



Practices for Becoming Mature Disciples SIGN #3 - YOU LOVE CHURCHLESS PEOPLE

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: A Mature Disciple Loves Churchless People

Our third sign of spiritual maturity is loving churchless people. For us, this looks like building relationships with people outside of the body of Christ for the purpose of loving them, sharing how Jesus has changed our life, and sharing the message of Christ. A mature follower knows that Jesus came to seek and save the lost, including themselves. They understand that while they were still far from Christ, He died for them so that they might receive forgiveness, love, and true life forever. So their love for churchless people is driven by gratitude and humility.

Quick Tip: Give Yourself Context When Reading the Bible

If you ever get stuck or confused while reading scripture, it can be helpful to understand the bigger picture. The Bible Project has hundreds of videos that teach about scripture using well-written explanations and helpful visuals. Check them out on YouTube or head to www.bibleproject.com to learn more about them.

TIME ALONE

PRAY: Praying Like Jesus Did

Jesus came to Earth to save us from a life without Him. We were created for goodness, wholeness, peace, and relationship but we can only experience a fraction of these things without the presence of God. He saw how lost we were and had compassion, so He came to show us the way to Him and to Heaven. We want to adopt the same heart posture Jesus had - seeing the lost and having enough compassion to show them the way. This week during your time of prayer there are a few different ways you can pray with Jesus' heart for the lost:

- A. Ask God to help you see your part in loving churchless people. Sometimes we believe that only the 'evangelists' are good at loving and caring for people outside the church, but we are all called to and God gives us all different ways to do that. We want to pray that God would give us a heart to see those who are lost, to have compassion, and care for them.
- B. Ask God to bring relationships into your life. Without neglecting relationships inside the church community, it is vital for us to build authentic friendships with those who do not yet know Christ. Pray that God would bring people into your life. People who could become friends with and build positive relationships with.
- C. Pray for those you care about who don't know Christ. We all have at least one person in our lives that doesn't know Jesus. We want to continually pray for those who are lost. Write down a list of those you know, or ask God to bring people to your mind, and spend time praying each day for them.

READ: John 15:1 - 7

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

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:

- For The One by Jenn Johnson



TIME ALONE

REFLECT: How Often Do You Engage With Those Who Are Far From God?

According to a BARNAs study in 2019, 56% of Christians have 2 or fewer conversations with non-believers about faith in the past year. For many of us, we are around churchless neighbors, friends, and family members every day; but how often does our faith integrate into these relationships? We are susceptible to compartmentalizing our spiritual lives if we are not intentional with our outside relationships. The more we are engulfed in the 'busyness' of church without looking around us, the less we engage with those who are outside. One way we can be more intentional is by reflecting on (or "auditing") our relationships.

Relationship Audit

First, list out 10-15 people that you've spent the most time with in the last month. Put a cross next to the name if they are a follower of Jesus. Circle the name if they are connected to Vancouver Church or another church.

Then, in a journal or notebook (or even the notes app on your phone) answer the following questions

- Based on your relationship audit, what are some observations that you have about the people you spend most of your time with?
- Do your relationships revolve around churchless people or those within the church? How do you feel about that?
- Do you ever discuss faith with those you interact with outside the church? If you have, what is one of the biggest "wins" to come out of a conversation like that?
- What are some of your largest barriers to integrating your faith into these conversations more often?
- What's something realistic you could do today to address one of those barriers?

TIME TOGETHER

Welcome: *Going Deeper*

- Icebreaker: Share a favorite toy, embarrassing moment, or moment of personal victory from when you were a kid?
- Describe a time of your life that was difficult or sad - a personal failure, great trial, loss - where you saw the Lord bring something beautiful out of it?
- What is one way you know your life is different only because of Jesus?

Scripture: *Luke 15:1-7*

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

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Discussion: *The Bible*

- Share any words, phrases, or pictures that stood out to you while reading.
- Historical Insight: In the time of Jesus, Pharisees were religious leaders who had tremendous social and political power. They were known for their personal piety, well-known experts of the scriptures, as well as legal experts. Many Pharisees who encountered Jesus saw him as a breaker of laws and a threat to their power, while a few Pharisees chose to believe Jesus [see John 3.] Does our culture have people who are similar to a Pharisee?
- What does Jesus compare a sinful person to? What is his attitude toward sinful people?
- When you think of the people you know who are far from Jesus, is your attitude toward them more similar to Jesus or the Pharisees? In what ways is this true?
- Jesus spent a lot of his time around people considered "sinners." How would your life look differently if you modeled it more after Jesus in this way?

TIME TOGETHER

Discussion: *The Practices*

- Discuss your experience of taking time alone with God
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? What are 2-3 steps that you can take now to grow in loving your church?

Share your “Relationship Audit” from your Time Alone

1. Based on your relationship audit, what are some observations that you have about the people you spend most of your time with?
2. Do your relationships revolve around churchless people or those within the church? How do you feel about that?
3. Do you ever discuss faith with those you interact with outside the church? What are some of your largest barriers to integrating your faith into these conversations?
4. Begin to pray for God to highlight people that you can begin to have significant spiritual conversations that will lead them into the Kingdom.

Discussion: *The Journey*

Growing in 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.

- How have you been encouraged in your relationship with Jesus lately? (the “Wins”)
- What challenges have you experienced that seem to pull you away from trusting God (distractions, defeats, doubts)
- During the next season of focusing on our relationship with Jesus, in what ways are you especially hoping to grow?
- What actions do you need to take in order for your “love for churchless people” [which we are studying this week] to become more real in your life?
- How can the group encourage you and pray for you as we each walk together?

Prayer:

In addition to prayer requests and anything else the group wants to pray about, ask that God would grow your compassion for those who don’t know Him and courage to love them well by sharing your faith.

FAMILY TIME

It's not too early to teach your kids to love their friends and family who do not know Jesus! In fact, some kids have no hesitation in sharing about their love for Jesus with anyone who will listen. These kids can be bold and gifted evangelists. Others can be more hesitant to even be friends with someone who is not a Christian. They may need more coaching and encouragement to show love and understanding to others, knowing that Jesus loves them just as much as he loves us!

Families can also have different approaches to engaging with churchless family members, friends, and neighbors. Some families isolate and stay in their "holy huddle" to avoid negative influences, while others spend most of their time with people who don't know Jesus. But the truth is, building relationships with people who don't know Jesus is a great practice to engage while your kids are still in your home. This can combat fear of people who think and live differently than you, as well as building their love and compassion for those who do not know Jesus. Meanwhile, building relationships with churchless friends allows you to be able to address questions that your children may have about faith, God and other religions or lifestyle choices.

As you build relationships with churchless friends and families:

1. Pray together for the people in your life that don't know Jesus. Model for your kids how you pray for others with compassion, grace, and a deep desire for them to know Jesus. Encourage them to also pray for those they know.
2. Share your own faith story with your kids! It might feel risky for your kids to know about your life before Jesus rescued you, but your story is powerful. God changed your life, and he can change the lives of our friends!
3. Encourage them to invite a friend to church and offer to provide the transportation. At Vancouver Church, we intentionally create a fun and friendly environment that is welcoming to kids who do not know Jesus. And we regularly create events for kids to invite their friends to, like "Trunk Or Treat" on October 30.
4. Teach your kids how to share their faith! Show a simple way of sharing Your Story of making Jesus your Rescuer and King.
5. Celebrate risk taking! Most of us have experienced sharing our faith and having someone respond in a way that is discouraging. Celebrate when someone in your family shares about God with someone who doesn't know Jesus. Celebrate when someone tries to share about God, and it doesn't quite work out. We learn through taking risks, and we learn to trust Jesus!