



Practices for Becoming Mature Disciples Conclusion

Introducing *The Nine Signs of Spiritual Maturity*

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: Reflecting on the Nine Signs in Your Life

Now that we've taken a closer look at each of the signs individually, let's take a birds eye view of how they show up in your life as a whole. It's important to remember that spiritual maturity is a life-long pursuit and not something we need to "arrive" at in order to be a good follower of Christ. We hope that you will use this reflection as a way to gain direction from God and momentum for your spiritual growth.

WORSHIP: New Original Christmas Song!

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:

- This Is Our Hope by VC Music



TIME ALONE

READ, PRAY & REFLECT: Personal Assessment of Spiritual Maturity

This week, we've combined our reading, prayer and reflection time into one activity to help you gain insight into where you are in your own spiritual maturity. Take your time with each section and be as honest as you can with yourself. We recommend writing down your answers to the reflection questions and then rating each section so you can refer back to it in your group discussions.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY ASSESSMENT

SIGN #1 - YOU LOVE JESUS

Consistently trusting Jesus as your personal Savior & Leader of your life, you sincerely depend on him for life, love, and meaning.

Matthew 22:37-38, Psalm 23, Psalm 63, Psalm 119:57

Reflect

- Do you regularly spend time alone with God, in prayer and contemplation?
- 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?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

TIME ALONE

SIGN #2 - YOU LOVE YOUR CHURCH

Building relationships with other VC members for the purpose of spiritual growth, practical service, and personal accountability. These relationships strengthen not only the individual, but those smaller groups and the church as a whole.

Matthew 22:37-38, John 15:12-13, Acts 2:42-47, Philippians 2:1-4

Reflect

- Who at VC have you built relationships with beyond a Sunday gathering?
- How are you pushing your VC friendships beyond casual relationships and into deep spiritual ones?
- If you are in a small discipleship group, how frequently do you meet? When and where are you meeting?
- What next steps of growth do you see in building your love for your church?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

SIGN #3 - YOU LOVE CHURCHLESS PEOPLE

Building relationships with people outside of the body of Christ for the purpose of loving them, sharing how Jesus has changed your life, and sharing the message of Christ.

Matthew 22:37-38; Matt. 9:36-38; Matt. 28:19-20, Jeremiah 29:4-7

Reflect

- Who is someone, who does not follow Jesus, whom you have built a friendship with?
- How do you intentionally and regularly spend time with churchless people?
- Who have you recently shared your Story with of how Jesus has rescued you?
- What next steps of growth do you see in building your love for churchless people?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

TIME ALONE

SIGN #4 - YOU'RE GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

Experiencing daily the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Others are quick to say you exemplify the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 3:3, Galatians 5:16-23, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Reflect

- Would the people who know you well say that you consistently demonstrate the “fruit of the Spirit”? (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self control)
- Recently, how have you experienced the power and presence of the Holy Spirit?
- How have you seen the Spirit grow you in character and strength?
- What next steps of growth do you see in the power and presence of the Spirit?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

SIGN #5 - YOU HELP OTHERS GROW IN CHRIST

Taking personal responsibility for the maturing of their faith, most commonly demonstrated by their personal devotion to God and their participation in the fitting ministries encouraged by VC.

Matthew 28:16-20, 2 Timothy 2:1-2, Romans 10:14-17

Reflect

- Who is someone you have been intentionally spending time with to encourage their growth in Jesus?
- How frequently are you meeting with someone for intentional discipleship? When?
- How are you investing time in someone to build them as a disciple-maker?
- What next steps of growth do you see in helping others grow in Jesus?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

TIME ALONE

SIGN #6 - YOU SERVE THE MOST VULNERABLE

Serving the oppressed, marginalized, and overlooked,
both inside and outside the local church.

Matthew 25:31-46, James 2:1-5, Jeremiah 22:3, Luke 4:18-19

Reflect

- Where and when have you recently done work to serve the vulnerable?
- How frequently are you taking time to serve the vulnerable? And how?
- What next steps of growth do you see in serving the most vulnerable?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

SIGN #7 - YOU LIVE OUT SCRIPTURE

You are regularly spending time in the Bible for encouragement and training, and allowing the Holy Spirit to use the Word of God to make powerful, ongoing change in your life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 119:105, James 1:22-24

Reflect

- Do you regularly spend time alone with God, reading and reflecting on His Word?
- What have you been reading lately?
- How have you allowed scripture to challenge and change you recently?
- What next steps of growth do you see in living out scripture?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

TIME ALONE

SIGN #8 - YOU DEVELOP YOUR PERSONAL MINISTRY

Identifying your customized calling, spiritual gifting, and place of meaningful service. Regardless of your profession, you treat each day of your life as an opportunity for ministry and mission.

1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 3:23-24

Reflect

- In what way do you connect ministry to your daily work or school life?
- How have you been actively serving in a ministry recently
- In what ways has God gifted you to serve in ministry
- What next steps of growth do you see in serving Jesus

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

SIGN #9 - YOU TRUST GOD FINANCIALLY

Entrusting God with all areas of your life and resources, committing yourself to utilizing those resources for the advancement of His kingdom, and recognizing tithing as the practice of every believer.

Proverbs 3:9, Micah 3:10, Acts 2:42-47, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Reflect

- How has your trust in God recently impacted how you act with your finances?
- How have you demonstrated generosity recently with your money and your belongings?
- How are you responding to the call to tithe and support your local church?
- What next steps of growth do you see in trusting God with finances?

Rate (low) **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (high)

TIME TOGETHER

Welcome:

- Icebreaker: Share some highlights from your time together as a group this fall.
- Discuss as a group your meeting plans for this next season:
 - What is our plan for meeting during the holiday season?
 - What is our plan for meeting after the new year?

Scripture: Philippians 3:3b-14

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

3b we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

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. 13 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, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

TIME TOGETHER

Discussion: *The Bible*

- Share any words, phrases, or pictures that stood out to you while reading.
- How does generosity fit into your personal finances? Do you regularly challenge yourself to live generously? Do you have room in your finances for generosity?
- What is significant about the Apostle Paul saying that he has not “arrived at [his] goal” in his life? (vs 12) How does this give you insight into his mindset toward life?
- In what ways are you “pressing on” and “straining toward what is ahead”? Consider your responses to the Spiritual Maturity Reflection, especially the next steps of growth you identified.

Discussion: *The Practices*

- We looked back over the NINE SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY, as well as your responses to the SPIRITUAL MATURITY REFLECTION. Share with the group anything that stood out to you as you looked back over these.
- Is there any area of your SPIRITUAL MATURITY REFLECTION that you find difficulty writing responses? Particularly, are there areas where it is difficult to identify “next steps of growth”?

Discussion: *The Journey*

- How have you been encouraged in your relationship with Jesus lately?
- Where do you see the Lord is challenging you to continue in growth? How can the group encourage you in this area?
- As we continue together as a group, is there a particular aspect of walking with Jesus that we should focus on together? (Perhaps we have a common area in our Spiritual Maturity Reflection that we feel challenged to take next steps of growth.)

Prayer:

In addition to prayer requests and anything else the group wants to pray about, have the groups pair up in groups of 2-3. In those smaller groups, take turns sharing one of the areas that you feel God is calling you to grow in and then pray for that area. Ask God where He wants you to take the next steps of growth and new steps in trusting and obeying Him. Then ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength you need to do it.

FAMILY TIME

Finding the Time

While we can all agree that raising our kids to follow Jesus is arguably one of our most important responsibilities as parents, many of us can struggle to find the right time and place in our busy schedules for those important moments and conversations. As we continue growing together, we want to give you some ideas for where these conversations can happen. Test them out as each child and family is different. It may be a challenge, but over time and with grace, you will find a rhythm that works best for you and your kids. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

Breakfast

Carve a few minutes out of your morning rush before school and work. This is a great way to model and pass on morning devotions to your kids.

Dinner

Create a ritual of sitting together for dinner. It may not be realistic every day, with work and sports pulling you different directions. But even getting 2 - 3 dinners each week can make a big difference.

Bedtime

For some families, the tuck-in time is the most sacred time. Instead of sending your kids to bed, join them for a few minutes of reading and talking in the bedroom. You might be surprised to discover that it becomes your most important part of the day.

Car Rides

Grab a child to go with you on errands, and talk along the way. Some kids more naturally open up as they sit next to you. Turn down the music and give them your (mostly) undivided attention and encouragement.

Family Check-ins

During those times, ask your family intentional questions like:

- What were your “highs” and “lows” today? (Mom and Dad need to share too!)
- What are you thankful for today?
- How did you see God today?
- What’s something you want to ask Jesus?