

The Journey Towards Spiritual Maturity

Genesis 1.26

Hebrews 1.3

Image - Character - Impression

Galatians 5.7-26

When we talk about Christian Character, in my opinion, we are talking about growing and maturing spiritually.

The purpose of Spiritual Maturity

Luke 1.80

Why is it important that we grow, mature and develop character?

Why not simply just be satisfied with being saved?

In one word - Destiny. Purpose. Calling.

God wants us to grow and mature, that we might fulfill His plans our lives. - Jeremiah 29.11

The foundation of Spiritual Maturity

1. Growth

- a. Growth is not optional.
- b. We are to grow in grace and the Knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - i. Indicators of Growth
 1. Consistent in my behavior.
 2. Understanding of Biblical Concepts
 - a. It is given to you to know the mysteries, but to them it is a parable.
 - i. Luke 8.10
 3. You've become a producer not just a consumer

- a. Immature people consume only.
- b. Mature people re-produce.

2. Strong in spirit

- a. Familiar with Spiritual Matters
 - i. 1 Corinthians 12.1
 - ii. Our ability to hear God, is predicated on our level of maturity. The more mature we were, the more he speaks directly to us...
 1. 1 Samuel 3.
- b. This isn't only knowing the bible, it is a ability to apply it.
 - i. John 8.32
- c. God has to take you through your own journey so that you can become (Be made)
 - i. Genesis 12
 - ii. Mark 1.17-18
 1. You cannot begin the process, until you are ready to let go of some things.
 - a. Abram - Left his father's house.
 - b. Disciples - Left their nets.

3. Wilderness

- a. God always prepares individuals in places where you don't even think.
- b. Growth begins in obscurity.
- c. You have to deal with low places
 - i. Jordan is the lowest place on the earth (1400' below sea level)
 1. Jesus began his ministry here.
 2. The children crossed here before taking the promise Land.
- d. Your growth downward, needs to exceeds your growth upward.
 - i. Col.. 2.6
 1. Chinese Bamboo -

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It seems that this tree when planted, watered, and nurtured for an entire growing season doesn't outwardly grow as much as an inch. Then, after the second growing season, a season in which the farmer takes extra care to water, fertilize and care for the bamboo tree, the tree still hasn't sprouted. So it goes as the sun rises and sets for four solid years. The farmer and his wife have nothing tangible to show for all of their labor trying to grow the tree.

right now!

Then, along comes year five.

In the fifth year that Chinese bamboo tree seed finally sprouts and the bamboo tree grows up to eighty feet in just one growing season! Or so it seems...

Did the little tree lie dormant for four years only to grow exponentially in the fifth? Or, was the little tree growing underground, developing a root system strong enough to support its potential for outward growth in the fifth year and beyond? The answer is, of course, obvious. Had the tree not developed a strong unseen foundation it could not have sustained its life as it grew. The same principle is true for people. People, who patiently toil towards worthwhile dreams and goals, building strong character while overcoming adversity and challenge, grow the strong internal foundation to handle success, while get-rich-quickers and lottery winners usually are unable to sustain unearned sudden wealth.

Had the Chinese bamboo farmer dug up his little seed every year to see if it was growing, he would have stunted the tree's growth as surely as a caterpillar is doomed to a life on the ground if it is freed from its struggle inside a cocoon prematurely. The struggle in the cocoon is what gives the future butterfly the wing power to fly, just as tension against muscles as we exercise strengthen our muscles, while muscles left alone will soon atrophy. My problem with exercise is not getting instantly stronger after each work out! I pray for more patience every day and I pray to get it

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1 Corinthians 2.14-3.1
Galatians 5.16-25
Job 1
Philippians 3.12,15

Why did Jesus spend three years with the disciples? He needed them prepared (matured) for what they were going to do.

After the Crucifixion, they went back to what they were doing, before they met Christ.

Paul Identifies three levels of Men:

1. **Natural Man** - This is the man that has never received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
 - a. Ephesians 2.1-2

2. **Spiritual Man (Mature)** - This is the man who has received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The correlation is that a Spiritual Man, is a person who is mature (an adult). You can handle more things...

3. **Carnal Man (Immature)**- This is the man who has received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, but lives like he hasn't.
 - a. Whereas with and carnal person, this person is correlated to a baby; immature.
 - b. 3 reasons why a person is carnal?
 - i. *Uncontrolled body*
 1. i Corinthians 9.27 - "I discipline my body..."
 - ii. *Un-renewed mind*
 1. Romans 12.1-2
 - a. Salvation of my spirit is a measure of grace with God, but renewing my mind, is an act of my desire.

- b. Renewing my mind is more than just learning, it's about changing.
- c. Renewing my mind is a lifestyle, not an experience.
- d. Where you set your mind, controls where you go.

iii. *Under-developed spirit*

1. When a person accepts Christ, they become spiritually alive. However, spiritually alive does not equate to spiritual maturity.
2. Spiritual development is achieved solely by what and how you feed your spirit.

What is Spiritual Maturity?

Who demonstrates the new nature of the holy spirit through Christ-like behavior within the context of human relationships.

Babies are immature physically and mentally, but we expect them to develop. If they don't, there is reason for concern.

Any of us long time Christians find ourselves victims of what appears to be arrested spiritual development. Despite the length of time we have been converted, we seem no farther ahead than when we first came to know Christ.

Spirituality deals with my health (as a spiritual person), while maturity deals with my growth. Maturity is a matter of degrees whereas spirituality is always an absolute.

1. Spiritual maturity is a process that begins when a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior.

2. Spiritual maturity is not just an accumulation of knowledge.
 - a. Spiritual maturity is demonstrated more by behaviors than by beliefs.

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3. Spiritual maturity is not only a private matter but also a community matter.
 - a. Spiritual Maturity is founded in your relationship with the Father, and manifested in the relationships with His children.
 - b. The quality of your relationship to Christ can be seen in the quality of your relationships with other believers.

4. Spiritual Maturity is a journey of discipleship.
 - a. A Disciple is a learner - Open and Teachable.
 - b. A Disciple puts Christ first in all areas of life.
 - c. A Disciple is committed to a life of purity and is taking steps to separate from sin.
 - d. A Disciple has a daily devotional time and is developing in their prayer life.

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Truths about Spiritual Maturity

1. Spiritual Maturity is a Journey.
2. Spiritual Maturity has a beginning point but not an ending point.
 - a. You will never reach a complete level of Spiritual Maturity - While you are this side, you should always be in a process of learning and growing.
 - i. Philippians 3.12
3. Your level of blessings are based on your level of maturity.
 - a. Matthew 25.15 - Each was given a talent based on their ability (Maturity).
 - b. Galatians 4.1-3
4. Your level of growth is based on your desire to grow.
 - a. 1 Peter 2.1
 - b. In essence, spiritual maturity is not automatic.

Four stages of Growth

1 Corinthians 13.11

Talking - Thinking - Reasoning

God wants you to grow. We are designed to grow.

Whenever a Christian is stagnant, something is drastically wrong. Stagnation - without motion or current; not flowing or moving.

1. Infancy
 - a. Known by birth
 - i. Those who don't know anything; don't talk.
Dependent on other's for survival.
2. Childhood
 - a. Know by looks
 - i. School children capable of receiving instruction.
3. Adolescence
 - a. Known because of what you know

4. Maturity
 - a. Mature in thought and actions. People of understanding.
 - i. 1 Corinthians 13.11

Process of Spiritual Maturity

In order to mature spiritually there at least three things we must do:

1. Make God's word a priority in our lives.
2. Have a Renewed Mind.
3. Be obedient to what you have learned.
 - a. I must have a dedication to God that anchors me.
 - b. I make decisions which I know are acceptable to God.
 - c. I have a distinctiveness about me, which sets me apart.
 - d. I have a devotion to my assignment.
 - e. I must have a detachment from anything that is deemed adversarial.
 - i. 1 Cor.15.3
 - ii. Romans 16.17
 - iii. 2 Cor. 10
 - f. I must have a disciplined principle even when I am under attack.
 - i. 1 Peter 5.8
 - g. I declare my agreement with God.

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7 Principles of Spiritual Maturity

According to one expert children go through 4 stages of dealing with their fathers. In stage one they call you dada. In stage 2 they grow and call you daddy. As they mature and reach stage 3 they call you dad. Finally in stage 4 they call you collect.

Why did Jesus spend three years with the disciples? He needed them prepared (matured) for what they were going to do.

After the Crucifixion, they went back to what they were doing, before they met Christ.

Ephesians 4.11-13

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

1. The Goal of Spiritual Growth is to be like Jesus.
2. Our food for growth is the Word of God not Amusement.
"Amusement" – "Muse"- means meditate or think... "a" in front means NON so Amusement means "No Thinking"
 - i. Heb. 5:12-13
 - ii. If we are to grow spiritually, we need a daily diet of the Word of God.
 - iii. Read, study, meditate, memorize, & sing the word of God.
 1. Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;
* Our food for growth is not entertainment, BUT God's truth.
 2. What a tragedy that God's people are no longer challenged to think about God's truth.
3. The more we apply the Word of God, the more mature we'll become.

a. Heb. 5:14

- i. Spiritual maturity is not just an accumulation of knowledge.
 1. Spiritual maturity is demonstrated more by behaviors than by beliefs.
- ii. Exposure to God's word is not enough. It is necessary, but it is not enough!
- iii. The Word of God will not effect our lives, until we apply it to our lives.
 1. "Practice makes perfect" -- In spiritual realm..."Practice makes mature!"
- iv. 3 things that hinder the application of God's Word:
 1. Dull ears
 - a. Heb. 5:11
-- spiritual perception isn't up to par
-- slow to hear – idea of a slow learner
-- to be slow and sluggish in mind as well as in the ears
Heb 5:11 –Message- "I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you've picked up this bad habit of not listening."

* The fault did not lie with the writer of Hebrews but with the hearing of the listeners.
 2. Hard heart
 - a. Heb. 4:2, 7
 - b. Writer is not speaking of the blockage of an artery in our physical heart.
-- We use the term – "hard hearted"
-- It describes a "stubbornness"

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Idea of "being unmoved emotionally" ...
being resistant to someone (God)
* A hard heart can cause us not to apply
God's truth.

3. Traditional thinking

i. Matt. 15:1-6

The traditional teaching of scribes and Pharisees
contradicted the teaching of Scripture.

* Jesus calls a man who hears God's word BUT does not do
God's word – a foolish man who builds his house on sand.
* God did not give us His word to give us a bigger head but
a bigger heart.
* It's not what we know, it's how we live that makes the
difference!

4. We cannot grow up by consuming only milk.

a. Heb. 5:12,13

i. Milk is necessary for babies BUT God did not
intend for us to grow up with bottles in our
hands.

1. 1 Pet 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the
sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow
thereby:
2. What is milk? - pre-digested food
3. Babies need predigested food.
4. But we can't grow up if what the Pastor has
digested(studied) is our only source of
nourishment.
5. If you are going to grow up you must learn to
prepare your own meals.
6. Dig out the food you need to get through each
day.
* v. 12 – get past the fundamentals,
foundational truths, ABC's.

5. We must have a balanced diet

a. Matt. 4:4,

b. 2 Tim. 3:16

i. Mom used to say, "Eat those vegetables"

ii. We need to eat what we don't like sometimes.

1. We need a balanced diet.

2. One of the reasons I prefer expository
preaching is it gives us a balanced diet of
God's word.

3. It's not healthy to eat only and always the
sweet things in life and never some of the
more nutritious foods.

4. You can survive on sweets BUT you can't live
a healthy life.

6. We cannot grow up without a dependence upon the Holy Spirit

a. Gal. 3:3

i. " Can you become mature on your own?"

* " Do you think you can do this by yourself?"

* For too long Baptist have ignored the teaching
of Scripture concerning the Holy Spirit.

* Perhaps that's the reason there is so little
maturity in the church today.

* How many in the church today...

-- know how and what it means to be filled with
the Spirit?

-- know how to "walk in the Spirit"?

-- know what it is to live in the Spirit?

* I know we don't even have to understand it, to
be able to do it, but you do if you are going to be
able to teach others.

* We can't go on and grow up without depending
upon the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

7. The more mature you become, the more you are capable of and expected to handle.

Listen to this story...

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There was once a farmer who went to town to purchase seeds for his farm. As he was returning home one of the squash seeds he had purchased fell from his pocket onto the ground. It happened that within a few feet was another seed of a different type. The place where the two seeds lay was rather fertile, and miraculously they took root. After about a week the squash seed showed signs of growth. The second seed showed none. After two weeks the squash began to sprout leaves. The second seed showed none. After seven weeks the squash began to show fruit. The second seed still showed no progress. Four more weeks came and gone. The squash plant reached the end of its life bearing much fruit in that time, but the other seed finally began to slowly grow. Many years later the squash was all but forgotten, but the other tiny seed, an acorn, had grown into a mighty oak tree. Many people want their faith to be like the squash. They want to experience it all right now...

SPIRITUAL TRUTH #1: God is never in a hurry.

Psalm 90:4 says, "For in your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that passes by, like a few hours of the night."

"God draws people into the Way, according to the way of the Way.

SPIRITUAL TRUTH #2: God works in and for eternity.

Philippians 1:6 says, "I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

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7 Advantages to Spiritual Maturity

7 Principles of Spiritual Maturity

1. The Goal of Spiritual Growth is to be like Jesus.
2. Our food for growth is the Word of God not Amusement.
3. The more we apply the Word of God, the more mature we'll become.
4. We cannot grow up by consuming only milk.
5. We must have a balanced diet
6. We cannot grow up without a dependence upon the Holy Spirit
7. The more mature you become, the more you are capable of and expected to handle.

1. **Mature believers are not constantly drawn into jealousy and strife.**

- a. 1 Cor 3:1-3

4 Differences between immature and mature Christians:

- Immature Christians fulfill the flesh; mature Christians walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)
- Immature Christians are easily offended; mature Christians are able to overlook an offense. (Prov. 19:11)
- Immature Christians demand their rights; mature Christians see themselves as crucified with Christ. (1 Cor. 6:7-8)
- Immature Christians are impatient with the weaknesses and failings of others; mature Christians are long-suffering and understanding. (Eph. 4:1b-3)

2. **Mature believers have trained themselves to discern between good and evil.**

- a. spiritually mature are those who are discerning - they keep their own counsel rather than walk in the counsel of the wicked (v.1).

- i. Ps. 1:1

- ii. Heb 5:14, AMP - But solid food is for full-grown men, for those whose senses *and* mental faculties are trained by practice to discriminate *and* distinguish between what is morally good *and* noble and what is evil *and* contrary either to divine or human law.

The key to being well-trained in discerning between good and evil is the pursuit and application of God's wisdom and understanding for the details of everyday life... nothing being too small.

- iii. Eph 5:15-17, NIV - Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

3. **Mature believers actively and aggressively pursue transformation.**

- a. Ps. 1:2

- i. The spiritually mature are those who are delighting in God's ways (v.2).

- ii. Phil 3:12-15

- iii. Eph 4:22-24, The Message -Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything — and I do mean everything — connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life — a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.

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4. Mature believers have a sense of stability

- a. Ps. 1.3(a)
 - i. Balanced
 - ii. Stable
- b. Eph. 4.14-
 - i. *Identity* - A spiritually mature Christian is not in bondage to anyone.
 1. Don't lose your uniqueness (1 Corinthians 4:3, NIV). -I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.
 - a. Be yourself and don't conform to everybody else and their standard.
 - i. Children are always concerned about what people think of them.
 - ii. There comes a time in your life when you don't care what people think about you.
 - iii. It is more important to get affirmation and validation from God than from people.
 - iv. When Jesus ministered to sinners, people thought He was a sinner Himself.
 1. As a servant of God, you cannot worry about always pleasing men (Galatians 1:10).
 2. Live an honest life, and it will put to silence the criticisms of people (1 Peter 2:15, AMP). - For it is God's will and intention that by doing right [your good and honest lives] should silence (muzzle, gag) the ignorant charges and ill-informed criticisms of foolish persons.
 3. Keep doing what is right.

- b. The children of Israel were intimidated by how they appeared in the eyes of others.
- c. As a result, they were prevented from reaching their destiny.
- d. Conform to the Word, and allow it to shape who you are (1 Corinthians 6:17).

ii. *Emotions*

1. Christians cannot be emotionally-ruled.
 - a. Emotions are feelings caused by pain or pleasure, which are designed to move you in a certain direction.
 - i. The success you have in managing your soul (your mind, will, and emotions), determines the success you'll have in life (3 John 2).
 - ii. If you can control your emotions, you can do anything (Proverbs 16:32).
2. How you deal with your emotions will determine whether you walk in God's blessing, or under the curse.
 - a. Don't allow your emotions to control your decisions.
 - b. Allow the Word of God to determine your decisions.
3. Out of control emotions will block the fullness of God's blessings from manifesting in your life.

iii. *Speech*

5. Mature believers are able to fulfill purpose, and don't make excuses.

- a. The spiritually mature are those who are diligent. "Whatever he does prospers." (v.3b) They are not dependent on other people's hand-outs.
 - i. Ps. 1.3(b)

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ii. **You have the power to change; however, you must stop making excuses.**

1. Jesus met a man who had an infirmity for 38 years. He asked the man, if he wanted to be healed (John 5:2-8).
 - a. In this story, an angel would trouble the water, and when people stepped into it, they would be healed.
 - b. The man made excuses for not getting in the water (verse 7). As a result, his condition remained the same.
2. Excuses are nails used to build a house of failure.
 - a. A lazy man will make excuses (Proverbs 26:13).
 - b. In Luke 14:16-20, a man invited many guests to a banquet; but some made excuses as to why they could not show up.
 - c. An excuse is an attempt to be released from an obligation or duty; it is an attempt to remove yourself from blame.

6. **Mature believers were not afraid to receive correction, instruction or rebukes for their deficient understanding.**

Ask the Lord to give you a greater humility so that you can receive correction, instruction and rebukes with a teachable spirit.

These were people who meditated on the scripture so that they could find better ways of being

7. **Spiritually mature Christians esteem the things of God higher than the things of this world.**

- a. Hebrews 11:24
 - i. The spiritually mature are those who are being doctrinally grounded; they are balanced in their

beliefs, stable and fruitful. They are "like a tree planted by streams of water." (v.3a)

- a.
2. Eph 4:14-15
3. Col 2:8-9
4. 2 Tim. 2:15

The acid test:

Is it consistent with the nature and person of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture?

Primary Obstacles to a Biblical Worldview in Western Societies (Charles Kraft, *Christianity with Power*)

- The western tends to exclude the spiritual and supernatural as unimportant or non-existent. (compare Matt. 4:11; Luke 4:41)
 - The western worldview is largely materialistic, focused on attaining security through material things. (compare Luke 18:22)
 - The western worldview is humanistic, focused on human abilities and accomplishments and ignoring the need for God. (compare Luke 18:27; John 5:19,30)
 - The western worldview sees reason and logic as the primary way of understanding reality. (compare Luke 10:21; John 5:39-40)
 - The western worldview highly values individualism and independence so that "we often experience little real relating to others or to God." (compare Luke 5:16; Mark 3:14; Matt. 26:37)
- ### 8. **Spiritually mature Christians are able to recognize when God is at work.**
1. When God is at work, you can rejoice no matter what the circumstances.

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- a. Joseph's story is an example of God at work (Genesis 45:5, 7).
 - i. It is not strange to experience trials, tests and temptations.
 - ii. You can't develop your faith unless there is pressure.
 - iii. People tend to blame the devil for the storms in their life; however God is always working to mature you through the things you face and overcome.
 - iv. Everything is a walk of faith, and if you have the faith you will develop and pass the test.
 - a. In order to be a conqueror you must conquer some things.

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Immaturity signs - Arrested Development

Hebrews 5.12

A timid HUNTER searching for lion tracks, asked a woodcutter if he had seen any. The woodcutter replied, "not only can I show you tracks, I can show you the lion right now!" The Hunter, turned pale and through teeth chattering in fear, replied, "No, thanks. **I am only searching for tracks ..not the lion himself.**"

Many Christians are more interested in *following the tracks or studying the teachings of Jesus*, than in following the Lion of Judah Himself. They go through the religious motions of "track-hunting," but never grow to real **Spiritual** maturity or experience a close relationship with Christ.

After a baby leaves the cramped confines of the womb, it quickly outgrows cradles, playpens and other childhood constraints. That is, unless the natural **growth** process is somehow restricted or 'bound'.

For example,

- (a) The Japanese once bound the feet young girls to keep them from growing;
- (b) Orphans who have not experienced nurturing contact often grow physically, while their emotions and socialization remain 'bound' or stifled inside;

When we find Christians who have been baptized for decades behaving as though they were "baby Christians" we are probably looking at cases of arrested spiritual development.

What is Arrested Development

Children who freeze their emotional and intellectual progress at certain levels are said to have become victims of arrested development.

The Problem with Arrested Development

Arrested Developed people can become "emotional leeches" sucking the life out of all who come in contact with them. Like children, they use emotion as a weapon. Sometimes such arrested adults use "emotional blackmail" techniques to manipulate and control others.

The troublemaker now has what he or she wanted: attention and control. Such arrested people would rather receive negative attention than to be ignored.

They challenge us, stretch us, and force us to dig deep into our bag of emotional and spiritual resources. They try our patience to the max. Often they drive us to our knees in prayer.

4 Differences between Immature and Mature Christians:

1. Immature Christians fulfill the flesh; mature Christians live to walk in the Spirit
 - a. Gal. 5.16 - Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
2. Immature Christians are easily offended; mature Christians are able to overlook an offense. Prov. 19:11
3. Immature Christians demand their rights; mature Christians see themselves as crucified with Christ. (1 Cor. 6:7-8)
4. Immature Christians are impatient with the weaknesses and failings of others; mature Christians are long-suffering and understanding. (Eph. 4:1b-3)

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The best example of AD I believe is displayed through the Children of Israel.

Types of Arrested Development Exodus 14.13-15

God is concerned with our movement (maturing)! Our deliverance, is to move forward from where to were to where He wants us to be. Thus we are not delivered to remain in the same condition or same station.

Spiritual Maturity is about your relationship with God. A relationship that drives us to becoming all that we were created to be.

God wants to direct our relationship with Him. When we begin to direct it, then we will have arrested development.

One of the greatest mistakes we could ever make is think we can develop ourselves. Maturity comes through discipleship (the process of fathering). This is why Paul told the Corinthians - You have many instructors, but not many fathers.

There are 2 types of AD:

1. Stagnation
 - a. Exodus 16.15-20
 - i. God was concerned about their moving forward - their progress.
 - ii. Stagnation unaddressed migrates into regression.
2. Regression
 - a. Backsliding

Stagnations --> Regression --> Backslidden

Reasons for Arrested Development

Galatians 3.1-3 Mark 4.1-9

1. **WAYSIDE**

Wayside deals with hard things - things which are entrenched. It doesn't allow for penetration into our hearts. What cannot be penetrated cannot produce sustainable growth.

- a. Pleasure - If it felt good let's stay here.
 - i. The pleasure principle creates *pillars of traditions*.
 1. Matthew 17.1-4
- b. Pain -
 - i. 2 Samuel 12.15-23
 1. The pain principle creates *memorials for mourning*.
 2. When we cannot get over the pain, we will stay (emotionally and spiritually) in the place of our pain.
 - ii. Offense
 1. It is OK to be offended - offense will happen. But don't take offense. Don't take it into your heart. Don't make it yours.
 2. The word offense is *skandelon* - It is the trigger of a trap.
 3. A trap needs one of two things in order to be successful.
 - a. Either it must be *hidden*, in the hope that an animal will stumble upon it, or
 - b. it must be *baited* to lure the animal into the trap's deadly jaws
 - i. Proverbs 18.19
 4. One of three things happens when a person takes offense:
 - a. Abandonment:

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- i. This often comes in the form of leaving churches, marriages or places of employment in order to escape the chance of being hurt again.
- b. Appeasement:
 - i. Second, they become spiritual vagabonds or wanderers. They will stay as long as those people behave exactly as they desire, but if they don't, they run again to the next relationship or organization.
- c. Avoidance
 - i. The third behavior of those who will not let go of an offense is that they become spiritual zombies. They may stay in the place where the hurt occurred, but they never reach their potential because they refuse to forgive and release the person who hurt them. This is tragic because life holds so little joy for them, and others miss the blessing that their lives were intended to bring.

2. Stoney Ground

Stoney ground deals with no depth. Things remain superficial. Very little penetration. Your relationship with God, has never progressed into something meaningful and satisfying.

a. **Fear**

- i. Exodus 20.18-21
 - 1. Weed Paper illustration.
 - a. Weeds cannot get anchored into the soil, so there are easy to uproot.
 - b. There is no continuation of growth. Each time you must start over with new growth.

- c. How far are you willing to go?
 - i. Ezekiel 47.3
- d. The healthier your lawn, the less weeds you will have.

b. **Lack of Commitment**

- i. Luke 9.23
 - ii. Luke 14.27
 - 1. You have to give of yourself. If you are going to grow spiritually, then you have to commit yourself.
 - 2. A tree is committed to the ground in which it is planted.
 - a. Desire
 - i. It signifies "determine to."
 - 1. Then in Luke 14:27 Christ declared, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." So it is not optional.
 - b. Denial of Self
 - i. to affirm that one has no acquaintance or connection with someone
 - ii. to forget one's self, lose sight of one's self and one's own interests
 - iii. Abandoning his own righteousness.
 - iv. It means refusing to rest upon my own wisdom. It means far more than that.
 - v. It means ceasing to insist upon my own rights. It means repudiating self itself. It means ceasing to consider our own comforts, our own ease, our own pleasure, our own aggrandizement, our own benefits. It means being done with self. It means, beloved, saying with the apostle, For me to live is, not self, but Christ.
- c. Cross.

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- i. It is not a cross that is laid upon us, but a cross which must be "taken up"!
- c. **Lack of Vision**
 - i. Numbers 10.29-32
 - ii. Proverbs 29.18
 - 1. Generates stagnation
- d. **Improper Relationships**
 - i. We do not grow in a vacuum.
 - 1. Ecc. 4.9-10
 - 2. Who did you learn from?
 - ii. Are you associating with people who don't want to do anything or go anywhere?
 - 1. One of two things will happen
 - a. Either you will leave them, or
 - b. You will join them.
 - iii. **Example of a good friendship**
 - 1. David and Jonathan
 - 2. Jesus and John
 - iv. **Examine your relationships.**
 - 1. Choosing good friendships is essential to your well-being.
 - a. The right friend can be a blessing
 - i. Proverbs 17:17 - A friend loves at all times. And a brother is born for adversity.
 - b. A good friend knows how to empower you for success.
 - c. The wrong friend can be a curse
 - i. Proverbs 12:26
 - 2. You must make the decision to cut off any relationship that isn't productive.
 - a. Productive relationships may cause you pain.
- i. Proverbs 27.17 - As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.
- 3. Do you have someone in your life who will give up their desires for you?
 - a. John 15:13, 14
- v. **There are three levels of friendship.**
 - 1. The tabernacle consists of the outer court, inner court and holy of holies (behind the veil).
 - a. Outer court: *casual relationship*
 - b. Inner court: *close relationship*
 - c. Holy of holies: *intimate relationship in which you and the other person are vulnerable to one another*
 - i. You are the most vulnerable when there is intimacy between you.
 - ii. Determine which friends should be in your outer court, inner court and holy of holies.
 - iii. Don't allow someone who has demonstrated they are an outer court friend into your inner court or holy of holies.
- vi. **Beware of ungodly brethren**
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 5:9
 - a. Withdraw yourself from people who are committed to rebellion.
 - i. A person who refuses to repent is committed to rebellion.
 - b. Stick with people who are committed to pursuing godliness.
 - i. Move away from people who refuse to repent (turn away from ungodly behavior).
 - c. Do not maintain friendships with ungodly Christians.
 - i. Their behavior will rub off on you.

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- d. The sin you fail to judge yourself of; will be responsible for your downfall.

3. **Thorny Ground**

There are 2 types of AD:

1. Stagnation
 - a. Exodus 16.15-20
 - i. God was concerned about their moving forward - their progress.
 - ii. Stagnation unaddressed migrates into regression.
2. Regression
 - a. Backsliding

Stagnations --> Regression --> Backslidden

Mark 4.1-9

***Wayside ground deals with hard things;
Stoney ground deals with superficial things;
Thorny ground deals with competing things.***

The girl knelt in the confessional and said, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." "What is it, my child?" "Father, I have committed the sin of vanity. several times a day I gaze at myself in the mirror and tell myself how beautiful I am." The priest turned, took a good look at the girl, and said, "My dear, I have good news. That isn't a sin - it's only a mistake."

Thorny Ground deals with competing things. While there is growth, due to the competition, we have a loss of growth.

I've discovered, that the way you prevent weeds from growing in your grass is to have to healthy lawn - A healthy lawn has a good root structure. With a good root structure,

the weed seeds cannot grow.

We have to be aware there are many things which are competing for our attention, but there are only a few things deserving our attention.

Because of a competition, it causes us to focus on other matters which become more important than God.

If you've ever said, "I cannot go to church because I'm too tired, your rest competed with your attendance at church"

Things which compete for our attention

1. *Worldly Ambitions*
 - a. Israel wanted a King, like everyone else, and it altered their relationship with God.
2. *Family Matters*
 - a. In Matthew 8:21-22, the disciple wanted to go home to bury his father, but Jesus said to follow Him and to let the dead bury their dead. Jesus wasn't trying to be harsh but wanted the man to prioritize things properly.
3. *Selfishness*
 - a. Take care of yourself first. Then if you have enough left over, then you can help someone else.

What happens when we continuously give in?

1. Loss of desire (intense craving) for God - Everything else becomes more important than our relationship with God, and therefore strangles it; allowing SAD to enter.
 - a. Psalms 27.4

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- i. What you desire - You seek - you intensively go after. So when we've lost our desire for God, then we don't go after Him.
 - 1. We've grown cold towards the things of God.
- b. 1 Peter 2.1

- i. 5 effects of Loss of Desire which contributes to SAD
 - 1. Affects how you view God
 - a. Zephaniah 1:12 (647)
 - 2. Generates slothfulness / Laziness
 - a. 2 aspects of slothfulness
 - i. Procrastination
 - 1. Genesis 19:15-16
 - a. Lot was slack, and it almost cost him and his family their lives; however the mercy of God saved them .
 - ii. Idleness
 - 1. Heb. 5.14
 - a. One way to have SAD is not to use what you have been given – not to exercise not to develop.

3. Indifferent

To be indifferent is to be unconcerned and uninterested and to live in a neutral position; content with present circumstances and unmotivated to reach new goals. The danger of indifference is that it leads to SAD.

- 4. Mis-prioritization
 - a. Other things become just as or more important.
 - i. Mt. 6.33
- 5. Extinguishes your fire

- a. Revelation 3:14-16

Why is maintaining our desire important?

Desire ignites the fires in us. It makes us itch for what we've never had enough of, hunger for something better than we have ever tasted and thirst for living waters we've never drank.

2. **Inability or Unwillingness to change**

a. **Transformation Principle**

- i. Afraid of Change
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 13.11

b. **Change is not easy; but it is possible.**

- i. In order to change, you must change your mind, ideas and attitudes.
 - 1. Romans 12:1-2
- ii. Make small changes and begin to develop your confidence in your ability to change.
- iii. For Christians, change should be a lifestyle. Consider some the language for the church...
 - 1. Repent
 - 2. Renew
 - 3. Reconciled
- iv. Change begins on the inside; allow Jesus to change your heart.
- v. Submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and He will help you change.
- vi. Realize you can't change other people. Focus on allowing God to change you.

c. **There are three reasons why people don't desire to change.**

- i. Fear that they can't change.
 - 1. If you are afraid, change won't happen, because you won't initiate the process.
 - 2. Know that you have the power to change
 - a. 2 Timothy 1:7

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- ii. They perceive the need for change as an admission of weakness.
 - 1. People don't want to admit their weaknesses, so they deceive themselves into thinking they don't need to change.
 - 2. It takes a strong person to look at themselves and admit they need to change.
 - iii. People don't want to unsettle things in their lives.
 - 1. Sometimes, you have to stir things up in order to initiate change in your life.
 - 2. Don't live a life of mediocrity because you are unwilling to change.
- d. **Sometimes, it will look like things are getting worse before they get better.**
- i. It is not uncommon for things to look worse when you make a decision to change.
 - ii. When those things you want to change seem to be getting worse, you know you are headed for a breakthrough.