

Spiritual Maturity

It would seem that the goal of every believer would be to achieve spiritual maturity – at least that is what the Lord expects of the believer. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). The acronym “PRIME” has helped others remember the basics essential for achieving spiritual maturity. Neglecting these areas of a believer's life will prevent spiritual maturity. They are as follows:

Prayer – consistent, meaningful, personal, persistent prayer. This includes bringing your petitions before the Lord, giving thanks, sharing your deepest needs, and maintaining your fellowship with God. *“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice”* (Psalms 55:17).

Reading – regular, organized reading and studying of God's word. *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (II Timothy 2:15).

Instruction – search for personal instruction the Lord has placed into His scriptures for you. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

Meditation and Memorization – the letter “M” has two “humps” and represents two principles in this acronym. Meditate on the scriptures – reviewing in your mind their meaning, the way they fit in with the central truths of God's word, and the way they apply to the current situations of your life - and memorize those that stand out to you. *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success”* (Joshua 1:8). *“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all”* (I Timothy 4:15). *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalms 119:11).

Exercise – live what you know from God's word. *“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee”* (I Timothy 4:16). *“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Hebrews 5:14).

This approach seems simple enough, and indeed it is when practiced out of a devotion to God. However, we can see from Hebrews 5:12, 13 that spiritual maturity is neither automatic, nor is it achieved by the simple passing of time as physical maturity is achieved. *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”* Note the disturbing implication that some believers “lose ground”, i.e. return to the need for milk – “are become such as have need of milk” – when they would have been capable of something more. The question then is, if we have understood God's personal call to holiness and have responded

with a life committed to service to Him, what goes wrong in a believer's life when spiritual maturity is absent? The scriptures give several reasons.

We cripple our spiritual maturity when we allow the fervency of our "first love" to fade, not remembering the preciousness of the Lord and His blessings as we first received them. *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"* (Revelations 2:4).

The parable of the sower identifies trouble areas for believers, though the parable describes a more drastic outcome. These trouble areas are an unwillingness to endure hardship and a preoccupation with the things of this world. Consider the impact that the North American culture of ease and a multitude of demands on our time and attention have on those who would seek spiritual maturity. *"Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful"* (Matthew 13:21, 22).

Some believers simply ignore the clear voice of the Holy Spirit. *"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing"* (Hebrews 5:11).

Ultimately, believers are responsible for their own lack of spiritual maturity. *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed"* (James 1:14).

Seeing these scriptures, and their application to today's world, we might wonder what can be done to foster greater maturity. Here are a few answers.

The most encouraging response is that God himself has our spiritual interests at heart and helps us along towards maturity. *"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit"* (John 15:2). Note that the purging process may be painful and may not be our first idea of how God should "bless" us. However, it produces God's perfect work in our lives. *"And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord"* (Jeremiah 23:4). God provides for the needs of His sheep through His shepherds. *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come"* (John 16:13). God sent His Holy Spirit to lead us into "all truth" (maturity). Additionally, when we repent for spiritual indifference, the Lord also knows how to nurture the weak and to restore the damage done by neglect. *"A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory"* (Matthew 12:20). *"And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm..."* (Joel 2:25).

A believer must consistently practice self-examination, as emphasized in the Lord's instructions regarding preparation for communion. *"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup...For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged"* (I Corinthians 11:28, 31).

A sign of a maturing believer is an increasingly accurate understanding of God's view of unrighteousness. This leads to confessions even from men whom God spoke highly of, as in Daniel 9 and Job 42:1-6.

A believer must not be satisfied with the traps of complacency and apathy, nor with remaining at their current status of spiritual maturity, nor with anything less than the fullest spiritual blessings God intended for him. Instead, he must fervently serve the Lord. *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6). *"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God"* (Ephesians 3:16-19).

There is more that could be written on this subject. However, I would like to leave you with this promise found in God's word: the key to spiritual maturity is follow-through. *"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (II Peter 1:8).

Truth for our Time is prepared by the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) Communications Committee. Comments or questions can be directed to: ACCNcommunications@gmail.com