is a warning that people will try to come in like savage wolves to try to draw away disciples for themselves. If we're not taught — if we're not basing our beliefs and our lives upon sound doctrine, then we can be more easily deceived by these types of people.

We have heard of bad things that have happened in the Charismatic movement. There's always some kind of a wolf that Satan sends in to try to destroy what God has started. There are young Christians being torn away by some deceitful person, and there is nobody there skillful enough to convince them of Biblical truth. All it takes is one person to mess up a whole church.

1 Timothy 4:13-16

... focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. . . Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress. _____ a close _____ on how

you _____ and on your _____ . Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you.

Acts 20:26-27

... I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, for I didn't shrink from declaring _____ that God wants you to know.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

... remain faithful to the things you have been _____. You know they are true, . . . You have been taught the holy Scriptures . . . All Scripture is inspired by God and is _____ to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It _____ us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

The Word of God is POWERFUL. Don't diminish what the Word can do. You might not know what to say to others. But you can open your Bible and start to read. You'll find the Holy Spirit will take your innocent, inexperienced desire to minister to that person, and He'll use it in a very powerful way.

And the things you have heard me say . . . entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

(II Timothy 2:2 NIV)

Don't just share everything you hear. Take it, study it out in the Bible, be convinced it's true, then share it. In this scripture, there's four generations of people teaching. Timothy heard things from Paul. Timothy was to commit them to faithful men. Faithful men can teach others also. From Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others.

TEST

Discovering Maturity

Name: _____

Score: _____

2 points each

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the correct answer in each of the following multiple choice questions. **THIS IS AN OPEN-BOOK TEST**

1. **Infancy is a time of**
 - a. Dependency
 - b. Slavery.
 - c. Independence.
 - d. All of the above
2. **The “Young Men” stage is a time of**
 - a. Learning to overcome Satan.
 - b. Struggle between independence and submission.
 - c. Learning to seek God for wisdom.
 - d. All of the above.
3. **Maturity is**
 - a. Going to church.
 - b. Knowing more than other people.
 - c. Being completely developed.
 - d. All of the above
4. **Small groups are important because**
 - a. They provide a place to learn.
 - b. They provide a place to share problems.
 - c. They provide a place to receive good advice.
 - d. All of the above.
5. **When a maturing person falls**
 - a. He stays down on the floor
 - b. He whines and cries for his mommy.
 - c. He gets back up and tries again.
 - d. All of the above
6. **Temptations are**
 - a. Common
 - b. Rare
 - c. Sent by God.
 - d. All of the above
7. **The way you transform your life is by**
 - a. Diet and exercise
 - b. Renewing your mind and learning to think differently.
 - c. Calling the Psychic Friends Network.
 - d. All of the above.
8. **If we want fruit, we need to**
 - a. Plant the seed
 - b. Water the planted seed.
 - c. Give the seed the proper care and feeding.
 - d. All of the above.
9. **Parents know their child is beginning to mature when**
 - a. They see their child grow taller and taller.
 - b. They see their child go on their first date.
 - c. They see their child making wise decisions about what to eat and who their friends are.
 - d. All of the above.
10. **Permitting other people to speak into our lives is**
 - a. Not necessary.
 - b. Very important.
 - c. Only for the baby Christian.
 - d. All of the above.
11. **If you don’t control yourself . . .**
 - a. Someone else will control you.
 - b. You will live a happier life.
 - c. You will be successful
 - d. All of the above.
12. **Mature Christians. . .**

- a. Let their attitudes rule them.
- b. Allow their minds to be idle.
- c. Rule their attitudes.
- d. All of the above.

13. Love is

- a. Always a sweet, lovely thing.
- b. Sometimes a corrective thing.
- c. Always permissive and indulgent.
- d. All of the above.

14. What can you do to feed yourself spiritually?

- a. Read the Bible and other Christian books.
- b. Listen to Christian Music and teaching tapes
- c. Take notes during sermons, and review them from time to time.
- d. All of the above.

15. Taming the tongue

- a. Takes effort and determination.
- b. Comes naturally to most people.
- c. Happens by accident.
- d. All of the above.

16. Another part of learning to control your tongue involves

- a. Not making foolish promises.
- b. Listening to others.
- c. Planting the Word of God in our hearts.
- d. All of the above.

17. Growing up emotionally involves

- a. Dealing with hurts from the past.
- b. Forgiving those who have offended you.
- c. Learning to trust the Word of God instead of our emotional highs and lows.
- d. All of the above.

18. It is easy to

- a. Become a mature Christian.
- b. Allow spiritual laziness to come upon us.
- c. Accomplish God's plan for our life.
- d. All of the above.

19. A mature believer

- a. Plans (gives thought) his attitudes, responses, and actions.
- b. Goes along with the flow of life.
- c. Allows others to take responsibility for him.
- d. All of the above.

20. People in leadership are

- a. All-wise.
- b. Tireless
- c. Faulty.
- d. All of the above.

21. If you crave the Word of God

- a. You will become complacent.
- b. You'll never be satisfied.
- c. You will grow.
- d. All of the above.

22. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to

- a. Teach us.
- b. Correct the direction we're heading.
- c. Reveal flaws in our character.
- d. All of the above.

23. A true friend

- a. Will let do whatever you want.
- b. Will love you enough to be honest with you, even if it hurts.
- c. Will go with you when you want to do wrong.
- d. All of the above.

24. Christians must be

- a. Serious, deep thinkers.
- b. Correct all of the time.
- c. Practically perfect in every way.
- d. None of the above.

**INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the correct answer in each of the following true & false questions.
THIS IS AN OPEN-BOOK TEST**

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|-----|---|---|---|
| 25. | T | F | The infancy stage is meant to last for many years. | 38. | T | F | People with bad attitudes tend to rub off on others. |
| 26. | T | F | Childhood is a time of learning and character development. | 39. | T | F | If we store up good things in our hearts, good things will come out of our mouths. |
| 27. | T | F | There are few 'fathers' in the church today. | 40. | T | F | The emotional life of a Christian is probably one of the slowest areas to develop. |
| 28. | T | F | God is always busy working in our lives. | 41. | T | F | A person who sins sexually is only hurting himself. |
| 29. | T | F | Many times people complain about not being "fed" when they are old enough to feed themselves! | 42. | T | F | It is never right to do wrong and it is never wrong to do right. |
| 30. | T | F | Becoming a Christian is all you have to do to be a disciple. | 43. | T | F | It is your Pastor's fault if you fail to grow as a Christian. |
| 31. | T | F | If you are faithful in small things, you'll be given greater things. | 44. | T | F | "Leech" Christians are those who are always trying to get security through the attention of others. |
| 32. | T | F | Only a few children need to learn to obey their parents. | 45. | T | F | There are some good excuses for bad behavior. |
| 33. | T | F | We cannot control the way we think. | 46. | T | F | Our emotions can be both helpful and dangerous. |
| 34. | T | F | Attitudes are contagious. | 47. | T | F | Mature Christians have learned how to retaliate when someone attacks them. |
| 35. | T | F | Parents love to give blessings to rebellious children. | 48. | T | F | To lead someone else, all you need is to be one step ahead of them. |
| 36. | T | F | Babies are selfish creatures. | 49. | T | F | Most people have a total understanding of what it means to join a local church. |
| 37. | T | F | If a child doesn't learn to obey his parents when he is young, it will hinder his ability to function in the workplace, in his own family, and in society. | | | | |

INSTRUCTIONS: In your own words, explain what the word *katargeo* means.

50.

When you have completed your test, tear it out of the book and turn it in to the church office or to your Home Group Leader.

If you score 80% or above you will receive a certificate of achievement.

MASTERPIECES

