

What Does a Mature Christian Look Like?

It's common to talk about having a "personal relationship with Jesus." Certainly, a good term but that phrase never appears in Scripture. The most common word to describe the Christian life is "walk." Jesus invited His disciples—and us—to follow Him (Matt. 4:19; 16:24) and following implies walking.

- "Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph. 4:1).
- "So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him" (Col. 2:6).
- "This is love: that we walk according to his commands. This is the command as you have heard it from the beginning: that you walk in love" (2 John 6).

I like that picture. We're not being asked to run or jump. Just walk. Walking carries the idea that, even as I am walking *toward* Jesus (becoming more like Him), I am walking *with* Jesus. Furthermore, walking means the Christian life is a journey. No one who comes to Christ in one moment is a fully mature Christian in the next. John Bunyan captured this well in his classic book *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In this novel, Bunyan explores both the joys and challenges that face Christians as they seek to lose their burden of sin and enter the celestial city. The book is about the Christian journey, the progress we make as we follow Christ.

But what exactly does that journey look like?

Good pathways include a clearly delineated path to walk. My wife and I occasionally go for walks in some of our state parks. We love the nature trails, and I am thankful for both the clearly marked path and the occasional signpost showing us we're heading in the right direction. When I see these signposts, I know we are making progress—and it is progress in the right direction.

Similar signposts can surely help us as we journey toward Christlikeness. Even when we face

challenges—the uphill climbs or rocky terrain—we know we're still progressing in the right direction.

Let's consider what those signposts look like and what they tell us.

Lifeway Research conducted a significantly large research study around the subject of discipleship. As the research was culled through, they identified eight areas of the Christian life that lead to spiritual health in a believer. Looking at these eight attributes of discipleship, we realized these are the characteristics that ought to be present, in increasing measure, in the life of someone who is growing toward Christlikeness.

- **Engage with Scripture.** Transformation can be recognized when we regularly interact with God's Word. Our mind is sharpened by the Bible, our perspective is shaped by the Bible, and our actions are directed by the Bible. "*All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- **Obey God and Deny Self.** Discipleship is the process of obedience to the One who is in authority over you. Transformation can be seen when we progressively set aside what we want, live under the lordship of Christ, and pursue His kingdom's priorities. "*If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me*" (Luke 9:23).
- **Serve God and Others.** Transformation is evident when personal needs and even dreams are set aside for the needs we see in others. We understand our service to God is reflected in our service to others. "*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*" (Matt. 25:40).
- **Share Christ.** Living out the effects of the gospel is certainly important, but maturing

believers know speaking about the message is also important. Transformation is evident when we talk about the Source of our changed lives. *“But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).*

- **Exercise Faith.** Transformation is seen in believers when we increasingly choose to trust and obey God, regardless of any inner risks, outward risks, or tugs from others to choose a safer path. Our lives are characterized by faithful obedience to God’s will. *“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).*
- **Seek God.** Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully. As we mature, we seek to deepen our communion with God. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you” (Matt. 6:33).*
- **Build Relationships.** Faith is personal but it is not intended to be private. Our horizontal relationships should develop just as our vertical relationship with God does. We are meant to live in community with other believers, where we can mutually love and encourage one another. As we build relationships with those outside the community of faith, we reflect Christ to them. *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).*
- **Live Unashamed.** Transformation is evident when we are unashamed to present our own lives as being aligned with Christ. Mature believers do not hesitate for their lives and words to be on display for all to see Christ in them. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).*

These are the statistically validated marks of a maturing Christian. I am convinced on the importance of these markers, which is why the studies I help develop for Bible Studies for Life are built on these eight markers. Within each issue, two of the markers are specifically addressed in six-week studies. (If you use [Bible Studies for Life](#), look in the table of contents for “Bible Studies for Life’s Discipleship Plan.”)

What are you doing to grow into a mature follower of Christ?