



2019 Lenten Focus on Spiritual Maturity
Suttons Bay Congregational Church

10 Marks of a Mature Christian

By Frank Powell

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What spiritual maturity is not:

Spiritual maturity is not about age.

Similar to the bumper sticker that says, “I might be getting older, but I will never grow up.” Spiritual maturity takes time, energy and effort, but it is possible to be a 50- or 60-year-old spiritual baby.

Spiritual maturity is not about achievements.

“Dude, you read through the Bible 25 times? Oh, you memorized the entire book of James? Wow, you can say the books of the Bible in 12 languages ... backwards? Are you serious? ... You have a Ph.D. in Religion from Harvard?”

Those accomplishments are impressive, but they aren’t necessarily marks of a spiritually mature person. Remember, the Pharisees knew a lot of Scripture and had a trophy room full of achievements.

Spiritual maturity is not about appearance.

There are people who “look the part.” In football, this is called “passing the eye test.” Tall. Big hands. Rocket arm. But many guys who pass the eye test aren’t good football players. Similarly, there are many Christians who “pass the eye test.” But this isn’t an indication of spiritual maturity.

So, what is spiritual maturity? There are potentially hundreds of markers. So, understand the following markers aren’t a checklist. They aren’t exhaustive. They provide a framework for spiritual maturity.

No one ever fully matures spiritually. But we must journey on the road to maturity, and while we journey, there are marks that help us determine where we are.

10 marks of what spiritual maturity is . . .

1) The highs and lows of life don’t impact your relationship with God.

I love roller coasters. My favorite part is ascending to the apex, stalling for a moment or two, then taking a free fall only to begin the next ascension. What makes roller coasters awesome is the constant rise and fall. But this is not what makes Christianity awesome. I have seen too many people live for the mountaintop experience. They are up, then down. They are all in, then all out. They have an emotional high (conversion experience, weekend retreat, etc.), but when the high wears off, so does their relationship with God.

Mature Christians don’t ride a spiritual roller coaster. They are consistent. They do not allow the highs and lows of life to impact their walk with God. They are consistent. Oh, yes, they celebrate the mountaintop moments, but they do not rely on those moments to sustain their faith.

2) You find value in the “daily-ness” and trivial seasons of life.

BE PATIENT IN THE MUNDANE ACTIVITIES OF LIFE. GOD IS STILL WORKING. WHATEVER YOU DO IN SECRET, GOD WILL REVEAL IN PUBLIC. —Christine Caine

I call this the iPhone complex. It is an exhausting mentality where someone lives every day waiting for the next big thing. We love the iPhone ... until the next year when the new one comes out that is basically the same phone.

Similarly, so many people love their church or situation in life ... until the church down the road is doing new awesome stuff or until their current situation loses its luster.

When nothing “awesome” is happening, many Christians leave or give up. They believe every day is supposed to be a day when God rocks the world. Mature Christians understand the value in mundane and trivial seasons.

3) You are at peace with situations beyond your control.

I argue this is one of the most underrated marks of spiritual maturity. Just turn on the TV and you probably see sensationalized stories about ISIS, the downward spiral of our country and everything in between. Are we living in dark days? Absolutely. Are the acts carried out by ISIS and other terror organizations awful? Beyond awful, they are heinous.

But mature Christians don't allow the latest buzz on the news to derail their lives. They don't waste time worrying and freaking out over situations beyond their control.

They pray hard. They act on the situations they can control. But they don't allow a second of their day to be wasted on conspiracy theories or sensationalized new stories.

God is sovereign over everything. That includes ISIS. That includes the apparent downfall of America. And as long as God is sovereign, there is no reason to freak out.

4) You don't allow disciplines to take a back seat.

IT NEVER FAILS. IF I REFLECT ON A SEASON OF MY LIFE WHERE I DID NOT FEEL CLOSE TO GOD, THERE WAS ONE CONSTANT: SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WERE LACKING OR NONEXISTENT.

Meditation. Bible study. Prayer. Solitude. Worship. Community. Confession. Fasting. These are non-negotiable for spiritual maturity and continued intimacy with God. People who struggle with consistency and intimacy in their walk with God are the ones that constantly place everything ahead of God. Spiritually mature Christians do not allow time or busyness to be excuses. They find time. They create space. They make whatever sacrifices necessary to live a spiritually disciplined life.

5) You maintain a childlike sense of wonder and awe.

As adults, we have a tendency to lose our childlike sense of wonder toward the world and our surroundings. Maybe this is why Jesus told his disciples we must become like little children to inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). Children take risks. Children don't put up walls based on skin color. Children see the beauty and joy in life. Children find joy in eating Cheerios underneath the couch.

Mature Christians have a childlike nature. They don't easily become bored. They celebrate. They laugh. They don't put up walls. They view life as a gift. They see opportunity where others see failure. They have a healthy naivety.

Becoming a child doesn't mean you are immature. It means you refuse to accept the joyless, bored life that often associates adulthood.

6) You do not compare yourself to others.

You are trying to feel right by comparing yourself to others. It is ridiculous! Who told you there was anything wrong with you in the first place? Don't you know that a human is just a human?—Donald Miller

We live in a culture obsessed with looking at magazines and pictures of others and coveting their body, looks and position in life. Our culture-wants constantly try to drive us to be the next best whatever the ideal of the moment is, instead of being the person God designed us to be. This is toxic to joy and degrading to God. Comparison produces shame, bitterness and frustration.

Spiritually mature Christians understand reaching their full potential does not come from looking horizontally at the world, but looking vertically to God.

7) You listen to others who have a different viewpoint ... with the goal of growing and not correcting.

Spiritually mature Christians glean insight from everyone. They have conversations with atheists, Muslims, Buddhists, Catholics, Baptists and Pentecostals with the goal of learning.

This stands in stark contrast to some Christians who believe their job is to fix everyone who does not think like them. They are the spiritual "fix it" people who never leave home without their tool belt.

Mature Christians are convicted but not convinced. They understand their perspective is limited. They acknowledge God doesn't need spiritual police, God needs passionate followers. And followers are listeners. Followers are gleaners. Followers are convicted of their beliefs but are not so close-minded that everyone else is wrong. They understand listening to another viewpoint does not equate to condoning or accepting it.

8) Your heart breaks for the poor and marginalized.

Jesus loved everyone. But Jesus had a special love for the marginalized. Maybe more than any other mark, this mark forms the dividing wall between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus loved those without a voice. The poor. The sick. The helpless. The Pharisees only loved those who could help them.

Mature Christians understand this distinction. Their hearts genuinely break for those in the world who don't have a voice. Their hearts hurt for the poor. They can't stand to see kids at school get picked on. They can't stand to think about boys and girls without parents. This is the heart of Christ. And it is the heart of mature Christians.

Mature Christians love those without a voice because they are close to God, and God is close to those without a voice.

9) You understand Christianity doesn't have an on/off switch.

Christian living does not have an “on/off” switch. Living for God is 24/7/365. Spiritually mature Christians do not find ways to compartmentalize God because God is not *part* of their life ... God is their life (see Romans 12:1-2).

Mature Christians are constantly aware of their surroundings. They are constantly aware of opportunities God is presenting them to disciple, share, love and comfort. Nothing is off limits. The grocery store. A restaurant. The church building. They believe God is always working, and they are not going to miss an opportunity.

10) You have a sustainable rhythm to your life.

Mature Christians are not workaholics or lazy slob. They are not underachievers or overachievers. They believe health is important. They find value in exercise. They find value in vacationing. They find value in a regular Sabbath. They find value in hobbies.

They understand living for Jesus and being the most effective servant possible means living holistically.

