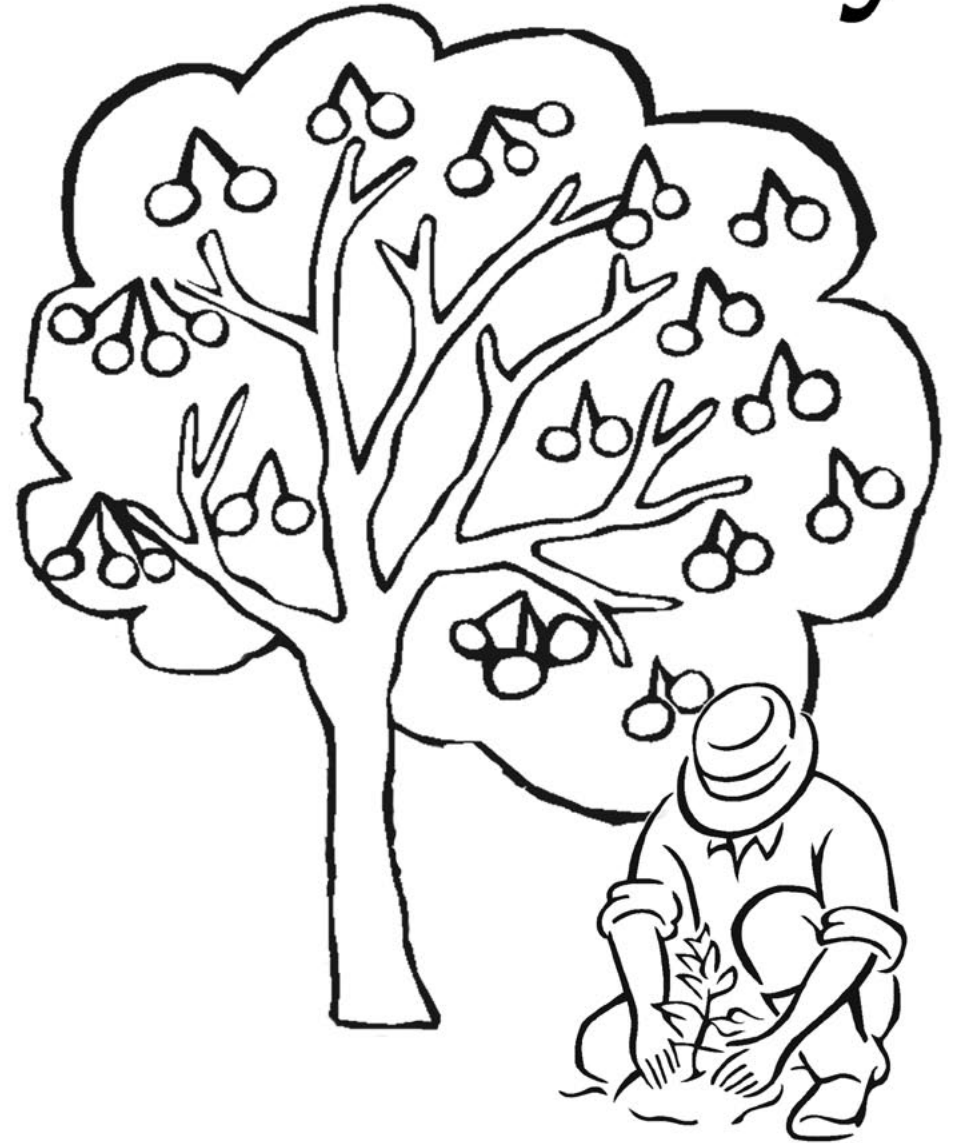


Levels of Maturity



As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
P.O. Box 68309, Indianapolis, IN 46268 USA.

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Levels of Maturity

in regard to loving and obeying
the Truth of God

I'd like to suggest, briefly, some earmarks of those that are, and are not,
positioning themselves to be most fruitful and to receive God's fullest
blessings in this life. These "levels" certainly aren't comprehensive, yet
in regard to this one aspect of "loving the Truth," I believe that you'll
find them practical and beneficial.

*"Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man,
and he will love you."* Proverbs 9:8

*"A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, nor will he go to
the wise."* Proverbs 15:12

"Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed."
Proverbs 27:5

*"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy
are deceitful."* Proverbs 27:6

“He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.” Proverbs 28:23

“He who is often reproved, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” Proverbs 29:1

“They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.” Amos 5:10

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16

“... Those perish because they refused to love the truth that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.” 2 Corinthians 7:10-11

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort {warn, admonish, urge, encourage, ‘Holy Spirit’} one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Hebrews 3:12-13

It goes without saying that, Biblically, if a man won't hear the Word of God, he has no hope (John 12:48; Luke 16:31; Mat.7:21; John 10:3-4). Yet, it is also true that we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ” with “ever-increasing Glory.”

Below are some “road signs” along that Journey into “the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ,” that you might check your progress.

1
At our earliest stages of development we may not see at all the very basics of “putting to death the misdeeds of the body” and living as God called us to, “as sojourners and pilgrims, abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” We do not see the shallow and selfish life that obstructs our friendship with God and isolates us from one another. As helpless newborns (or still at that level after many months or years) we are nearly uncorrectable by God or God's people. When someone brings us the Word of God that God meant for our “reproof, correction, and training in righteousness” and applies it to our lives, at this infantile stage we may be too dense to see it at all. Or maybe we will just see it “in the mirror,” very, very dimly.

We do, of course, like to sing and pray and “fellowship” and have “devotionals”—but no one should have the right to louse all of that up by getting “personal.” “We just need to have the ‘christian spirit’” is the oft-heard protest of the infant. (In other words, complacency, sin and unfruitfulness are preferable to the cost of changing our priorities and tearing down our idols. After all, “everyone else is doing it too—we're all just sinners. I love to have things my way, so don't bug me or I'll go tell everyone that you're judging me and legalistic.”)

This is infancy at best, and, often, it is more accurately an unregenerate, unsaved man or woman's response. Though many are religious enough to go to Bible classes, or even well-studied enough to teach Bible classes, that is not evidence in any way that a person is a Christian (Luke 13:3, 24-30; 14:33; Mat.7:21-23). Is a person simply a “newborn” in need of diaper changes and tender care, or are they unconverted or “stillborn?” The test of whether this person is in infancy or one that is not truly a christian at all (but thinks they are because they are religious) is whether or not they continue to move

up this “ladder” of maturity. Some “love the Truth, and so are saved.” Others will go only as far as is convenient, and “so are not.”

2 At this next level of maturity, we still will not see the foolishness or ungodliness of our idols or vices or attitudes by ourselves. We still reject most everything that challenges us face to face. Challenging “sermons” are OK from a pulpit, but “How dare you say anything specific to my face. You’re judging. Get the log out of your own eye.” These and other means of carnal defensiveness are the rule at this level as well. Yet later, an event, a conversation, a crisis or something allows the truth of the issue to shine through, and we are dropped to our knees. (2Cor.7:10-11; 2Sam.12:1-17; and Mark 14:72 are examples of this). We know that if we refuse to “agape the truth” God will “send a powerful delusion.” We know that if we don’t “cast down imaginations,” Satan will build a “stronghold” in our hearts (2Cor.10:4-6).

I hope you can say with all your heart: “That defensiveness is not for me. I’m a child of the Living God and ‘the sheep know the Shepherd’s voice!’ I’ll move anywhere, sell everything, change anything He calls me to change!”

There is, by the way, no embarrassment in being a child (functioning in these early stages). The only failure would be to stay in unproductive fantasy and infancy. Where you are is OK -- but get movin’!

3 When we have grown up to this point, we are wise to the fact that “He who is often reprov’d, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” Now, though we still don’t “see it” and aren’t necessarily in agreement just yet, we do understand the necessity of receiving openly a word from God through His “earthen vessels,” or any other manner He chooses to utilize. His word is always “living and active; Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” At this stage of

growth I may not understand fully what’s at stake, but I’m certainly not going to forfeit my future by rejecting instantly everything that is not as palatable as I would like. I know it is for my good -- I just don’t see it clearly. I’m not gullible and I don’t “roll over and play dead” like someone’s dog, but I am very aware (at last!) of my limited vision. I recognize the fruit of being moldable and “equipped for the works of the ministry” by others with more experience in Christ and intimacy with the Father than I. I’ve been an infant all along (no one skips infancy), but this is the first time that I realized it!

While I still may not see it at the time the event occurs, sometime later the correction that I’ve received from within the “priesthood of believers” or via some other means, hits me hard. While in prayer, or in a time of sharing with others, like a tidal wave it crashes over me. “Ohhh. NOW I see what they were saying and why that attitude (or action or ...) is so deadly! I am incredibly grateful that they were patient enough with my “blind side” to hang in there and love me into this. I hope I don’t forget this lesson and become impatient with those that I pour Christ into in the future!”

If that sounds ideal, it’s only because so few Christians have matured to this yet “lightweight” level! A Christian, by definition, “agape’s,” “loves the Truth.”

4 As our growth into “the full measure of the stature of Christ” progresses, we will become more sensitive to the possibility of breaking our “fellowship with the Holy Spirit” and actually “grieving” Him (making Him cry). Our knowledge of the principles of the Word of God and our history with God are increased to the extent that we can see during our time of rebellion or foolishness (temper-tantrum, talkativeness, boasting, laziness, flaunting our knowledge, flirting, self-hatred, fear, worldly jesting, etc.) that it is not Jesus Christ! We know full well that all of our needs are fully met in a love-affair with the Father in Jesus Christ. And yet, our will remains an unbridled beast. The momentum of the sin is greater than our desire, humility, and obedience. At this level we know we are violating God’s highest will while we are doing it. (This is the distinction from the previous

class.) Still, though, we are seemingly captives to the patterns of our previous lives, with its “futility of thinking.” In spite of the “flub,” our heart is fully turned to pleasing the Father and we take very seriously the falterings. (“What I do I hate,” said Paul of the failures that he encountered.) Our hearts are free, in the Name of Jesus Christ, of despair and condemnation—but full of the fire of the Holy Ghost to press higher!

We do not, must not, respond to please men or to “keep our image up,” to be recognized, appreciated or “promoted.” Before God Himself we passionately present our attitudes, motivations, imaginations and the will of our hearts for refining by the Father. To please Him, in view of men and angels. And all the demons of Hell’s pathetic army. “Get out of my way—in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth!”

“And do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transfigured by the renewing of your mind.”

5 This stage of development is characterized by the sensitivity to see what is not of the Spirit of Jesus, and then to have the courage and conviction to stop right in the middle of this violation of the “beauty of Holiness.” We’ll confess it and make it right—on the spot! In our tracks. On a dime.

This is generally socially unacceptable amongst the unsaved church-attenders, or spiritual infants. (“Well, I don’t think that it was really gossip. Can’t we talk about anything without you getting so self-righteous and judgmental?”)

Though never popular in institutional “religion,” it is mandatory to have this heart in spite of all...if we desire to go on with God.

6
“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Romans 8:13-14

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.’” John 5:19

“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.” John 12:49

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.” John 14:10

“The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints: God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations: which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory.” Colossians 1:26-27

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Hebrews 5:13-14

At this highest mortal plane of Life, our deep sensitivity to the Heart of God has equipped us to “taste” in advance those words that we are about to say, and the things we are about to do. We weigh them and hold them up to the light of the glorious Gospel that is made to shine “in the face of Jesus Christ.” Before indulging our flesh, we stop far short. As we envision pursuing a course of selfishness, or anger, or vanity, or deceitfulness, or lust, or immersing ourselves in

worldly entertainment or values, we feel in our hearts the impending grief of our Father and loss of Fellowship with Him and our brothers and sisters. We see in advance the imminent loss of that ability to open our eyes and our hearts fully to our brothers and sisters in the Faith. In our History with the Father, we have “exercised our Spiritual Senses” in walking under the Government of the Holy Spirit. We “experience” in advance the interruption of our intimacy and friendship and with the Creator-God and Jesus, His Son—if we were to continue on this animal course. We know that this is a far greater price to pay than the momentary gratification of any fleshly depravity that we might indulge in.

We welcome and appreciate more than ever before the continued input from our brothers and sisters regarding the holiness and fruitfulness of our lives. (And God will often allow us to be buffeted “that we might not become conceited.”) The pattern of our lives is very much single-minded, stable and drunk on the passion of God and consuming zeal for His House. We can say, as Paul “you know how holy, righteous and blameless we were in your midst,” and “you follow me as I follow Christ. {Let’s GO boys!}” The consistent character and fruitfulness and Glory of Jesus Christ is evident to all (Acts 6:3, 8-10; Eph.5:18; Jn.2:13-17; Col.1:26-27; Jn.14:12-14; Eph.3:10; Mat.16:18).

May the tribe of those “conformed to the family likeness of Jesus Christ” multiply and fill the earth, that Jesus might have “a Bride who has made herself ready!”

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

7
“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. “And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”
Romans 8:16-23

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”
1 John 3:2

(Yee-Hah!)