

What Does a Mature Christian Look Like?

At Harvest Fellowship we seek to make radical, mature disciples of Christ who advance the kingdom of God together. But what does a radical, mature disciple look like?

Radical in the dictionary means extreme, an advocate of revolution. We speak a lot about balance in Christianity, but we do not mean less extreme – we mean to be extreme about what God is extreme about, without leaving anything out! We are to extremely love God with our minds and we are to extremely love God with our hearts: these two areas of love should produce extreme love for God in our actions. By radical we also mean to be advocates of revolution. The church today, has become anemic because it has become a mirror of the world (i.e. individualistic, consumerist oriented, no conviction on beliefs), rather than a transformer of society. Jesus started a revolution – a total change in lifestyle, commitments, priorities and beliefs (Luke 9:23-26; 57-62; 14:25-34; 18:18-30; Matthew 10:34-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-38).

Mature in the dictionary means fully developed (The Greek word is *teleios* which means complete, perfect, mature). By this we do not mean a person can arrive at a place spiritually where there is no more room for growth (Philippians 3:12-16), but we do mean that the Christian has developed to such an extent that he or she is proficient in a number of areas:

1. Ethically a mature believer is a person of character where sin is the exception to the rule in his or her life. This does not mean that the Christian never sins, but it does mean that there are no blatant, ongoing areas of deviation to God's moral standards in his or her life (i.e. greed, pride, sexual misbehavior, anger, etc. see Galatians 5:19-21). It also means that the fruits of the Spirit are evident in the believer's life (i.e. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, see Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:12-14; Proverbs 6:16-19; 8:13; Ephesians 4:22-32; 2 Peter 1:3-11).

2. Relationally the radical disciple has a deep intimacy with God and a close, open relationship with those in his or her local fellowship as well as a dynamic, growing family life. The believer's knowledge of God and His ways and his or her experience of God are not shallow, but rather rich. This would include, though is not limited to, a good understanding of God's word and a regular and consistent prayer life. The relationship with the people in his or her local fellowship is more than surface level. Fellowship, community life, and accountability would be a regular part of the mature believer's life. The disciple's relationships in his or her family are healthy. If the person is married and has children he or she does not have serious marital problems or a distant or adverse relationship with the children as far as the mature believer's part is concerned. (See Mark 12:28-34; Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; John 10:27-30; 1 John 1:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-4:4; Psalm 119; 1 Corinthians 13; Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

3. Vocationally the mature believer knows his or her spiritual gifts and passions and is actively being used by God to advance the kingdom of God in a ministry in his or

her local church. (See Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11).

4. Missionally the radical disciple is regularly involved in reaching out to the lost and the poor. The believer is active in sharing his or her faith – purposely making friends with people who do not know Christ in hopes of sharing Christ with them. The believer is open to and listening for God’s voice for opportunities to present the gospel (what we call divine appointments). He or she has a deep concern for the lost in other parts of the world (missions oriented). The disciple has God’s heart for the poor, reaching out to help those in need (i.e. sponsoring a child through Compassion, feeding the poor, etc.). (See Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:11-12; 3:15; Colossians 4:2-6; Proverbs 19:17; Isaiah 25:4; Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 15:17; Amos 4:1; James 1:27).

5. Overall the mature believer has a servant’s heart. The Christian is not more concerned about his or her own comfort than God’s plan for his or her life. The mature believer does not seek prestige and recognition, but rather follows Jesus wherever He leads, only seeking His glory. (See John 13:1-17; Luke 14:7-11; Matthew 20:20-28).

God does desire for all believers to become radical, mature disciples who advance the kingdom of God together. (See Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 4:12; Hebrews 5:11-14; James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 2:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). This is what it means to look like Jesus, to be conformed to His image, to be Christ-like.

How do we become mature? How is the image of God renewed in us? Many think it simply takes sheer grit; I just try real hard. Those that have attempted this method will tell you it doesn’t work. Others think it is “me and Jesus.” I do my part and He does His. The problem with this method is that if it works it takes away some of the glory from Jesus, but, as most that have tried it will tell you, it doesn’t work any better than the first method. It has to be all Jesus! John 15:5 gives us the answer: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.” We become mature by abiding in Christ and allowing Him to mold us into His image. We are to be transformed by God, rather than initiate some self-transformation process. But what does it mean to abide? Does the branch try real hard to produce fruit? No, it simply remains connected to the vine allowing the sap to flow from the vine into its inner core, which produces the fruit. The sap is the Holy Spirit. To abide entails two things: 1) Close proximity and intimacy, communication and communion, in other words, contact with God; 2) Agreement with God, in other words, faith. To encourage faith and experience contact, God has provided several means for us, which Christians throughout the centuries have called *Spiritual Disciplines*; I like to call them avenues of grace because spiritual disciplines sounds too much like work. Avenues of grace are not works to gain God’s favor, but rather opportunities or paths God has provided for us to commune with Him. The classic spiritual disciplines are: Bible intake, prayer, fellowship, worship, meditation, the Lord’s Supper, fasting, solitude, service and witnessing. The wise follower of Christ will take advantage of these means of grace often, seeking God with all of his or her heart, both corporately and individually. As we seek God using His provided means for experiencing His presence, He fills us with His Holy Spirit and transforms us from the inside out. God does all the work (Philippians

2:13) as we allow Him to change us and so He gets all the glory and we get all the benefit!