

## Life Principles Center

### Course: Measuring Your Spiritual Growth

#### T4\_CA\_L1: The Stages of our Christian Life Part 1 (MA127)

#### Introduction:

Is there really such a thing as “spiritual maturity”? What does it mean to be “spiritually mature”? How will I know when I’ve become “spiritually mature”? These are all fine questions, and, as you’ve grown in your Christian life, you’ve probably wondered about them.

This course, entitled *Measuring Your Spiritual Growth*, will give you the tools necessary to identify key areas of the Christian life. In the twelfth chapter of Romans, verse 3, Paul instructs us, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” In this course, we will learn how to evaluate our relationship with Christ with sober judgment.

#### Objectives

##### Lesson 1, Section 1

At the end of this section of Lesson 1, you should be able to:

- A. Discuss two reasons why it is important to grow into spiritual maturity.
- B. Understand the importance God places upon our spiritual growth.

#### Scripture

*Read 2 Peter 3:14-18*

*Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

## Lesson 1

The Christian life is not an event, it is a process. Too many people believe that there is some specific point in our walk with the Lord that we become “mature” or fully developed Christians. The truth is, however, that the entire Christian life is a journey; it begins with our confession of faith in Christ and it actually never ends. Even when we leave this earth, we will be walking in the way of the Lord for all eternity.

Because God has such long-range plans for our lives, He saved us with a purpose in mind. Romans 8:29 shows that God predestined you and me to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. In order for this to take place, we must be in a continual state of growth, becoming more like Christ as we go through our Christian lives.

***J1: Carefully and prayerfully read the following Scripture passages. Then, discuss in your journal what these passages say about our Christian growth.***

***2 Peter 3:14-18***

***1 Corinthians 3:1-3***

***Hebrews 5:11-14***

Why is it important to grow into spiritual maturity as believers? Well, there are certainly many reasons. However, I want you to consider two specific reasons why God wants you to grow as a Christian. **First, it is absolutely vital that we grow in the knowledge and understanding of who Jesus is.** Now, we may know enough about Him to make a decision about our need for salvation, but none of us *begin* our Christian lives with a *complete* understanding of who Jesus is. We must discover Him more and more as we walk in His ways.

**Second, we must grow in our spiritual maturity in order to stand boldly against the pressures of the world.** This was just as real a threat to the first Christians as it is to us today. There have always been unprincipled men and women in the world who seek to distort the Word of God. (2 Peter 3:17) If we hope to identify and discern between these errors, we must have a firm, biblical foundation.

***Q1: Multiple Choice.***

***Two reasons for growing in our spiritual maturity are:***

***A. To guarantee our salvation and to enable us to stand against the pressures of the world.***

***B. To continually grow in our understanding of Christ and to enable us to stand against the pressures of the world.***

***C. To continually grow in our understanding of Christ and to earn membership in a local church.***

My friend, it is a great tragedy for people to be saved, attend church, and start praying a little bit and believe that this is as far as they need to go in their Christian lives. For many people, it simply never dawns on them that this is not enough. Yes, they may be saved and eternally secure, but if they refuse to grow any further in Christ, then they show great disrespect and rebellion toward God. It is as though they say, “Okay God, I’m saved now and I’m going to go to heaven. That’s all I’m interested in. I don’t care about getting to know you any better than that.”

This attitude breaks God’s heart. He wants us to know Him intimately; if we are to be mature believers, we must seek to know Him more and more. And, we do this in certain stages of our Christian lives. I have identified seven specific stages of our development, which we will explore in this course. As we go through these stages, I encourage you to prayerfully find your place on this great spiritual journey.

## **Lesson 1, Section 2**

### **Objectives**

**At the end of this section of Lesson 1, you should be able to:**

- A. Discuss the first two stages of our spiritual maturity.**
- B. Note the changes in your understanding of God from the time of your salvation to now.**

**The first stage is unbelief.** This is where we all begin. No person has ever been born a Christian. Rather, we all start our lives as unbelievers—as people who do not know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Now, it makes no difference whether you were saved as a young child or later in life; the point is, before Christ came into our hearts and lives, we were lost.

Ephesians 2:1-3 paints a vivid picture of what our spiritual condition was at that point in our lives. Verse one reads, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” That phrase, “dead,” should not be taken lightly. This means that we were completely dead spiritually. We couldn’t interact with God, because we were not even alive.

But then, something happened. At some point, we heard the saving message of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit began to plant a seed of faith in our hearts. These are the fundamental, progressive moments when the spiritual journey first begins. When we are talking about our walk with Christ, this stage ends with the first step: the step out of unbelief and into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

***Q2: True/False. Ephesians 2:1-3 shows that, before our salvation experience in Christ, we were each spiritually sick and weak.***

So, this first step brings us into the **second stage: salvation**. Now, when we first get saved, we do not understand everything about Jesus. For example, I accepted Christ when I was twelve years of age. At that time, I did not know anything about the cross except that Jesus died on it. Basically, I only knew that I was a sinner, that Jesus died for me, and that I needed Him. However, that was all I needed to know. And, from that point on, I began to grow.

***J2: Take a moment to think about the time in your life when you made the decision to accept the salvation that Christ offers. What did you know about God at that point? What were your struggles? Write your thoughts in your journal.***

I remember my own insatiable appetite for God's Word in those early years after my salvation. I had never really studied the Bible on my own before then, but I found that I desperately wanted to know what the Word taught. I knew almost immediately that I was not satisfied with simply "being saved."

How can a person be content to live his entire Christian life with no greater understanding of who God is than he had at the moment of salvation? Simply having a saving knowledge of Jesus is clearly enough to keep us out of the gates of hell, but it is certainly not enough to bring us the abundant life that Jesus spoke of. (John 10:10)

God wants us to grow. What we must realize is that our salvation is not the stopping point of our spiritual understanding; it is the very beginning of the journey! In the next lesson of this course, we will see where our Christian walk takes us as we move beyond simply "being saved" and further into maturity.

## Prayer

Father God, when we think back to that time in our lives when we didn't know you, we just praise You for making Yourself known to us. Scripture says that we were dead, but You made us alive in Christ Jesus, Your Son. Thank you for that first step of faith, and help us now as we seek to move ever forward on the path of spiritual maturity. And we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

## Homework

### Scripture Memory:

*The Scripture memory assignment for this course is given below. Be sure to commit this passage to memory before moving on to the next lesson. Then, practice reciting it over and over throughout this course.*

### *Philippians 3:13-14*

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

## Life Principles Center

### Course: Measuring Your Spiritual Growth

### Lesson 2: The Stages of our Christian Life Part 2 (MA127)

**Introduction:** This lesson is divided into two sections to help you complete the entire lesson at your convenience. In order to renew your mind with God's Word and give you an accurate view of Him, it's very important that you take time to complete each assignment before moving on to the next lesson.

#### Lesson 2, Section 1

##### Objectives

At the end of this section of Lesson 2, you should be able to:

- A. See Ephesians 2:10 as a call to a specific, preordained work.
- B. Understand the great importance of service in our Christian lives.

##### Scripture

*Read Ephesians 2:8-10*

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

#### Lesson 2

So far in this course, we have seen the first two stages in our Christian growth: unbelief and salvation. Now, let us get right back into the material by discovering the next step in our walk with the Lord.

Once we progress through the salvation stage and begin to explore God's Word, our attitudes and actions will begin to change regarding other people. At this point, we move into the **third stage: Christian service.**

Ephesians 2:8-10 reveals that God not only chose to save us, but that He also chose us to serve Him in some manner. Verse 10 states, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." You see, God not only knew us before we were saved, but He also knew the exact form of service to which He would call us.

***J1: Carefully read Ephesians 2:10. If we are indeed "God's workmanship" and "created . . . for good works," what might***

***God be calling you to do for Him? Do you truly believe that God has already prepared a specific work for you to do? Does your life reflect this belief? Record your thoughts in your journal.***

Knowing the job we are called to perform, God has specifically gifted each of us for specific acts of ministry. The point here is that we will never know the extent to which God has gifted us until we begin to utilize our gifts in service to Him.

Today's demanding world offers plenty of excuses to escape the call to service. Many people are pulled in so many directions—family issues, career demands, financial concerns—that they simply see no way to donate their time and energy to others. At most, many people simply give a little money and feel satisfied that they have served the Lord fully.

My friend, let me say this as clearly as I can: God rejoices in your financial obedience, but your money is not an acceptable substitute for your time and spiritual gifts. He has specifically gifted you for works of service, and your refusal to use those gifts in ministry is a deliberate act of disobedience.

There is no way to succeed in life if we carry on in willful disobedience to God in the area of service. God has invested so much in you; He has given you every wonderful thing in your life. (James 1:17) When we consider that, how can we possibly respond, "Well, thanks for all of this, God, but I still don't have time to serve you"?

Now, you may feel horribly inadequate to do anything of value for the Lord. You may look at some church leaders and feel small and weak compared to them. Please understand that this is not even an issue. Jesus never compared one believer with another in this way. Rather, we are each given special, individual calls to service, and we are responsible for taking care of that need. What someone else is doing—great or small—simply does not affect what we have been called to do ourselves. We are not responsible for someone else's service, but we are completely responsible for our own.

***Q1: True/False. God will judge our service to Him by comparing our work to the work of other believers.***

## **Lesson 2, Section 2**

### **Objectives**

At the end of this section of Lesson 2, you should be able to:

- A. List and discuss the first four stages of your Christian growth.
- B. Define the concept of “frustrated inadequacy.”

The tension between what others are doing and what we are trying to do ourselves is somewhat related to the **fourth stage: frustrated inadequacy**. Well, what in the world is “frustrated inadequacy”? You may not be familiar with the expression, but I am confident that you are familiar with the feeling. You see, we have all faced this stage at some point, even if we did not realize it at the time.

Frustrated inadequacy is a tool that God uses to keep us in a mindset of service and dependence upon Him. In a sense, this is one way in which God keeps us humbly looking toward His power, rather than relying on our own faulty strength.

Maybe you have been asked to serve in some manner, and at first, you excelled at the task, perhaps singing a solo in church, for example. And then, because your great success prompted you to feel pretty good about your own ability, you agreed to do it again. However, this second time, you just flopped. You see, whenever we believe that we can accomplish some great work of service without total dependence upon God, then we are due for some frustrated inadequacy. While God may be using you in a wonderful way, He knows that one of the greatest threats to your heartfelt service is your own pride and self-reliance. Therefore, He often steps in to remind us that without Him, we can do nothing. (John 15:5)

***J2: Can you think of a specific time in your life when you experienced frustrated inadequacy? Has God used this to remind you of your dependence on Him, rather than on your own talents and abilities? Describe the situation in your journal.***

The apostle Paul was quite honest about his bouts with frustrated inadequacy. If any believer had a right to boast in his own abilities, it was Paul. However, he was kept humble and in total dependence upon God because God had given him a particular weakness. We do not know what this weakness was, but we do know that Paul struggled against it quite often. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, he reveals, “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!”

What a wonderful passage. Here, the apostle Paul essentially admits, “God knew that I was prone to pride and egotism. He gave me such wonderful visions, it would have been easy for me to dazzle the churches with what God has shared. So, God gave me something to keep me humble and on my knees before Him.”

You see, even Paul had trouble living the Christian life. We see this clearly in Romans 7:15-21. There, the apostle admits, “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.” He understood that he was weak and that his own power was insufficient. His frustrated inadequacy kept him at the point of realizing that he could only succeed in the Christian life by abiding in the power of God.

***Q2: True/False. Romans 7:15-21 shows that we can get to the point in our spiritual maturity where we only do those things that are good and desirable, leaving our sinful urges behind.***

My friend, please understand that God does not throw obstacles in your way because He wants to hurt you or prevent you from living a rich, fulfilled life. Instead, He provides these moments of frustrated inadequacy because that is the only way to keep us on track and moving forward. Whenever we feel that we can achieve some goal under our own power, even though we may feel strong, we are actually moving backward in our Christian walk. There is no room for self-sufficiency in the kingdom of God.

We have now seen the first four stages of our Christian development: unbelief, salvation, service, and frustrated inadequacy. In the next lesson of this course, we will examine the final three stages and begin to find our own place in this fantastic journey with the Lord.

## **Prayer**

Lord God, how we hate to fall down, to stumble and fail. But Father, we know that sometimes, the most loving thing you can do for us is to let us fall and to fail so miserably that we are reminded of our own weakness. Save us from our pride, from any notion of self-sufficiency; and keep us humbly positioned in the flow of Your strength, Your power, and Your sufficiency. In Jesus’ name we ask it, Amen.

## **Homework**

Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

*Philippians 3:13-14*

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

**J3:** In 2 Corinthians 12:7, the apostle Paul refers to a specific “thorn in [his] flesh” that prevented him from placing too much confidence in his own power. Has the Lord given you a thorn in your flesh? Is there some point of weakness in your life that stands as a constant reminder of your own weakness and complete dependence upon God? Record your thoughts in your journal.

## Life Principles Center

### Course: Measuring Your Spiritual Growth

### Lesson 3: The Stages of our Christian Life Part 3 (MA127)

**Introduction:** What makes a successful student? The Lord answers, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (Joshua 1:8). Divided into two sections, this lesson contains assignments that you are encouraged to finish before continuing to the next lesson.

### Lesson 3, Section 1

#### Objectives

At the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- A. Discuss the concept of spiritual dependency and identify areas of your life over which you struggle to maintain control rather than surrender them to God.
- B. Understand the impact that other people's insults, restrictions, and abuse has on your spiritual life.

#### Scripture

*Read Galatians 2:20*

*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

In this course, we have examined four specific stages of the Christian life. Now, we know that there is not a clear, easy-to-follow roadmap of the Christian walk for each of us to pursue, but we can recognize several spiritual markers as we walk with the Lord. So far, we have examined the stages of unbelief, salvation, service, and frustrated inadequacy. In this lesson, we will explore the final three stages and begin to find our own place in this great journey.

You'll recall that frustrated inadequacy, the fourth stage, is the way in which God keeps us from being motivated by pride and ego. Rather than working in our own strength, we must operate solely under the power of God. Therefore, **we can identify the fifth stage of the Christian life as spiritual dependency.**

It is difficult for most of us to reach this stage because we must first realize that our own strength, wisdom, courage, and determination are simply insufficient. After all, why should we be dependent on the Holy

Spirit if we can be successful in our own sufficiency? So, as we go through the stage of frustrated inadequacy, we respond incorrectly. Instead of admitting our own weakness, we think we can do better on our own. We try harder, work longer, and think more positively. But all the while, God is working to bring us to the place where we collapse under the weight of our insufficiency and fall into the arms of the Spirit.

***J1: Is there any area of your life in which you struggle to maintain control, rather than submitting it to God's control? Respond in your journal.***

Even after three years of walking and working with Jesus, the disciples were not powerful enough to strike out on their own. Remember what Jesus told them before He ascended to heaven? He said, "You are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Well, we know that power to be the Holy Spirit of God, and He is available to all of us who are in Christ. No matter what we face in a given day, the Spirit of the Living God is there to energize us, work through us, and supply us with wisdom and power to accomplish God's purposes. What an exciting stage this is!

***Q1: Multiple Choice. Finish this sentence: The Holy Spirit . . .***  
***A. helps us to accomplish God's purposes.***  
***B. works hand-in-hand with our own strength to bring about God's purposes.***  
***C. enables and empowers us to accomplish God's purposes.***

Now, as we move on, things must get a bit more personal. The next stage is rooted deep within our hearts and minds, so much so that we often cannot even recognize it. **We will call this sixth stage "preprogrammed bondage."**

What I mean by this is that there are things that we learned from a very young age by our parents, teachers, and other influential adults that have become deeply ingrained in our personalities. Sadly, many of these lessons are harmful and disruptive to our development.

For example, if a child is physically abused by a parent at a young age, then he will most likely grow up with an overwhelming sense of worthlessness. His experience has taught him that his parents really did not want him, that they did not care for him, and that they wish he had

not been born. When that child grows into man, even after being saved by Christ, that inner voice will still be whispering, “You’re not worth anything.” My friend, this has serious implications on your spiritual growth.

This bondage comes in many other forms. Children can be programmed for failure, self-loathing, cowardice, unfaithfulness, distrust, and countless other obstacles. And, no matter how much we have grown, no matter how “big and strong” we think we have become, we will always have that frightened, confused, mistreated child within us.

*J2: As you have read about preprogrammed bondage, have you thought of anything that has happened in your life that may now be an obstacle in your spiritual growth? Record your thoughts in your journal, knowing that this information is completely private and secure.*

Well, what do we do with this preprogrammed bondage? First, you should recognize that it may or may not be a sin. A child has no responsibility whatsoever in how his parents treated him. If you were abused, you should know that it was not your fault and that God will deal with the abusers. Second, even if it is through no sin of your own, these things do affect your daily life. Ignoring these issues will not take them away. Instead, we must find the strength in Christ to bring these things to the surface of our minds and allow the Lord to free us from the heavy load. (Matthew 11:28-30)

### Lesson 3, Section 2

#### Objectives

By the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- A. Discuss the concept of the exchanged life, as presented in Galatians 2:20.
- B. Understand the concept of the “exchanged life” and its implications for our day-to-day living in Christ.

Successful progression through the stage of preprogrammed bondage is marked with the realization that we cannot live the Christian life under our own power. **This seventh stage is called the “exchanged life.”** By “exchanged,” we mean that we have put down our own best efforts and have accepted that we can only live the Christian life when we allow the Holy Spirit to live it for us.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul means in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” When we accept Jesus Christ into our lives, we also accept the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. It is that Holy Spirit that empowers, enables, and enlivens us.

Before receiving this Spirit of Life, we were all spiritually dead. (Ephesians 2:1) However, in Christ, we are brand new creatures; when Jesus rose from the dead, our own dead spirits were made alive. Jesus Christ is more than our Savior; He is our very life! (Colossians 3:1-4)

***J3: Carefully read Galatians 2:20. In your journal record your thoughts about what it means to actually be “crucified with Christ.” Also comment on the notion of the exchanged life, knowing that Christ is now your very life.***

You may ask, “Well, what’s the next stage?” Once we reach the point of understanding what it means to live an exchanged life, we can only abide in that. When we realize what it means for Jesus to be our very life, then we begin to grow like never before. We grow in our understanding, in our love, and in our submission. And, our perspective on life changes dramatically. This is because we reach the point of laying down our own efforts and simply accepting what God has already done for us.

So now, let me leave you with one plea: take these seven stages and principles, and with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, *find yourself*. Where are you spiritually? What is your motivation? What are your weaknesses? What obstacles stand in your way? What emotional baggage is holding you back? Take the time to discover your place in this great spiritual journey.

And, once you know where you are spiritually, *move on*. Do not be content to stay where you are. After all, are you content to stay just where you are financially for the rest of your life? Most likely, you would take any opportunity to improve your financial situation. Why, then, would you not have at least that same desire for your spiritual situation?

We are called to be a people on the move for God. Do not be stagnant in your walk with Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:14-24) Rather, push forward as you learn to live under His sufficient power.

## Prayer

Father, we love You and praise You for Your patience, Your goodness, Your kindness. You've blessed all of us in so many ways. We're so unworthy; but, we thank You that You think we're so worthy that You died for us.

And, I pray for somebody today who is not a Christian, who is not a believer, never trusted Jesus as their Savior. Today, wherever that person is listening, oh dear God, that they might be willing to say, "Lord, would You forgive me of my sins? I don't want to waste any more of my life, and I want to trust the Lord Jesus Christ today as my Savior and Lord."

And, Father, I think about how many millions and millions of believers will hear this message, who have never even thought about where they are in their spiritual growth. Dear God, create within them a hunger, an insatiable hunger and thirst that will not allow them to remain where they are, but to get up, surrender themselves to You, and step out to be used of You in any and every way possible.

Father, move us all to the exchanged life. Move us all on and on and on in our understanding, in our love, in our service, in our devotion, in our praise, and in our worship of You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Homework

### Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

#### *Philippians 3:13-14*

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Before moving on to the next lesson of this course, review each of the seven stages of Christian growth that we have studied in this course. If necessary, make a journal entry to record new insights you have had since completing the previous lessons.

## Transcript of Audio/Video Teaching Clip *The Exchanged Life*

Our Christian growth will come to a screeching halt if we fail to recognize one vital point. And that is, God never intended us to live the Christian life on our own. In fact, it is totally impossible for us to be successful, mature believers if we try to do it in our own strength.

We have to come to the point in our walk with Christ where we realize we are living an exchanged life. We have to be able to say, “Oh, God . . . I can’t live this life. You never intended me to.” I remember the day I learned that truth. I’ll never forget how liberating it was to realize that I didn’t have to try to live the Christian life on my own.

The day after I understood this, I was pulling into the church parking lot and I remember thinking, “Wow! Thank God! This is no longer my responsibility. I don’t have to make this church grow. It doesn’t have to be a big church. I don’t have to be a big preacher. Thank God, I don’t have to do anything, Lord, but whatever You choose to do through me.”

That was one of the most liberating moments of my life, to realize, “It’s no longer Charles, but it’s Jesus, living on the inside of me.” It was no longer my responsibility. It was no longer my work. It was no longer my ministry. It was His work, His ministry, His task, and His responsibility.

And what is mine? Just to live in continual surrender, decision after decision. Because, the exchanged life is an exchange of the old life we used to have for a brand new life. And my friend, there is simply no comparison between the two.

## Life Principles Center

### Course: Measuring Your Spiritual Growth

#### Lesson 4: A Barometer for Spiritual Growth Part 1 (RA127)

**Introduction:** This lesson is divided into two sections to help you complete the entire lesson at your convenience. In order to renew your mind with God's Word and give you an accurate view of Him, it's very important that you take time to complete each assignment before moving on to the next lesson.

#### Lesson 4, Section 1

##### Objectives

At the end of this section of Lesson 4, you should be able to:

- A. Begin to understand the need to track your spiritual journey by looking for certain key “markers” in your growth as a believer.

##### Scripture

*Read 2 Peter 3:14-18*

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

In the past few lessons of this course, we discovered certain stages in our spiritual growth through which we all progress on the road to spiritual maturity. I pray that over the course of those lessons, you were able to identify your own place in that progression.

Now, with our understanding of the general stages intact, I want to use the next two lessons to provide you with certain “marks” that we can use to mark our growth. These are all things that we can expect to take place as we grow more mature in the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to not only study these things online, but to also write them down and keep

them in your Bible. This can be an excellent reference for you as you go about your Christian life.

### **1. A Growing Hunger to Know God**

If we are maturing in our Christian walk, then we will certainly have a growing hunger to know God. We will not be satisfied with how much we know Him or understand His ways; instead, we will yearn to know Him more and more.

### **2. A Desire to Know the Truth of the Word**

If we are growing in the Lord, then we will want to know what He says about everything. A vital part of our maturity is understanding the power and relevance of God's Word for us today, in every area of our lives. We must seek to discover what the Word says about our families, our relationships, our ministries, our churches, our careers, our politics, and every other part of our lives.

Let me ask you a tough question: how much time do you spend reading the Word of God compared to the time you spend watching television, reading magazines, or scanning newspapers? My friend, I know that it is important to stay up-to-date on world events, but we must be careful not to give too much of our time away to worldly things. Personally, I would much rather know what God has to say than what man has to say.

*J1: Take a moment to answer the questions in the previous paragraph. If you were to track where and with what you spent your time each day, how prevalent would Bible study be?*

### **3. An Increasing Awareness of Our Sinfulness**

As we grow closer to the Lord, we become more and more aware of our desperate need for Him. This does not mean that mature Christians should devalue themselves or view themselves as worthless. Rather, this awareness means that our maturing spirit simply will not tolerate the same sins that once came so easily.

Now, we are all sinners and we are all still subject to the same human drives and desires. However, as we abide in the Holy Spirit, those things are brought under His control, and we become increasingly aware of our own weaknesses. When we know what our weaknesses—or “danger zones”—are, we can more effectively guard against them.

***J2: What are your “danger zones”? What areas of your life do you struggle to bring under God’s control? Respond in your journal.***

#### **4. A Quick Response to Sin Involving Genuine Repentance**

Immature believers put off dealing with sin for as long as they can. Many people even admit, “Well, I know God will forgive me anyway, so I’m just going to hang on to this sin for a little longer.” What a horrible misuse of the grace of God.

When we are growing spiritually, we will no longer be able to wade in sin so effortlessly. When we stumble, we will want to bring that sin to the feet of God and repent of our actions as quickly as possible.

#### **5. A Growing Reliance on the Holy Spirit**

We have already studied the issues of frustrated inadequacy and spiritual dependency. A key marker in our spiritual development is the ability to trust the Holy Spirit and rely solely upon Him to see us through those times in life that seem unbearable.

When we are truly growing in the Lord, we will not worry about as many things as we normally would. Instead, we will be able to trust the Spirit to work these things out for us and through us. The most amazing times of growth often occur in the midst of the most horrible, stressful, painful times. We honestly never realize what God can accomplish through us until we are thrown into situations in which we are utterly helpless. When our own pride and human strength is stripped away, the power of the Spirit can come blazing forth.

***Q1: True / False. God wants us to reach the point of spiritual maturity at which we can handle our temptations and struggles under our own might.***

### **Lesson 4, Section 2**

#### **Objectives**

At the end of this section of Lesson 4, you should be able to:

- A. Understand the spiritual value of trials, temptations, and intense spiritual battles.
- B. Recognize all things—both good and bad—as coming from the Lord.

#### **6. Joy in the Midst of Intense Spiritual Battles**

As we mature, our spiritual battles will become more intense. This means that our problems may seem bigger and our temptations may seem more inviting. However, as we trust in the Holy Spirit, we can still rejoice because we know that God is in the process of developing us into mature believers. Every time God brings us through a battle, we are left with the assurance that there is nothing beyond God's power to overcome.

## **7. Understanding Trials and Temptations as Opportunities for Growth**

When do you think Christians grow more: during times of hardship or times of success? The truth is that we generally learn the most about God during those times when everything seems hopeless. Even though the situation is painful, mature believers recognize the potential for God to reveal Himself in a mighty way. When our backs are against the wall and we have no choice but to trust God's power to see us through the trial, we discover things about God's character that could not have been revealed otherwise. In that, we find that the benefits far outweigh the losses in our struggles. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

***Q2: Multiple Choice. We often learn the most about God:***

- A. When everything in our lives seems to be going well***
- B. When we sit in church on Sunday.***
- C. When we are in the midst of an apparently hopeless situation.***

## **8. Viewing Service to God as an Honor, Not a Burden**

If we are growing in the Lord, we will want to serve Him. You have most likely heard the old adage, "Love is spelled T - I - M - E." My friend, if you love the Lord, you will want to show that by giving Him your time.

Also, your service will be motivated by love, not responsibility or obligation. No one will force you to serve God. However, if you are maturing in Him, you will truly enjoy the time you spend in service to Him. This does not mean that you must keep your life filled with "busy work." We must remember that, even though we are called to serve, we are also called to observe a day or season of rest. God wants us at our best, and my friend, we will not be at our best if we work ourselves to death without rest.

## 9. Viewing Everything—Good and Bad—As Coming from the Lord

Too often, we try to protect God when tragedy occurs by saying, “Well, surely God had nothing to do with that.” My friend, God does not need our protection, and He does not need us to make excuses for Him. If we are to be mature believers, then we must understand God’s complete and total sovereignty. This means that everything that happens—good or bad—is under His control.

Even though we may not understand God’s purposes for certain things, we must trust that His will is perfect and that He can bring His good out of any situation. We must place our faith in Romans 8:28, knowing that God can and does work all things for good.

I pray that you are already starting to see many of these changes taking place in your life. In the next lesson, we will conclude this course by examining even more spiritual markers in our journey toward maturity.

### Prayer

Father God, You have made it so easy for us to experience You in Your fullness. You didn’t wait for us to become clean enough to enter into Your presence. You knew that we would never be able to do that. Instead, You gave Your Son for us exactly as we are: sinful, rebellious, selfish.

And now, Father, we ask that You help us along this road to maturity. Help us to grow in our understanding of who You are. Help us trust in Your sovereign control of everything life throws at us. Now that You have saved us, help us to grow into the men and women You want us to be. And we ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.

### Homework

#### Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

#### *Philippians 3:13-14*

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

**J3:** Review the nine spiritual “pegs” discussed in this lesson. In your journal, list these nine things and write one or two lines for each one,

detailing how you do or do not see evidence of that quality in your Christian life.

## Life Principles Center

### Course: Measuring Your Spiritual Growth

#### Lesson 5: A Barometer for Spiritual Growth Part 2 (RA127)

**Introduction:** Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." For that reason, we encourage you to complete each assignment before progressing to the next lesson. This lesson is structured with two separate sections to help you maximize your study time.

#### Lesson 5, Section 1

##### Objectives

By the end of this section of Lesson 5, you should be able to:

- A. Understand the importance of asking God for bigger things.
- B. Track your own spiritual maturity through these evidences.

##### Scripture

*Read Philippians 3:8-14*

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

#### Lesson 5

In the previous lesson of this course, we began a study of several key “pegs” or “road signs” that will help us track our maturity in Christ. Now, let’s get right back to work by examining more evidences of our

growth in the Christian life. Picking up where we left off, we will continue with the tenth evidence.

## **10. Faith to Ask God for Bigger Things**

As we mature in Christ, so does our faith and confidence that God will answer our prayers. God wants us to pray big; there is nothing we can ask that will be too much for God to accomplish. Now, we must remember from our study on prayer that God may choose to answer “no,” but that is not because He could not deliver what we needed. God only says no when our requests are not in line with His will.

God is honored by the size of our requests. It takes a great deal of faith to ask for something that seems impossible. Mature believers show God great faith by asking for bigger and bigger things, while allowing the Holy Spirit to guide the requests.

*J1: Do you sometimes choose not to ask God for something because it seems too big? Is it because you secretly think that God couldn't deliver it, or maybe because you don't want God to think you are asking for more than you deserve? Review the preceding section on asking God for bigger things and respond in your journal.*

## **11. Obedience Becomes More Important While Sin Becomes Less Attractive**

Every Christian has been an unbeliever at some time in his or her life. Even if you were saved as a young child, you still lived as an unbeliever for some years. There should be a big difference in your life at this point in comparison to your unbelieving years. In those days, you were more self-centered, seeking primarily after your own good. Now, your actions and attitude should be under the control of the Holy Spirit.

This means that many of the things that once appealed to you should be much less attractive to you now. While we once looked after our own desires, we now seek to be obedient to the One who can take care of every need we could ever have.

## **12. Eagerness to Share Christ with Others**

One of the signs that you are growing in the Lord is that you cannot stay quiet about it. God's overwhelming grace may overtake you in such a way that you just have to tell someone what God is doing in your life.

As we mature, we develop a heart for other people. And, knowing what God has done for us, the most sincere way to help others is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. When we are overcome with the need to tell others, we can be sure that God is doing a mighty work in our lives.

*Q1: True / False. A mature believer may or may not feel the need to tell others about Jesus.*

## **Lesson 5, Section 2**

### **Objectives**

By the end of this section of Lesson 5, you should be able to:

- A. Memorize Philippians 3:13-14.
- B. Review the evidences of a mature faith and discover areas in which you need to develop.

### **13. Earnest Desire to Give to the Lord's Work**

One key evidence of maturity in a believer is what happens to his pocketbook. Now, you may be annoyed by the fact that I've brought money into this discussion. However, I want you to know that it is not Charles Stanley who is bringing money into it; it is the very Word of God.

Take a moment to read Luke 16:10-11. Over and over again, Scripture warns us about the dangers of money. Did you know that Jesus taught more on this subject than any other topic in Scripture? The issue at hand is that if we are unfaithful with something as temporary as our money, why should we expect God to entrust something of eternal value to us?

Our checkbooks are little windows into our souls. If we are not faithful in that area, then every other part of our Christian lives will be skewed. Matthew 6:21 reveals that our heart—our true focus—will be where our treasure lies. If your heart is for ministry, then you will give gladly to the work of the Gospel.

*J2: Did this section on joyful giving make you uncomfortable, or did you read and affirm the truths presented? Our money can be a major obstacle to spiritual maturity. In your journal, comment on how this mark of maturity is evidenced in your life.*

### **14. An Increasing Awareness of God in Every Area of Life**

A mature believer is one who is constantly aware of the presence and work of God. First Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us that a growing

Christian prays continually. This does not mean that we must walk around every moment of the day with our eyes closed and heads bowed. Rather, this is an instruction to abide in the presence of God at all times.

A true believer cannot compartmentalize his life. This means that the person you are at church on Sunday must be the same as the person you are during the week at home, work, or school. Faith is not a part-time commitment. If we are believers, we must believe *at all times*.

**Q2: Multiple Choice. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, a mature believer prays:**

- A. at all times, without ceasing.**
- B. every morning before getting out of bed.**
- C. every night before going to sleep.**
- D. Both B and C**

### **15. The Priority of a Personal, Private Devotional Life**

*The most important time of day for a mature believer is that time dedicated solely to growing closer to the Lord. That is when we are filled with power, direction, comfort, and guidance. Our time of devotion sets the tone for the whole day; if your prayer time is frantic, chances are great that your day will be rushed and unorganized as well. If you are truly growing in the Lord, then you will certainly guard that precious time with Him.*

### **16. A Complete Focus on Jesus as Lord**

*When we are growing in Christ, He will become the primary focus of our lives. Morning, noon, and night, Jesus will be at the forefront of our thoughts.*

*The purpose of this list was not to give you a strict report card of whether or not you are "mature." Rather, these sixteen things provide a type of measuring stick by which you can measure your Christian growth. I encourage you to write these things down and put that list in your Bible. Pull it out occasionally and ask yourself of each one, "Is this true of me, Lord?" I pray that as you honestly go through this process, over time you will discover that you are, in fact, changing into the person God wants you to be.*

**Prayer**

*Father, we love You and thank You again for being patient with us, and seeing us as children. But, thank You that You see us as we are, but You also see us as we shall be.*

*And so, we just ask tonight that the Holy Spirit would take these simple truths, apply them to our hearts, increase our love and devotion, and then our service to You, is my prayer. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Homework

### Scripture Memory Review

Fill in the blanks to complete this course's memory verse.

Brethren, I do not \_\_\_\_\_ as having \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of it \_\_\_\_\_; but one thing I do: \_\_\_\_\_ what  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to what \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_ toward the \_\_\_\_\_ for the  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of God in Christ Jesus.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3:13-14

**J3: Review the 16 marks of maturity in this and the previous lesson. In your journal, respond to the following questions: Which of these 16 things are evident in my life? Which of these are completely lacking in my life? With these things in mind, how might I develop a fuller, more mature relationship with Christ?**

## *Conclusion*

### *[from conclusion audio/video]*

Congratulations on completing this important course. The issue of spiritual maturity is something that many people are interested in, yet no one seems to take the time to study. I'm so glad that you've chosen to do so.

You should now have the tools necessary not only to understand the fundamental aspects of the Christian life, but to also identify where you are in your walk with the Lord.

Now, there is certainly no specific time in our lives when we all-of-a-sudden become spiritually mature. We won't be able to stop one day and say, "Well, now I'm mature. I've learned all I need to know." Rather, the

Christian life is a process that will continue until the day we go to be with Christ. Until that day, I pray that you continue to take bold strides forward in your walk with Him, showing yourself to be in a constant state of maturing.

