



Practices for Becoming Mature Disciples

SIGN #4 - YOU ARE GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

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 Continually Grows in Their Spiritual Life

Before beginning this week's practice, it's important to have a good understanding of what we mean when we say "the Holy Spirit." If you're a little unclear or even just curious, we recommend you start by watching this 4 minute video from The Bible Project: [Holy Spirit](#) (or search 'bible project holy spirit' on YouTube.)

Our fourth sign of spiritual maturity is growing in the spirit. For us, this looks like seeking the presence, the power and the fruit of the Holy Spirit both in our personal walks and in our relationships. We believe that Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to live in all of His followers. So we celebrate and seek His power and presence in our individual lives and in the collective life of our church. So what does that actually look like? The bible references two categories of evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives: the "gifts" of the spirit, and the "fruit" of the spirit.

The "gifts" of the spirit are things like prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, and healing. And while there are some who are more naturally inclined, we all have access to these as followers. The "fruits" of the spirit are the more widely known character attributes of peace, love, patience, goodness, joy, kindness, gentleness and self control. When we are growing in the spirit, these attributes become more natural to us in our everyday lives. We believe a mature disciple is continually growing in both..

Quick Tip: Keep an Open Mind

Listening to God is an important part of our lives as Christians, but it's not always easy. While we have access to Him as easy as calling up a dear friend, there's rarely an audible voice on the other end of the line. But that doesn't mean He isn't speaking to us. There are many different ways God will communicate with us, and oftentimes he'll do so through stories and symbols rather than words. The good news is that He knows us deeply, so he speaks to us in a combination of ways that we uniquely understand. When you're prompted to listen to God, keep an open mind that He might communicate with you in several different ways. If you're unsure if something is from God or not, see what the bible has to say about the subject, then invite a mentor or trusted leader into the conversation. To give you an idea, some of the ways God speaks to us are through:

- Scriptures
- Visions/Pictures
- Dreams
- Thoughts
- Creation
- Reminders
- Impressions/feelings
- Audible voice
- Words from Others
- Music
- Other

TIME ALONE

PRAY: Communicating with God

Living a life led by the Spirit requires us to live in constant communication with God through prayer. And in order to truly communicate, we need to both speak and listen. This week we want to practice both as we grow in our relationship and awareness of the Holy Spirit. So in your prayer life this week, focus on being filled, becoming aware, and practicing listening:

1. **Be Filled:** Paul says that we are filled with the spirit and we will keep being filled. (Ephesians 5:18) Ask God to fill you with His spirit. Remember, when we are filled, we see both the gifts and the fruit of the spirit begin to increase in our lives.
2. **Become Aware:** Pray that God would make you aware of His spirit throughout the day. It can be easy to get caught up in the business of our days, so when you ask for awareness, you're inviting the Lord to join you in that day in a way that you can see and understand. This could be through songs, conversations, or thoughts that remind you of Him. And you may even experience nudges, sensings, and promptings to respond to His presence.
3. **Practice Listening:** Simply Ask God what He wants you to know throughout the day. Then give Him space to speak to you, either by retreating to a quiet space or by quieting your mind.

Going Deeper: In a journal spend some time writing down all the different ways in which you experienced the move of the Holy Spirit throughout your life. Ask God to remind you as you write and try to capture everything you can.

READ: Romans 8:14-17

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:

- Fall Afresh by Jeremy Riddle



TIME ALONE

REFLECT: Are You Open to Growing in the Holy Spirit?

Start by reading Romans 8:14-17 again.

Assessment: When we give our life to Christ we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but we also believe in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit continually growing throughout our entire faith journey. As you begin this practice, assess how you feel about the idea of “growing in the spirit.” Use the statements below to prompt your thinking, but don’t feel limited to them. Once you feel like you have a few statements that feel true to you, continue to the response section.

- I believe I am already experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- I feel desperate for something more in my Christian life.
- I am skeptical of teaching that focuses on seeking more of the Holy Spirit.
- I am concerned that those who seek more of the Holy Spirit often do so at the expense of good theology about Christ's finished work on the cross.
- I am concerned about teaching that puts too much emphasis on emotional experiences.
- I am pursuing more of the Holy Spirit, but I'm concerned that most Christians I know are not.
- I experience the love of God most of the time and at an increasingly deep level.
- I have experienced a filling of the Holy Spirit in the past, but not as part of my recent experience.
- I need greater boldness to proclaim Christ.
- I don't think I have as much joy in Christ as I think I should or have, given what the New Testament says on the subject.
- I have some besetting sins that I very much want to get rid of, but I'm surprised at the idea that more of the Holy Spirit would make a difference.
- I don't have the kind of "blazing love" for Christ that some around me speak of.
- I'm longing for intimacy with Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- I am open to the possibility that I need to grow in the Holy Spirit, but I'm not sure what that means.

Response: Read the passage below and then write your own prayer that expands on or responds to it. Can you genuinely say your soul thirsts for the living God? Be honest with God with where you're at, but take on the challenge to finish your prayer saying, “God if there’s more room for your spirit to grow within me, I’m ready to receive it!”

Psalm 42:1-2

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

TIME TOGETHER

Welcome: *Going Deeper*

- Icebreaker (pick one): What is a food you are almost embarrassed you love? [example: Pop Tarts, Kraft Mac & Cheese, Goldfish Crackers . . .] What is a food you are almost embarrassed that you cannot stand? What is a card game or board game you like? What is a memory you have of being on stage?
- When have you felt like an outsider?
- When has someone helped you feel valuable and seen?

Scripture: *Romans 8:14-17*

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

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Discussion: *The Bible*

- Share any words, phrases, or pictures that stood out to you while reading.
- Historical Insight: The word "Abba" in Hebrew means "Father" (or more affectionately Papa or Daddy.) Jesus used the word "Abba" when praying to God. And here, we see that the Holy Spirit gives us such close access to God, that we can call him Abba.
- What comes to mind in thinking of God as Papa or Daddy?
- What else does the Holy Spirit do for us, as you see in this passage?

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 statements from your assessment of “Growing in the Spirit”

Discussion: *The Journey*

- 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?
- 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, repeat the prayer from the reflection exercise over the group as a whole. Declare “God, if there’s more room for your spirit to grow within us, we’re ready to receive it!”

Going Deeper: Practice listening to the Holy Spirit as a group. Start by pairing everyone up (ideally with someone they’re less familiar with) but stay as a group and make sure everyone has something to write on. Then pray as a group and invite the Holy Spirit to speak encouragement over each pair. After you pray, give everyone some time to write down any words, images, and/or scripture that comes to mind for their partner. You may want to play some instrumental worship music during this time. After a few minutes, have the pairs split off and share with their partner what they wrote. Remember that this is meant to be encouraging, so keep your discussions focused on affirmation.

FAMILY TIME

Teaching your kids to grow in the Holy Spirit can feel intimidating at times but is so important! The fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control - are central to a family that reflects Jesus in their everyday life. And while it's not an easy feat, it can be a simple one. Here are two ways

Talk about the fruit of the Spirit. Ask your family members what area they would like to grow in, or pick one to focus on as a family this week! Then pick a time, such as bedtime or at the dinner table, to share stories of where each of you practiced that attribute during your day.

Practice listening to the Holy Spirit. During your family prayer time, take a couple minutes to listen to God, leave space for him to speak and discuss as a family what you felt like the Lord revealed to you. Listening prayer can feel awkward and clunky at first, but it's a great way to practice growing in our responsiveness to the Holy Spirit. You can also help your kids check what they feel the Lord saying against scripture so they can grow in wisdom and discernment.