

SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

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Introduction

In our modern world, the idea of a person being complete or perfect is one in which he is without fault or defect. The perfect person is considered to be one who has reached some abstract ideal standard of what it means to be the ultimate person. Most of us believe that few – if any – can ever reach the point of perfection and completion.

When we look at what the bible says about a person becoming perfect, we see that the command is for all to become perfect or complete. What is the difference between what the bible commands and what we believe today? The bible uses two Greek words that are usually translated into the English language as “*perfect*”, *mature*, or *complete*. In the bible they all mean the same thing.

THE COMPLETE PERSON IS ONE OF HOPE

The Hope that Is in Us

The complete person is a person of hope. To most of us today, hope is nothing more than wishful thinking. We really *want* something to happen, but we do not expect that it will actually happen. In the Bible “hope” means something else. It is the expectation of a future good event. *It is the belief that not only **can** something happen, but that it **will** happen.*

This is the difference that Christ makes in our lives.

Peter told his readers . . . “*. . . sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you . . .*” (**First Peter 3:15**). Not only does the complete person have hope, he knows that he has it and he knows how to explain that hope to others.

The hope that Peter is talking about is not wishing to obtain some type of material possession . . . It is not to make us self-aware or make us better people, although it does so. It is to help us know about God and His Son and what they did for us. It is about the salvation that they freely give to us.

STAGE AGE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Infancy 0-1 trusts in self and others *early childhood*.

1-3 learns that self-control creates a sense of independence.

Play age 3-6 mobility and curiosity encourages the initiative to master the environment.

School age 6-12 A sense of industry is developed through schoolwork and control of imagination.

Adolescence 12-20 A sense of uniqueness as a person, a desire for a meaningful role and place in society, sense of identity.

Young adulthood 20-30 wish to unite one's identity with others leading a person to seek intimacy; love, the capacity for mutual devotion in sharing relationships.

Adulthood 30-65 the need to create children, ideas, products and to care for them.

Mature age 65+ review of one's life, to ensure that it has had order and meaning; preserves wisdom and passes it to others.

DO ALL THINGS THROUGH LOVE

Paul says that Jesus has called us “ . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). In this short statement, he tells us much about the character of a Christian.

First, the Christian is to be *humble*. To ask a Greek and Roman to act in humility was an insult. No self-respecting citizen of the empire would ever think about being humble.

Humility was something that slaves, servants, and the poor exhibited. It meant to be weak, faint-hearted, and to have a servile mind. The writers of the New Testament took the word and turned it into a “virtue” accepted by God. They use it to describe a person who is not arrogant and who willingly serves the church and his fellow men.

A second aspect of a Christian is to be *gentle*. It is a quality shown by friends. It is the opposite of anger, harshness, brutality and self-expression. In other words, it means to be considerate and thoughtful toward others.

A third quality of the Christian is *patience*. It is the idea of choosing not to become angry or provoked. Patience is shown when we actively try to meet someone halfway and try to share our life with another person.

A fourth characteristic of a Christian is that of *forbearance*, which carries with it the idea of endurance. In other words, we are to put up with any insult or hurt done to us by someone else – whether real or imagined. This does not mean that we are to be a doormat. It means choosing to be like Christ. Jesus was not a doormat. He challenged His enemies to change their attitude and behavior. When

they did not, He did not try to force them. He allowed them to kill Him so all men might have salvation. What ties these characteristics together and strengthens them is . . . *love*. Love provides the motivation to want to be humble, gentle, patient, and forbearing. Love perfects us and draws us close to God and man.

Rooted And Grounded In Love
Forbears One Another In Love
Speak The Truth In Love
Edifies The Body In Love
Walks In Love
Is Unfeigned In Love
Increases In Love

Biblical love is more than a warm, fuzzy feeling. It is a feeling, a way of thinking, and a type of behavior (**Proverbs 23:7**). Paul calls it *a more excellent way* (**First Corinthians 12:31**).

The greatest example of God's love for man is the sending of His Son into the world as our Savior (**John 3:16**). It is through Jesus that we are able to return this love to God. There is no other way. God loved us first. When we accept His love, we love Him and we love our fellow man.

A MIND OF FORGIVENESS

Luke 15 contains the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. They are perhaps the best known parables in the entire Bible. In this lesson we will look at them in a different way from what you may have considered before.

Themes that are common to all three include the following . . .

- Separation
- The value of one
- Rejoicing in the found

THE VALUE OF ONE AND REJOICING IN THE FOUND

To understand these parables it is helpful to know to whom Jesus was talking. Several kinds of people surrounded Him as he taught – tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes and thieves. But perhaps He was directing His comments to the Pharisees and Scribes who were standing over to one side. These religious leaders were criticizing Jesus for associating with those who were unacceptable in their society.

It grieves God when even one of us turns away from Him, but He still loves us and longs for our return. He will not force us to come back but waits for us to decide.

Once we *decide* to come back, He rushes to us with open arms and prepares a celebration.

Those of us who have repented and have been welcomed back home, feel compelled to seek the lost – both those who have wandered away from God and those who don't even know they are lost.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF OBEDIENCE

A. There are many inspiring stories of obedience throughout the Bible. You may want to read these for further understanding of how people live out obedience in their lives. Hebrews 11 provides a list of some of the more inspiring ones.

B. There was Abel who obeyed God in the matter of sacrifice and died for his faithfulness.

There was Enoch who walked so closely with God that God did not allow him to die. There was Noah whose obedience was so radical that he endured the ridicule and derision of his neighbors in building a huge boat to save his family from a flood before the first drop of rain ever fell. There was Abraham who uprooted his family from a secure and prosperous life in one of the ancient world's greatest cities to live as a nomadic herdsman as he followed the direction of God in his life.

Then there are Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, and many others whose faith was demonstrated by radical obedience to God's will. Their obedience sometimes cost them dearly (**Hebrews 10:35-38**), but because of it God blessed them and the world through them.

A MIND OF PURITY

What do you think of when you think about the *Beatitudes*? Sadly, most people probably would not even know what you are talking about if you mentioned them. If they did, they would say something about the *meek inheriting the earth*. Even then, comments made are usually snide remarks about a “weak” person being victimized. The *Beatitudes* are much more than that . . .

They are the “preamble” of the *Sermon on the Mount*. In a few short verses (**Matthew 5:3-12**), Jesus outlines what it means to be a member of God's kingdom.

The sixth *Beatitude* has to do with personal purity. It states . . . **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”** When you read these words, what does it mean to you? Some might think of a Christian – the model of living a life of purity and holiness. Others might think of their parents. Still others might think of a loving spouse. In this lesson the goal is to see ourselves as *pure in heart* and to

learn how we can *see God*. Most people will think, “*With my behavior, how can I possibly see myself as pure in heart?*”

Jesus said, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*” We are pure in heart when we are reconciled to God, devote our lives to serving Him, and live a life of holiness. While we live in this world, we see God in Jesus Christ and His Gospel, in others – both the sinner and the saint – and in nature. If we are pure in heart, in eternity we will see God in Heaven

TEN SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1. SPEAKING TRUTH IN LOVE

Early in my faith journey, I caused a lot of relational tension with how forcefully I spoke truth. My intentions were good; I genuinely wanted others to experience freedom in Christ. But my abrasiveness ultimately pushed them further away. The problem came from relying on myself rather than the Holy Spirit within.

While I knew, intellectually, only God could draw people to His Son, I acted as if their salvation depended on my ability to persuade or debate. I inevitably allowed my **pride**, fear, and insecurity, rather than Christ, to lead me. I've since learned, to truly convey the love of Christ, I must remain dependent on Him. This means maintaining a posture of surrendered obedience and trusting His leading.

2. GENTLENESS

As we mature in Christ and learn to yield more consistently to the Holy Spirit's influence, He produces within us the godly traits, like gentleness, that we read about in *Galatians 5:22-23*. And *Titus 3:2* tells us “*to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone*” (NIV).

Often, our culture erroneously associates gentleness with weakness and brashness with strength. But Scripture indicates the opposite. We reveal our weakness and the sin lurking within whenever we lash out and speak with malice and hate.

As faith writer Desmond M Bantoh puts it, “*... being gentle is about self-control, the refusal of using power to harm anyone, the refusal of embracing vengeance, and an unwillingness to cut and slash at others.*” Because gentleness doesn't come naturally, whenever we behave in this manner, we demonstrate the life-changing power of the gospel and the heart of our Savior.

3. LIVING GENEROUSLY

Apart from Christ, many people develop what psychologists refer to as “the scarcity mindset.” This is where an individual focuses on needs and perceived

limitations, rather than resources. But Scripture tells us we belong to a limitless God of abundance, able to create galaxies from nothing, water from rocks, and to rain down nourishment from the sky.

Therefore, the more we understand the power, purposes, and heart of God, the more able we are to give of ourselves, our time and resources included, as God leads and without fear.

4. COURAGEOUSLY SHARING WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE

I was ashamed of my testimony for a long time. I wanted to proclaim how miraculously God had transformed my life, but I didn't want others to know why I'd so desperately needed transforming. I was afraid they'd reject me if they knew who I'd once been and all I'd once done. My fear came from a failure to live deeply anchored in God's grace.

God helped me grow in this area by increasing my love for others, removing my shame, and centering my focus on the cross. Eventually, my desire to see others walk in Christ's freedom became greater than my desire to self-protect. I learned to let Christ's grace define me rather than my past, and recognized He'd paid much too high a price for me to allow anything, insecurity included, to keep me from living for Him.

5. JOINING GOD'S MISSION

The moment we turn to Christ for salvation, God begins to change us to more accurately reflect Him. As **2 Corinthians 5:16-17** states, *"So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun"* (NLT). Our miraculous transformation occurs in our hearts and minds so that our thoughts and desires begin to mirror Christ's. Living for personal pleasure and gain indicates spiritual immaturity. This also suggests we don't yet understand our purpose or are living in rebellion.

God's molding occurs as we progressively yield to Christ, His truth, and His ways as revealed in Scripture. Through this, we begin to discover who we are and what we were created to do. **Ephesians 2:10** puts it this way: *"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things He planned for us long ago"* (NLT).

Tim Keller expounded on this beautifully, stating, *"You see, when Jesus gave Himself on the Cross, He didn't say, 'I'm going to die just so you know I love you.' He said, 'I'm going to die, I'm going to bleed, for your splendor. I'm going to recreate you into*

something beautiful." Into a life-changer and history maker; someone driven by love rather than selfishness; generosity, rather than greed.

6. PURSUING UNITY

When a person knows they're approaching death, they choose their words with care to ensure everything they want to say gets said. Knowing this adds significance to Jesus' prayer shortly before His death. After encouraging the disciples to remain connected with Him (**John 15**),

He said to His Father, *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me through their message. I pray that they will be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in Me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in Us so that the world will believe You sent Me"* (**John 17:20-21**, NLT).

Jesus understood the challenges His body of believers would face. Through His death and resurrection, He wasn't uniting a group of individuals who all thought and spoke alike. He was uniting people from all backgrounds and nations. This is precisely why our unity provides such strong evidence of the gospel (**John 13:35**). Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, our differences divide us and weaken our mission. But when surrendered to Christ, those same differences become beautiful, full-bodied expressions of grace.

7. HONORING SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Numbers 12 demonstrates God's heart for our spiritual leaders. This historical account records a time when a brother-sister duo opposed Moses, God's chosen leader. *"Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. 'Hasn't He also spoken through us?'"* (v. 1-2a, NIV).

God heard their grumbling, saw the **pride** rising up in their hearts, and was *not* pleased. He immediately called all three of them to the place of worship. Summoning Aaron and Miriam, He affirmed Moses's call, verbally honored him, then asked his siblings, *"Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?"* (V. 8).

In other words, "When you rebelled against Moses, My chosen leader, you were rebelling against Me." That's not to say we should follow all leaders without question, but we must always check our motives and guard our hearts. Are we reacting from pride? Are we making debatable issues overly consequential and thus potentially harming the congregation? If God clearly reveals the significance of an issue, we then ask, *"Is this something God is calling me to become involved in?"* Many times, God already has a plan for dealing with whatever is weakening the church or creating doctrinal confusion. I've found that His solutions are always much more effective than ours.

8. EXTENDING GRACE

In **Matthew 18:21-35**, Jesus told a convicting parable of a man who had been released from a huge debt, but showed no mercy to the one who owed money to him. The one in debt begged for patience, but the merciless man refused. Verse 30 tells us, *“Instead, he went off and had the man thrown in prison until he could pay the debt.”* When the master learned of this, he *“called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”* (vs. 32-34, NIV).

Jesus told this parable to encourage our self-evaluation. How can we withhold grace from others when God has given such grace to us? To do so implies we either don't understand God's grace or why we need it so desperately. While we may not have sinned in the same way or to the same extent as someone else, we've all grieved our holy God. He suffered and died a brutal death for our sin.

That's how ugly, how destructive it was, but his crucifixion also demonstrates the depth of His mercy. Our gratitude for all He's done should well up within us until it spills from us in lavish acts of mercy and grace.

9. LIVING ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE

Similarly, Jesus said, *“If you love Me, you will keep My commands”* (HCSB). As we mature, our desire increases to love Him and His will better. We want to please Him. This longing for godly living will draw us to Scripture in order to learn God's ways and experience greater closeness with Him.

Something beautiful happens as we read God's holy Word—it sparks within us an increased desire for Him and the righteousness He calls us to. This life-giving and progressive cycle plays a huge role in what Scripture refers to as sanctification, which, put simply, means growing more like Christ.

10. SEEKING RELATIONAL HEALTH

Jesus has such a heart for reconciliation—between God and man and between humans and one another. **Colossians 1:19-20** tells us that Christ came to reconcile all things, or to restore all things to their intended, harmonious state. To bring health and healing to our broken and often dysfunctional relationships.

Once you and I have entrusted our lives to Christ, Scripture says God gives us the ministry of reconciliation. This means as the Holy Spirit gains influence within us,

we'll find ourselves longing for true peace, which biblically means things as they should be.

We begin to view our world through Christ's perspective, begin to recognize brokenness for what it is, and feel compelled to bring God's light into every darkened area. Driven by courageous love, we're emboldened to hold hard, yet loving conversations and to persevere until hope and life thrives where hurt and distrust once grew.

In short, our Christian maturity is revealed not in how many church services we attend or how high we raise our hands during worship. Our maturity is most evident in how well we resemble our Savior, the One who gave His life so that we might live ours—as He intends.

CONCLUSION

God created man perfect, complete, and mature. God wants only the best for us. We know this because God sent His Son into the world to be an example for us and to redeem us. When we follow Jesus' example, we can become the perfect, complete, mature people that God wants us to be (*Philippians 4:13*). God created us to be bold and to soar with the eagles (*Isaiah 40:31*).