



Practices for Becoming Mature Disciples

SIGN #6 - YOU SERVE THE MOST VULNERABLE

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 Serves The Most Vulnerable

As Christians, we often refer to the way God designed our world as an "upside-down kingdom." This is in reference to Jesus' teachings during His time on earth; teachings that completely flipped cultural norms on their head. He taught that the most powerful leaders were humble and the holiest people were repentant sinners. He also taught that some of the most important people in our lives are the broken and hurting - the widows, the orphans, the poor, the isolated, the oppressed. He calls us to honorably care for those who are particularly vulnerable to the pains of our world and the temptations of our enemy.

We live by the values of that upside kingdom. So we believe a spirituality mature disciple sees Jesus as the first to touch the untouchables, the first to include the outcasts, and they follow His example. They stand with Jesus as defenders of the widows, orphans and foreigners. For us, this means being an active participant in our church's commitment to serve the oppressed, marginalized, and overlooked, both inside and outside the church.

Quick Tip: Create an "Emergency Kit" Worship Playlist

Have you ever had those days when life feels too heavy to talk about? Or you're too tired to even pray about what you're going through? Sometimes when our words fail us, the best thing we can do is listen (or even sing!) Music can reach places within us that words alone can't. But it can be hard to know what to listen to in a moment like that.

So try making a playlist for worship songs that are meaningful to you, and keep adding as you come across new ones you like. Save them for a rainy day. Before long, you'll have a go-to list of to play in tough moments. And because that list is personal to you, it can remind you of where God has been there for you before, and how he can be there for you again!

TIME ALONE

PRAY: Asking for God's Heart

Hillsong United's popular worship song Hosana includes the lyric "break my heart for what breaks yours." This sentiment is central to serving the most vulnerable from a spiritually mature place. We as humans can get lost in the game of right-and-wrong even when our judgment is clouded by limited perspectives. But God has a view well above our own, and knows so much more than we will ever know. So instead of trying to decide who we think deserves our support, we ask Him to move us to compassion for the people He has placed in front of us. Asking God to 'break our heart' is about asking Him to break down the cynicism and fear that holds us back from loving the marginalized like Jesus loves them.

So your prayer prompt this week is simple: invite God to break your heart for the things that break His heart. Repeat this invitation each day, and even throughout the day as you think of it. If it helps, you can play the song and sing along as a way to pray that prayer.

Going Deeper: As you go about your week, pay attention to the things that move you - stories, conversations, a movie, etc. and talk to God about them. If you can, write them down and reflect on why those things are moving to you. Then ask God how He is moved by those things. You may even begin to notice a pattern as you write and pray. That pattern can give you a good idea of how you were uniquely designed to serve the most vulnerable.

READ: Matthew 25:34 - 46

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:

- Hosana by Hillsong United



TIME ALONE

ACTION: Personal Prayer Walk

We get so caught up in the rhythms of our life that we often are blind to the brokenness around us. Jesus was clear to his followers that we have to open our eyes and our hearts to those around us who are in need. We have to wake up, become aware of the world around us, and take action as a community. One simple step to identify needs and the actions we can take is beginning with the practice of prayer walking.

Prayer walking is stepping out and praying for your community as you walk. In Joshua 1:3 God says, "I am giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on." Inspired by God's promise to Joshua, we can walk the victory of Jesus into every part of our neighborhoods, cities and nations. Prayer walking thrusts us out of our church buildings, forcing us to resist the temptation to stay inward-focused, stirring us to keep the mission front and center. It engages all our senses, moving us to cry out to God - as we walk with hope into every crack and crevice of our cities.

As you engage on your personal prayer walk, you will be asking God to do two things:

- **Reveal His Work:** Spend time asking God to reveal to you what he's already doing in this area. Ask him to open your eyes to where he's currently working, redeeming, and restoring. Remember that we are not bringing God to this neighborhood, we're meeting him there. So take time to ask him to give you visions of his plan for this neighborhood.
- **Reveal Your Work:** As He is revealing His work, invite God to prepare your heart for the work that still needs to be done. Ask Him to challenge the areas inside you that might be resistant to His calling. Then ask Him to show you who are the 'most vulnerable' closest to you. Talk with Him about how He wants to use you in their lives.

Planning Your Walk

With all of the above in mind, use the following prompts to plan out your prayer walk.

- **Day & Time** – Begin by deciding what day and time you want to walk. Are you ready to go right here and now? If so, great! If not, set a day on your calendar and commit to doing it when the time comes. It's also helpful to decide whether you want to cover a certain area or stop after a certain amount of time. A solo prayer walk can be as short or long as you'd like. If you're short on time, take a walk around the block on your lunch break or while you drink your morning coffee.
- **Map** – Pick an area you want to pray for. Likely, this will be your own neighborhood, but anywhere that you feel connected to works great. As you're walking, stop at certain places that feel symbolically significant and pause to pray more specifically for that area – a neighbor's house, local park, your neighborhood school, etc.
- **Kids** – We encourage you to bring and include your kids! As you plan ahead, consider asking them: What would you want to see God do out on our prayer walk? Is there anything specific you want to pray for on our prayer walk? What would you want to see God do in our neighborhood?
- **Be Prepared** – Lastly, make sure you prepare for your prayer walk. Depending on where you are, you may want to bring a water bottle. You could also bring a journal or notebook to write down what God reveals, so that you can keep praying into it.
- **End in Prayer** – Close your time thanking God for the ways in which he has guided you. Ask him for help to pay closer attention to what is happening in our city. Ask him to give you his eyes to see not just problems or brokenness, but to prophetically see what could be.

TIME TOGETHER

Welcome:

- Icebreaker: What is a movie that you have seen or book you have read at least 5 times?
- Share a time where someone helped you in a time of need. For example, a grief counselor who guided you through a personal tragedy, or a mentor who took you under their wing at a new job, or a friend who encouraged you to keep trying.

Scripture: Matthew 25:34-46

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

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Discussion: The Bible

- Share any words, phrases, or pictures that stood out to you while reading.
- We typically have an easier time demonstrating compassion for “innocent victims” rather than those who have contributed to their own failings. Have you allowed this attitude to stop you from caring for someone in need?
- Read these passages, and consider how Jesus responds to sinful, yet vulnerable people:
 - John 8:1-8, a woman caught in adultery
 - Luke 19:1-10, a fraudulent tax collector
 - Luke 23:39-43, a criminal with a death sentence

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 experience of the Personal Prayer Walk

- Did you find it challenging to do this activity? Why or why not?
- Has your view of the area you prayed for changed since your prayer walk?
- What did you think about or hear from the Lord during your walk?

Going Deeper: Do a prayer walk as a group. Prayer walks are even more powerful when we do them together! Click the link or go to bit.ly/GroupPrayerWalk for instructions on [how to plan a group prayer walk](#)

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?
- 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, have the group partner up and pray for the “most vulnerable” in their partner’s life by name. In pairs, share who you’ve been thinking about this week and how you want to serve them. Then pray for each other, both for the person or group and your partner’s role in serving them.

FAMILY TIME

See a Need, Meet a Need

Being young does not exclude our kids from Jesus' call to care for those around them. Seeing what the people around them need and doing something about it is a habit they can start building today! As a family, you can start with the motto "See a need, meet a need." Take time to talk with your children about who Jesus spent time with and how he treated others. Help them see that we have opportunities to love and serve vulnerable people around us each and every day.

This week, take the challenge to see and meet needs. If your kids are a little younger, you can start at home by encouraging your kids when you see them care for their siblings and friends naturally. Talk to them about how they "saw the need" (did their sibling look sad? Or was their friend playing by themselves?) and then what happened when they "met the need" (maybe they made them laugh or it ended up being fun playing together.)

If your kids are a little older, encourage them to practice at school. They could try sharing their snack with someone who doesn't have one, or inviting someone to sit with them at lunch, or chatting with the quiet kid on the bus, or going to a birthday party for someone who isn't as popular. It doesn't need to be big, it's just about building the habit of watching out for others and acting with compassion. Keep them motivated with a check in time each day to share what needs you each saw and how you attempted to meet that need.