

How God Makes Men: The Principle of Spiritual Maturity

Unedited Transcript

Colossians 1:28-29, Ephesians 4:11-16, Luke 8:14-15, Philippians 3:12-17

Good morning, men! Welcome to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study where we always have room for one more guy! Let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning. We have a new group that's joining us in Texas, some guys at the First United Methodist Church in Littlefield, TX. 7 men meeting on Saturday mornings at 8:00 am using the video Bible Study. Ken Bundy is their leader and we want to welcome you men, so would you guys join me in giving a big, rousing welcome to the men from First United Methodist Church in Littlefield? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys! We're glad to have you as part of the Bible Study.

We're in this series called *How God Makes Men*. Why do you come to this Bible Study on Friday morning? Why do we come to this Bible Study? Your wife makes you? That's a good reason! But one of the other reasons that you come to this Bible Study is that all week long you are subjected to a constant flow of triviality, banality, deceptions, people whispering things and this sort of husk builds up around us. A husk of indifference. It's how we repel the world. We come to this place to break off that husk. Hopefully for you it's not like the husk around a coconut, but more like the husk or shell around an egg. That way you can crack it off easily and get back to who you really are! We come here on a regular basis because if we don't, that soft shell that builds up around us actually hardens and becomes like the tough husk of a coconut. Today what I want us to do is look at some of the things that stunt our growth and maturity. We're going to answer the question what is spiritual maturity and we're going to look at what makes spiritual immaturity. Then, I'm going to give you some gauges that you can put on your life's dashboard to help you monitor this desire to become spiritually mature.

What is Spiritual Maturity?

The title of the message is Spiritual Maturity, so first let's answer the question what is spiritual maturity? You should be at Colossians 1:28. If you don't have a Bible that's fine. Look on with someone. Most men tend to be visual, not auditory learners, so it's a good idea to be able to actually look at these things together. Since the subject of spiritual maturity is so broad, there's so many ways to talk about and define it, I thought it would be best to look at the Bible and give you a clear Biblical target for how to think about this. The first thing we want to look at is really Paul's life purpose statement. This is Paul saying this is the reason I exist. He goes into a few other ideas about it beginning at verse 24, but at verse 28 he ends up saying this:

... we proclaim him (being Jesus), admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

How many of you when I read the words "so that we can be fully mature," how many of you have a different word in your Bible translation? If so, call it out. Perfect, complete. Anything else? Those are

usually the ways this word comes out. It's *teleos*, a word that comes from the root word *telos* in Greek and it has to do with a goal, meeting the goal, the end. The idea that this Greek word is rendered usually as mature or complete or perfect... It's interesting, perfect, because I use the NIV 1984 version and it does render it as perfect. I read it in the NIV 2011 version and the translators changed some things. I don't know much about the etymology of words, but I do know as time progresses that the meanings of words shift in the popular culture. The word perfect doesn't really help me understand what Paul was trying to get at here, but when it's rendered as fully mature, I get that! What does it mean to be mature? It means to not be like my children! Or not my grandchildren. I have two grandchildren in town this week. They say folly is bound up in the heart of a child. You love them in their immaturity, it doesn't change your love for them, but as a grandparent and as a parent, we are committed to do what? To help them become mature! And our Father in heaven is committed to help us become mature! You know that with your own kids that becoming mature means giving them skills, giving them understanding. Helping them to develop wise thinking, morale thinking. These are the things that constitute maturity for kids, and they also constitute maturity for us. 1 Corinthians 13, when I was a child I thought like a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things. So maturity has everything to do with this idea of acquiring these skills that we need to be the men that not only we want to be but also the men God created us to be.

One more thing about Colossians 1:28. If this is Paul's purpose, and Paul, it could be argued, is the second greatest theologian after Jesus. If you took away the writings of Paul, you pretty much wouldn't understand how to live your life, bottom line. If this is his purpose, then when you are interacting with your Paul, that person or persons who are discipling you, then one thing you should be looking for in your Paul is somebody whose life purpose is similar to this Paul. Someone who's committed to use all of their energy, the power of Christ in them, using that to bring you up, to pull you out, to encourage you, to give you this skill, to be spiritually mature. And, when you are in the role of Paul, when you are helping someone, this is what you should be doing! You should be trying to pull them up, to encourage them, to give them this maturity.

Turn with me now to Ephesians 4:11. Paul again is writing and he says:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Christ likeness. Another way of thinking about maturity is Christ likeness. We've talked in previous messages of this series about Romans 8:29, how we're predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. All these things are going on. Let's look at the problem this maturity solves, verse 14:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Verse 15:

Instead, speaking the truth in love...

All week long we have this deceitful scheming, these hollow, deceptive philosophies, and this husk is built up around us. When we pursue this spiritual maturity, then we are no longer like that. That's not a bad way for spiritual maturity to happen either. I've said before when I am preparing the messages, I look for whether the men need a hug or do they need a kick in the pants. Usually, you want to do a little

bit of each, but when you get a kick in the pants, you've never heard me say that because I'm angry, or because I think God is so angry. Speaking the truth in love. I also use the idea step on their toes while you make them laugh. So sometimes we use humor to get these points across, but the main point is love without truth is of no value to you. In that same way, truth without love doesn't have great value either. So speaking the truth in love, this is our method. To finish out the verse:

... we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Turn with me now to Luke 8:14. I was working on this this morning, doing the final preparations, and I was just overwhelmed. Do you have those moments where you're in the scriptures and you just get overwhelmed? The awe it inspires, for different reasons, and for me this morning it was just thinking about how cohesive and the congruity of the scriptures. Just how they all come together. There are really no conflicts when you understand what's going on. It's so cohesive! In Luke we see in 8:14 that the seed that fell among the thorns (the word of God) stands for those who hear, but as they go away they are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. That's another way of talking about this husk around us; life's worries, riches and pleasures. All week long, every day, we're exposed to these things. So you come here, you go to your church, you go to your private devotions. But these seeds, they do not mature. So that's one good way of defining spiritual immaturity, being choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. Being tossed to and fro by every different kind of deceitful thinking. Then verse 15 says this:

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

This is a great way to think about spiritual maturity. You hear the word, your heart is poised towards God, and you retain what you hear. You're not like the man that looks in the mirror and going away forgets what he looks like. You persevere because you've seen God work many times before, and you produce a crop. You produce fruit! So another way of looking at spiritual maturity is that there is fruit in your life! You can look around and their's fruit in your life.

One more verse and then I'll back off the scripture a little bit, but this is what we need to be doing. Turn with me to Philippians 3. You know the old story about the businessman who's being interviewed and they said you have this amazing reputation for having such good judgment. That would be another way of talking about spiritual maturity, having good judgment. They asked how did you acquire such good judgment? And he said, bad judgment. Spiritual maturity is a process, and that's what we see here in Philippians 3, beginning at verse 12:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things.

This is the viewpoint of the mature. I don't have it all yet, but I know what it is to be mature. Even though I don't have it, I press on to take hold of the prize. That's the view we should take on such things:

And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

Can you imagine? Can you imagine what it would be like to be able to say follow my example? A lot of you are already doing that, or would feel very comfortable saying to another man follow my example. But I am also guessing that a lot of us are not quite there yet, because our progress and spiritual maturity were just not quite there yet. How can you know with confidence that you have enough spiritual maturity? Paul has given us a kind of litmus test that you can give yourself to find where you are on this continuum of spiritual maturity. I think it's right here when he says follow my example, and that's the Big Idea for today: **You are closing in on spiritual maturity when you can say to another man, "Follow my example."** This is not the only place where Paul talks about this. 1 Corinthians 11:1, he amplifies on this thought. He says, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. I would never say to you follow my example period, instead he is saying follow my example in as much as I follow Christ. He's not saying follow me into sin, but follow me in my pursuit of Christ likeness. Can you do this fully? Follow Christ in such a way that people will want to follow your example? Can you do that fully? No way! Never in a million years! Even Paul said I don't do what I want to do, and what I don't want to do I do! Can you do this sufficiently? Enough to set an example? Absolutely! Absolutely you can! But you have to remember the flesh, the old man you were, it's like a piece of string. You cut it in half and throw half away, but half is left. Then as you continue to grow, you cut the string in half again and now you have a shorter piece. Eventually, you'll cut that too, but no matter how far you progress and how many cuts you make, there is always something left of the old. There is this humility that comes with follow my example, but that is a powerful litmus test for your spiritual maturity.

Why Is Spiritual Maturity Such A Struggle?

Why is spiritual maturity such a struggle? You know the reasons, but I'll give you Luke 8:14, life's worries, riches, and pleasures. They choke the word, and make it unfruitful. Colossians 2:8 says see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human traditions and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Then we also know we are in a spiritual battle, Ephesians 6:12, our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, principalities, and all that of this dark world. You can get stuck when you are out in the world and you begin favoring life's worries, riches, and pleasures. You begin favoring hollow and deceptive philosophies. That's why you keep coming here, that's why you keep going to your church. You are going to church right? If you're not going to church, don't tell me, just start doing that! We're not a church, this is a Bible Study. Be there! Just do it!

How will you know when you've gone on to maturity? One way to do that is to look at this idea of being able to say to another man, follow my example. Spiritual maturity; what is that? That's the whole Bible, so how do you talk about the whole Bible in one talk? You don't. I just think that this is a real nice litmus test, it just roles up everything about spiritual maturity into one idea. If I can't say to you follow my example, the reason I can't say that to you is because there's something about me that I don't think is fully in Christ.

5 Gauges You Can Mount On Your Dashboard

Last up, five gauges to mount on your dashboard. In nature, the white wolf chases the caribou calf, but the caribou is able to outrun the white wolf. The odds are even, because either the caribou will make a mistake and the wolf will catch it, or after one mile the white wolf will stop chasing the caribou. What these five gauges are is that they're a way to make sure you don't slip and lose your footing when the wolf is chasing you. I decided to use the weekly one hour accountability checkup, a wallet sized card, and give you each two copies on your tables. One for yourself, and one for whoever else you think may need it. I was thinking maybe you could go over these once a week with someone you meet with regularly.

1. Spiritual Life

The first gauge is your spiritual life. I'm not going to go through the questions on here, you can look at these yourself. Just remember this, to be spiritually mature, you have to have the right information. If that's all it was, then you all would be spiritually mature, and there would be no reason to get together and meet. So there's more than just having the right information, but it is a starting point. Being in God's word and pursuing the knowledge of God.

2. Home Life

Home life is the second gauge. You can look at the questions there.

3. Work Life

Work life is the third.

4. Ministry Life

Ministry Life. I decided that I'm going to redo this card and add this fourth category of Ministry Life. Under here, I'm going to put making disciples. What have you done this week to call someone to live Christ? To equip someone to live like Christ? Or to send someone to live for Christ?

5. Critical Concerns

And then different critical concerns like integrity, thought life, and so forth. Everybody has variances on what these might be.

Here it is, every single one of us have experienced enough sorrow in our circumstances that no one would blame us if we were a victim. But to be a victor is a choice, not a circumstance. It's a choice you make, and using these five gauges, by taking a look at them on a regular basis... You don't have to use it, you can stick it in your Bible and keep it as a reminder if you want, but this will give you a way to look at these things. This is not something I just dashed off yesterday. This weekly one hour accountability checkup has been in existence for twenty-five years. Actually a little longer. There are hundreds of thousands of these cards that have been distributed all over the world. This is not simply the idea of the week, but of the quarter century. When I developed this card, I took a friend to breakfast and gave it to him and asked would you look this over and give me your opinion? He took it and read the front very thoughtfully and turned it over and read the back. Then he just sat there staring at the card for what seemed like a long time. Then, kind of emotionally, he said isn't it interesting that everything a man needs to know to be spiritually mature and keep his life on track will fit on the front and back of a wallet

sized card? The Big Idea today: **You are closing in on spiritual maturity when you can say to another man, "Follow my example."** You pay attention to the gauges, you outrun the white wolf, and you don't lose your footing. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, thank you for all that you have said in your word about maturity and immaturity, and just this little idea that Paul has said repeatedly, saying to people follow my example. Lord, I know that when I first read that, I thought what an arrogant thing to say! But now I see Lord that in the process of becoming more spiritually mature ourselves that you humble us, you make us into disciples, stewards, servants, and Biblical Christians. We want others to experience this, because of the joy we have in you, what we have experienced for ourselves. Lord I pray for my brothers here and online, I pray that you would help each of us come to that point of maturity where we can say follow my example as I follow the example of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen!