

A person is walking on a sandy beach at sunset. The sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and blue. The ocean is visible in the background, and the person is walking away from the viewer towards the water.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

4 Critical Stages of Growth

'No prolonged infancies among us, please... God wants us to grow up...' Ephesians 4:14-15 (MSG)

When we accept Jesus as saviour, we start the journey of growing up in Him so we can look more and more like Him. This means that from God's perspective, a believer's maturity is not hinged on how long ago the person accepted Jesus as saviour, but how much that person looks like Jesus – not in the physical sense, but in character, desires, ambitions, fulfilment of purpose among others.

As with growing in the natural, growing up spiritually is a lifelong journey and this journey can be broken into 4 main stages. Our prayer is that as we explore these stages, we recognize where we are and by the help of the Holy Spirit, partner with Him to grow up into Christ.



Day 1 New-born

“Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3

At the point of accepting Jesus, a transformation occurs instantly in the spirit. but the transformation of the mind and character isn't instant. The physical body and mind just start making the journey of leaving the old ways. Hence new believers are likened to newborn babies.

Babies must be carefully handled and nurtured, they're not equipped to productively engage with the world they've been born into as they don't yet have the capacity for independence. Similarly, new believers don't yet know how to manoeuvre in the things of the spirit and so require a lot of support. People need to follow up on them to ensure they're frequenting a gathering of believers who will help nurture their spiritual growth, and that they're praying and being fed with the word of God. If the support system is cut off at this stage, the new believer may go back to his/her old ways - what is often called backsliding.

“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,” 1 Peter 2:2 NLT

The same way physical babies can put just anything in their mouth or depend on anyone good or bad, baby believers are highly susceptible to deception and wrong teaching because their discernment hasn't been developed yet. This is why new believers need an accountability system, regardless of whatever gifting they have been given by the Holy Spirit.

It would be dangerous and unfair to leave new believers to their own devices without any support. Just as the right nutrition is important to help a baby develop properly, new believers need the right spiritual environment consisting of the true word of God, a healthy prayer life focused on getting to know God and service with a desire to please God not men. This is where we all start, but this isn't where we're supposed to remain. As we receive the right nourishment, we move to the next stage.

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for the gift of salvation. Help me to desire true nourishment so I can develop properly.



Day 2 Childhood

“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” I Corinthians 13:11

Unlike newborns, children have some form of independence and are able to take on responsibility commensurate to their level of development. However, there’s a manner in which children think, reason and act, which Apostle Paul notes is different from the way mature people think, reason and act. So even if a child is involved in the same activity as a mature adult, the child may not have the full understanding of what and why they’re doing what they’re doing.

'And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.' Luke 2:42,46

Childhood is a critical nourishment period as it's at this stage that we allow ourselves to receive the spiritual diet, trainings and disciplines that create the foundation our maturity can spring up from. Children want only the nice things, but responsible adults know it's not healthy to be brought up on sweet things only. This means we will have to allow ourselves to be accountable to Godly leadership who will encourage, motivate and also chastise us where necessary so we come out better. As we mature we should also start taking on more personal responsibility for our development and start imbibing disciplines that enable us stay connected to the Lord even if no one prompts us.

'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.' Luke 2:52

Jesus had to be intentional about growing up spiritually, spending time in the right environment and developing His character. The danger of not being intentional about our development is that we can remain “old babies” that are born again but not schooled in the things of the kingdom of God. This opens us up to a lot of avoidable error and also causes confusion for others because we may claim Christ but behave exactly like those who do not. We also will not yet have the capacity to effectively carry and utilize the power available to us through the Holy Spirit because we won't fully understand who He is and who we are in Him if we don't spend time on the right spiritual “diet”.

Prayer: Lord help me as I become intentional about my spiritual growth

Day 3 Young Adult

'For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.' Hebrews 5:12-13

The thrust of this stage isn't being able to accurately recite scripture or become Bible scholars but developing a level of familiarity with the word of God and allowing it to transform us such that we begin showing His character as we exhibit the fruit of the spirit – the true nature of Christ. As young adults we start building up the capacity for taking responsibility not just for ourselves, to the extent that we can share and explain the principles of our faith with those less mature and work with them on their journey of maturity.

We can also gauge our maturing into adulthood by what we permit to take up our time, our appetite for the things of the kingdom of God and what we give attention to. We can tell if we're still children if all our prayer content and ambitions are focused on ourselves, our needs and what makes us happy alone. Growth means we stop being spectators and become participants in the things of the kingdom of God. Important to note that this isn't about physical activity – many spiritual babies can be active in service without truly being transformed inwardly by the Holy Spirit.

'Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...' 2 Corinthians 13:5

Let's ask ourselves some probing questions to determine where we are right now. Is walking with God something that has become our daily lifestyle or an activity we reserve for Sundays or whichever day of the week we choose to go to church? How often in a 24hour period do we think about Jesus and the things that are important to Him? Have we ever genuinely prayed for someone/people for a situation that will not benefit us at all? Have we intentionally denied ourselves of something so we can keep our bodies in check? Can we point to areas of our character that have improved since we became believers?

Prayer: Lord I appreciate how far you have brought me. Help me to keep maturing in Christ.

Day 4 Maturity

'... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.' Ephesians 3:19

Spiritual maturity isn't a destination, but a different phase in the journey. In the earlier stages, we may have been interested in the outward trappings of demonstrations of power, material increase etc, but at maturity we understand that God is more interested in the inner man and how much of Christ we reflect. As our ability to reflect more of Jesus is a direct function of how much we have set 'self' aside and allowed the Holy Spirit to take over, as He takes over, we increase in love, understanding, wisdom, capacity and so much more.

'while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' 2 Corinthians 4:18

The spiritually mature person understands critical principles: life is spiritual; the spiritual controls the natural, the natural is temporary while the spiritual is eternal. These principles sound basic but as we mature spiritually, they transform the way we live, what we choose to pursue and what we prioritize. As we mature spiritually our reward/success measurement system is based on what God says about us and not the applause of men. The spiritually mature person has learned how to die to self.

'I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.' I Corinthians 15:31

'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...' Philippians 3:14-15

Spiritual maturity isn't forced upon us, it's the result of choices we make every day. When Paul talked about dying daily, he clearly wasn't talking about his physical body. He chose to die to self (his needs, desires, etc) daily, so that Christ would reign in him. When we choose to live for Jesus, the Holy Spirit strengthens us because it would be impossible to do this in our own strength. So even if we may make mistakes, we can still choose not to remain in that state and keep pushing forward for more of Christ until by His grace, we are filled with all His fullness.

Prayer: Lord help me as I choose to strive for spiritual maturity.

Day 5

Babes to Adults

'No prolonged infancies among us, please... God wants us to grow up...' Ephesians 4:14-15 (MSG)

We all start as newborns in the spirit, but we aren't supposed to remain at that stage. We mature spiritually as a result of deliberate, consistent actions on our part as we choose to let the Holy Spirit work in us to make whatever changes are necessary. The renewing of our minds and transformation of our character to be like Jesus is a journey that can only be made in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

'But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.' 1 Corinthians 9:27

As physical disciplines are important for proper development in our natural life, likewise spiritual disciplines are critical to the development of our spirits. Development won't just happen simply because we have been born again for a long time. Sadly many who are still babies believe they are mature simply because of the number of years they have been born again.

'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' 2 Timothy 2:15

Diligent of the study of the word, prayer and fasting are non-negotiable if we truly want our spirit to develop as each has a role to play in our transformation process. However as with all things spiritual, it's not about the physical activity alone, but ensuring we are allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us, and that we obey His instructions.

'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.' John 15:5

Babies focus on the gifts of the Spirit, but the spiritually mature focus on the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), because the true evidence of our maturity is the amount of Christ we reflect to the world. Spiritual maturity is not about titles, etc but how much of Christ we carry. We're all on a journey and are at various stages of growing into who God designed us to be. May God's grace keep us striving for continued maturity in Him.

Prayer: Lord help me as I commit to being diligent on my journey of maturity. I ask for the grace to partner with the Holy Spirit to transform me so I can be strengthened and mature more and more daily (2 Cor 4:16)



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