

## 207. Spiritual Fitness 2

By Arland Steen

Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>19</sup>*Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*

Ephesians 4:12 (Living Bible): *Building up the church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity.*

2 Corinthians 13:9 (Living Bible): *Our greatest wish and prayer is that you will become mature Christians.*

Ephesians 4:14 (Phillips): *We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching but we are meant to speak the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ.*

The New Testament is very clear that God's will for every believer is spiritual maturity. He wants us to grow up. The ultimate goal of spiritual growth is to become like Jesus. God's plan for us since the beginning has been for us to be like His Son and develop the character of Christ. The big question is: How does spiritual growth happen?

Last time we gave you three factors:

- Spiritual growth is intentional  
Any believer can grow to maturity if he or she will develop the habits necessary for spiritual growth. We need to take the mystery out of it by breaking the components down into practical, everyday habits. The path to spiritual fitness is as practical as the path to physical fitness.
- Spiritual growth is very practical
- Spiritual growth is a process that takes time – there are no shortcuts as it is a destiny at which you arrive.

Today we'll conclude with the three final factors:

### ④ **Spiritual maturity is demonstrated more by behavior than by beliefs**

The Christian life isn't just a matter of creeds and convictions; it includes conduct and character.

Beliefs must be backed up with behavior.

Our deeds must be consistent with our creeds.

Many people evaluate spiritual maturity solely on the basis of how well you can identify Bible characters, interpret Bible passages or quote Bible verses. Knowledge of the Bible is important to spiritual maturity, yet it is not the total measurement of it.

The NT repeatedly teaches that our actions and attitudes reveal our maturity more than our affirmations.

James 2:18 (New International Version): *Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith **by what I do.***

James 3:13 (New American Standard Bible): *Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior,*

If your faith hasn't changed your lifestyle, it isn't worth much. Paul believed in connecting belief and behavior.

In every one of his letters, he drives home the importance of practicing what we believe.

Ephesians 5:8 (Living Bible): *For though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it!*

Jesus said it most succinctly of all.

Matthew 7:16: *By their fruit you will recognize them.*

It is fruit, not knowledge, that demonstrates a person's maturity.

If we don't put into practice what we know, we foolishly "build a house on sand."

Matthew 7:24-27 <sup>24</sup>“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: <sup>25</sup>“and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup>“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: <sup>27</sup>“and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

### ⑤ Christians need relationships to grow.

We don't grow in isolation from others; we develop in the context of fellowship.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (New International Version): <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

God intends for us to grow up in a family. The Bible teaches that fellowship is not optional for believers; it is mandatory. Christians that are not connected in loving relationships with other believers are disobeying the “one another” commands given in the Word. There are 58 of them:

Through love serve one another	Galatians 5:13
Therefore receive one another	Romans 15:7
Forgiving one another	Colossians 3:13
Bearing with one another	Colossians 3:13
Bear one another's burdens	Galatians 6:2
Be kindly affectionate to one another	Romans 12:10
In honor giving preference to one another	Romans 12:10
Admonish one another	Romans 15:14
Submitting to one another	Ephesians 5:21
Comfort each other and edify one another	1 Thessalonians 5:11

John tells us that the proof that we are walking in the light is that we have *fellowship with one another* (1 John 1:7). If you're not having regular fellowship with other believers you should seriously question whether or not you are really walking in the light.

1 John 4:21 *He who loves God must love his brother also.*

### □ It takes a variety of spiritual experiences with God to produce spiritual maturity.

Genuine spiritual maturity includes:

- having a heart that adores God and worships Him,
- building and enjoying quality relationships,
- becoming a genuine disciple of His,
- using your gifts and talents in service to others
- and, exerting godly influence wherever you go.

Any church strategy to bring people to maturity must include *all* of these experiences: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism. In other words, spiritual growth occurs by participating in all five purposes of the church. Mature Christians do more than study the Christian life – they *experience* it.

Different church groups tend to emphasize only one side of it at the expense of the other.

They either tend to emphasize the *study* side at the expense of the *experience* side or the *experience* side at the expense of the *study* side.

Many evangelical churches emphasize the legal work that Jesus did in His death, burial and resurrection yet have little real experience of it.

On the other hand, many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have emphasized experiencing God but have no understanding of the legal work of Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. We need both: The legal side or what Christ did FOR us; and the experiential side or what Christ does IN us.

What scares evangelicals about Pentecostals and Charismatics is that they sometimes overemphasize emotional experiences to the neglect of sound biblical doctrine.

Yet, on the other hand, many evangelical churches have downplayed the legitimate role of experiences in spiritual growth. They have overreacted to other groups' glorification of experience by removing *any* emphasis on experience and viewing every experience with suspicion, especially if it involves the emotions.

But God created us with emotions in addition to minds. If you remove all experience from the Christian-growth process, you are left with nothing but a sterile, intellectual creed that can be studied but not enjoyed or practiced.

Deuteronomy 11:2 (Good News Bible): *Remember today what you have learned about the Lord **through your experiences with him.***

If Christianity was a philosophy, then our primary activity might be studying. But Christianity is a relationship and a life.

The words most often used to describe the Christian life are:

- Love
- Give
- Believe
- Serve

Jesus did not say, "I have come that you might *study*. In fact, the word *study* appears only a couple of times in the NT. What they need are ministry and evangelism experiences where they can *apply* what they already know, relational experiences like a small group where they can be *held accountable* for what they know, and meaningful worship experiences where they can *express* appreciation to God for what they know.

Listen to this warning from James.

James 1:22 (Good News Bible): *Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice.*

Any pond of water that takes in but does not give out becomes stagnant.

I said a moment ago that Christianity is a relationship and a life. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ, God's Son. When you receive Him into your heart, He gives you eternal life. That is a quality of life for the present time with the assurance of heaven as your eternal destiny...