



Practices for Becoming Mature Disciples

SIGN #1 - You Love Jesus

Introducing *The Nine Signs of Spiritual Maturity*

As we discovered last week, being an apprentice, or disciple, to The Way of Jesus is about learning as we go. But while the bible is filled with helpful examples and instructions to follow, we can sometimes miss the point. If we're not paying attention, we can end up walking the 'right' path alone and miss the new life that comes from walking *with* Jesus. That new life is a personal and dynamic relationship with the living God and it is what transforms into spiritually mature Christians.

We have identified nine characteristics that define a transformed and mature follower of Christ. We hope to use these characteristics, or signs, as mile markers to help us pay attention to the path we're on. It is important to note that these are all broad simplifications. They're not meant to be a pass/fail test, but a gauge we check regularly and to know when and where to adjust as we go. Each week we will explore one of these nine signs in depth using a variety of exercises and spiritual disciplines designed to help you evaluate where you're at and how you can continue growing towards maturity in Christ.

This Week's Focus: A Mature Disciple Loves Jesus

The Way of Jesus is the way of love. As followers of Jesus, we first experience love *from* Christ that leads us to a love *for* Christ. This continues as we grow - His grace for our sins leads us to pursue holiness, His joy in our hardship strengthens us to bear the burdens of others, His guidance our uncertainty teaches us how to make disciples. He leads out of love, so we can follow out of love.

So the first sign that we are walking in The Way of Jesus is that we genuinely love God. And while we may express our adoration in different ways, we can use Jesus' example to assess the maturity of our love. We know we're growing in this area when we are consistently trusting Him as our personal Savior and the Leader of our life. A mature disciple depends entirely on God for their life, love, identity, and purpose. In this practice you will find tools to help you grow in your capacity to love Jesus authentically.

Quick Tip: Find What Works

Looking at a packet like this can feel daunting; it's easy to feel like you're "falling short" when the to-do list is so long. A great way to combat this is to experiment with different ways to do them. Likely, you'll find these practices are a lot easier to do when you tweak them to fit your life and the way your mind works. Try doing them at different places or times of day. Or just bring it with you everywhere and dive in when you have a minute. Try doing it all in one sitting or limiting yourself to 10 min every day. Try writing everything down or nothing down. Whatever you decide, just give it a shot.

There will always be moments where we need to push beyond what we feel like doing in order to be obedient to God, but a majority of life with Jesus is meant to be life-giving. So give yourself permission to find what fills you up with the deeply satisfying presence of the living God.

TIME ALONE

PRAY: Affirmation Prayer

Each day this week start your day with a Prayer of Affirmation either out loud or silently, let it be the first thing you do in your day. This kind of prayer focuses our attention, trust, and adoration towards Jesus, and declares He is Lord of your life. You can start with this example and then modify it as it fits your prayer life and needs.

Dear Heavenly Father,

This is your day, which you created. I choose to rejoice in it and be glad. Thank you for loving me unconditionally at the deepest level. If challenges arise in my day, I will hang on to the truth that you are with me and for me. I choose to believe that you are working in my life for good. Thank you for being my protector; for going before me, and for paving the way.

I treasure the communion I get to share with you because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit which dwells within me. I commit my life to you this day, help me to walk one with you. You are more than enough.

I receive your abundant grace and mercy for this day. I trust you will bring me the comfort, counsel, and courage I need in every moment of the day. Thank you for the power of forgiveness that flows in and through me. Lead me in the flow of your forgiveness, grace, and love.

I chose to trust that you created me to be exactly who you wanted me to be. That when you look at me you see worthiness, holiness, purity, and righteousness because that is how you made me. I am beautiful and whole in your sight; you delight in me. Today I choose to see myself the way you see me and to love myself the way you love me.

Thank you for the peace, joy, love, and patience you have instilled in me; may they overflow as a byproduct of your great love for me.

I choose to receive everything you have for me today. I open myself and all my senses to all the ways you want to communicate to me today. I surrender my will to your will, my mind to the mind of Christ, and my emotions to the balance of the Spirit. Father, today, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Go Deeper: After your Affirmation Prayer, ask God “what do you want me to know about this day?” then spend 15 minutes or so listening to God and journaling.

READ: John 14:1-14

Read through this passage each day. It can be helpful to read in different translations, such as NIV, ESV, or The Message.

TIME ALONE

REFLECT: Being a “Worshiper” by Loving Jesus

Jesus has placed his human identity within us. He has downloaded his own DNA into us. In John 3:7, he describes this as being “born again” and later on explains that “[He is] the vine; you are the branches... Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5) Understanding this, Paul declared “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) and taught us that “therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

When you trust Jesus for the salvation of your life, He gives you a new identity. Jesus called this being “born again.” Paul calls this the “new man” and a “new creation.” The Bible paints a detailed picture of this new identity that has been downloaded into everyone who has trusted Jesus for salvation.

We believe this new identity is well described using a three-fold view: we are Worshipers of God, Family of God, and Missionaries of God. All of our nine signs of maturity can fit into one of these three facets of our redeemed identity. In order to see God as worthy of worship, we must first love Him. This week’s sign of “Loving Jesus” describes one aspect of being a Worshiper of God.

Use these questions to gauge where you are at with “Loving Jesus”:

- Do you regularly spend time alone with God, in reading scripture, reflection, and prayer?
- What time and place do you meet?
- In a typical week, how often do you meet?
- What next steps of growth do you see in developing your love for Jesus?

WORSHIP: This Week’s New Songs

We now have a playlist made up of worship songs that are meaningful to our community; including our Sunday setlists and even a few originals! Each week, we’ll add new songs. Find the playlist using the links below. Here’s what we added this week:

- Same God by Elevation Worship
 - Jesus, We Love You by Worship Initiative
 - What Matchless Love by Mike Hohnholz
 - Here is Love by Bethel Music
- Bonus: Check out one of our newest originals - [Still Good by VC Music](#)



ACTION: Join a Group

We know transitions take time, that’s why we’ve kept this week’s action point the same. If you haven’t already, be sure to get connected & invested! Not sure where to start? Check out last week’s sermon practice for details on how to join a group

TIME TOGETHER

Welcome: *Would You Rather (Optional)*

Would you rather have a personal house cleaner or a personal chef? Would you rather spend time at the beach or time on a mountain? Would you rather go to a great concert or a great sporting event?

Scripture: *John 14:1 - 14*

Have someone read the passage out loud in any translation. Others can take notes below.

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe in the evidence of the works themselves. 12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. *NIV*

Discussion: *The Bible*

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- Why were the disciples' hearts troubled? (See John 13)
- What does it mean that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life? How could you explain it without using the words "way," "truth," and "life"?
- How is this claim of Jesus different from the leaders of all other world religions?
- What does Jesus do that actually makes a room available for us in God's house?
- If Jesus is the only way to God, and the only means of rescue from an empty life, how should we respond to him?
- *Respond to this Statement:*
Jesus is calling for nothing less than 100% dependence upon him for life. He is not claiming to be one way to a good life, but The Way to Life and to God. He is not giving advice as you go on with your life, he is calling for obedience, whatever the cost. This is more than wise teachings; this is a bold claim to submit to his leadership and receive his full rescue.

TIME TOGETHER, CONT.

Discussion: *The Practices*

- Discuss your experience of taking time alone.
How hard/easy was it to find time? How did you feel before you started versus after? Do you have a go-to place or spot in the house? What adjustments can you make to help you make time?
- Share insights, questions, and challenges from the “Time Alone” Practices
What has been encouraging to you this week? What questions do you have from your Time Alone? Where do you see God challenging you here? What are 2-3 steps that you can take now to grow in this area?

Discussion: *The Journey*

Remember, your relationship with Jesus is a life-long journey. Each of us has highs and lows along the way, and each of us is still growing. But the best part is that we don't have to do it alone. With that in mind, discuss as a group where you are today in your relationship with Jesus.

- In what ways do you most find joy and satisfaction in your love for Jesus? What challenges do you face, or questions do you have in growing that love?
- As you continue to build your relationship with Jesus, what has been especially helpful to you? Is it spending time in prayer, reading the Bible, worshiping through music, journaling your thoughts and prayers, learning from others teaching and insights? Other things?
- Which of those has been more difficult for you to do in a meaningful way? Where have you experienced frustration, doubt, or even defeat?
- What insights do you have, or breakthroughs you have experienced (in practices such as prayer, bible reading, or journaling) that might be encouraging to others?
- How can the group encourage you and pray for you as we each grow in this area?

Prayer: *What You Love About Jesus*

In addition to prayer requests and anything else the group wants to pray about, share with God what you love about him. This may sound similar to your Affirmation Prayers from your alone time, or it may come out of your conversations during group.

FAMILY TIME

Hanging Out With Jesus

We show Jesus we love him just like we show our friends and family we love them: by spending time together. Similar to hanging out with friends, spending intentional time with Jesus helps us feel closer and more connected to Him. And this is true no matter what your age is! So it is important to help our kids learn how to build a habit of spending time with Jesus daily that grows as they do. We have some simple ideas you can try with your kids today listed below. Keep in mind that different activities will work better for different kids, and even that may change over time. So just explore and have fun hanging out with Jesus!

For the little ones...

Pray Together [5 min]

Ask your child to pray with you, this builds their confidence that they can talk to God too! If needed, you can prompt them by having them pray: "Jesus, one thing I love about you is _____." You can even make this fun by taking turns praying this sentence and filling in the blank.

Daily Devotionals [5 min]

Pick up a devotional for littles and read it each day. One classic title is "Leading Little Ones To God." Many kid devotionals can be found online on sites like ChristianBook.com or Amazon.

Bedtime Bible Stories [5 min]

Use a children's bible as a bedtime story. Two great choices are "The Jesus Storybook Bible" and "The Biggest Story Bible Storybook."

Drawing for Jesus [5 - 10 min]

Draw a picture for Jesus about what you're thinking about. Use the picture as a conversation starter, and then pray with your child.

Intentional Entertainment [20 min]

Substitute one of your typical cartoons for [Bible Adventure on YouTube](http://BibleAdventureonYouTube.com). Talk with your child about what they learned about Jesus.

For the little older ones...

Ask for Prayer [5 - 10 min]

Ask your child to pray with you and for you, this builds their confidence that they can talk to God too and gives them insight into your own faith life! If needed, you can also prompt your older child by having them pray: "Jesus, one thing I love about you is _____", or "Jesus, I love the way you _____."

Daily Devotionals [5 - 10 min]

Choose a fun devotional that your child can read on their own or that you can read together. Let your child pick one that interests them! Many great titles are available at ChristianBook.com.

Side-by-Side Scripture [10 - 20 min]

Let your child choose a bible version they like, encourage them to read their bible while you read yours. You can read from the same section and talk about what God is showing you. The New Living Translation (NLT), the Message (MSG), and the New International Reader's Version (NIRV) are great places to start.

Go Deeper: As children continue to develop you can incorporate fun bible study methods like S.O.A.P. (Scripture reading, observations, how it applies, prayer) to learn to discover the bible on their own.

Writing to Jesus [5 - 10 min]

Write a short letter to Jesus about what is on your mind. Parents: don't correct grammar or spelling!

Intentional Entertainment [30 min]

Substitute one of your typical cartoons for [Superbook](http://Superbook.com) videos or games. Talk with your child about what they learned about Jesus.