

091122 – Spiritual Maturity In The Family

INTRODUCTION:

Paul's goal for the Ephesians is that they continue to *grow up*, as he puts it in vs 15. That to which you have been called in vs 1, continue to grow in it *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. What does this faith and knowledge, this maturity and stature result in? We are to grow in these things *so that we may no longer be children*.

So what is Christian maturity? What does it look like? Interesting notes from a Barna study.¹

- Most Christians equate spiritual maturity with the following of rules (81% of self-identified Christians).
- Pressed for clarity, 20% of self-described Christians couldn't say what spiritual maturity looked like.

We started way back at the beginning of this series by saying that the family is the most fundamental element in society – the family of the church first, and the nuclear family second. And if these things are true, then these families should be the source of ever increasing maturity. In the book *Pastoral Leadership For Manhood And Womanhood*, I found this statement:

Equipping husbands and wives in marriage and training parents to lead their children spiritually are not just part of local church ministry; they represent the greatest opportunity for the local church to spread the Gospel, build spiritual maturity, and advance the Kingdom of God in this generation!²

And the topic isn't just about culture and the church. It's very personal and practical as well. A preacher once commented that if one were to ask the average distressed wife what they wanted from their husbands, by far the common theme would be that wives are looking for their husbands to take spiritual leadership in the family.³ It may take on different forms of expression: making decisions, spiritual input, or just the need to spiritually and psychologically "man up."

If we think about spiritual maturity from vs 14, there are some things that seem to be inherent in the text. Namely:

- 1) Children and the spiritually immature are unstable.
- 2) Children and the spiritually immature lack the knowledge and wisdom of the faith.

¹ *Reformation, Renewal and Revival: Define Spiritual Maturity*, Posted by David Virtue on 2009/5/13 8:50:00. Define Spiritual Maturity, Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity. The Barna Group May 2009. virtueonline.org. The study will be published on the St. John's web site with these sermon notes.

² *Pastoral Leadership For Manhood And Womanhood*. Wayne Grudem And Dennis Rainey, Editors. Crossway Books, A Division Of Good News Publishers Wheaton, Illinois, 2002. Freely available as a PDF file from cbmw.org/Pastoral-Leadership-for-Manhood-and-Womanhood.

³ Voddie Baucham, "Biblical Male Headship: Gen 2.18 ff".

3) Children and the spiritually immature believe that it's all about me.

UNSTABLE:

The spiritually immature are unstable. They're hot and cold, up and down, and unpredictable.

Look at what vs 14 says. The spiritually immature are those *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine*. Jude says of the wicked that they are *uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars*.⁴ There is no commitment to one mood, one thought, one path, one goal, or one priority.

You've met Christians like this, I suspect. They're unstable and unpredictable both in doctrine and life. They're church hoppers, leaping from congregation to congregation, looking for the perfect place – and even the definition of the perfect church changes from month to month.

Every *wave* of mood or circumstance pushes them here or there, and every new *wind of doctrine* about end times, spiritual gifts, or how to be more spiritual in 5 easy lessons, attracts them like a manic-depressive kid with severe ADHD! Today they're going to do great things for God and tomorrow, after a bad day, want to go be a lumberjack in Canada for the rest of their lives.

There's often an incredible disconnect between what they say they profess and what they actually do. In public, one sees a St. Augustine, very pious in prayer and knowledgeable of all things Biblical. In private, the spouse and children see something that's a cross between Freddy Krueger and Hannibal Lector – a searing temper and incredibly self-oriented desires.

That's NOT what mature spirituality looks like. Rather, spiritual maturity increasingly stable and predictable. The maturity Christian keeps himself or herself well grounded on what's important. This kind of Christian isn't tossed here and there by every new mood or circumstances, a new theology, or a different goal. This kind of Christian is hot about what's important, cold on unimportant stuff. And there is an increasing unity between what they say and what they do, what they are in public and who they are in private.

LACK KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM OF THE FAITH:

The spiritually immature are unstable. And there's a reason for that. It's because they lack knowledge and wisdom. Spiritual immaturity is unstable and unpredictable, because it's gullible and naïve.

Look at how Paul puts this: the spiritually immature are *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*. They hear one opinion, and believe it. They hear another opinion, and believe that too. They might be contradictory, or even openly ridiculous, it doesn't matter. Lacking

⁴ Jde 1.12-13

knowledge, they know too little to discern. And lacking wisdom, they lack the ability to even know what they don't know. James writes:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.⁵

The double-minded man is literally of two minds. It would be like a cartoon ogre with two heads, each one constantly arguing with the other about what they should do next. It's like a dog chasing its spiritual tail – a great deal of energy and motion, but not a whole lot of distance covered.

The spiritually immature people tend to think about eternity in ways they would never think about this life. I've told you the story about the real estate agent, who said that it didn't matter what one believed, as long as one is sincere. However, she refused to sincerely invest \$100,000 with me, even though I couldn't define how the money would be invested. Can you imagine?

Instead, mature Christians are always maturing. They are always increasing in knowledge, wisdom, and faith. A person who isn't constantly growing in godly and Biblical maturity, is not spiritually mature at all. Mature Christians are always growing in the faith.

This is perfectly exemplified in Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul openly acknowledges concerning his own knowledge, wisdom, and faith:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way.⁶

BELIEVE IT'S ALL ABOUT ME:

The spiritually immature are unstable and it's because they lack knowledge and wisdom. They lack knowledge and wisdom in the faith, because the spiritually immature believe that it's all about me and no one else. Do you think that the trickery and craftiness of vs 14 would have been able to overtake the spiritually immature, if they had been willing to hear the truth spoken in love in vs 15?

The spiritually immature spend their lives with their fingers in their ears, listening to the only genius they know: themselves. How many spiritually immature people does it take to change a light bulb? Just one. All they have to do is stand still, because the whole world revolves around them!

⁵ Jam 1.5–8

⁶ Phi 3.12–15

Ultimately, spiritual immaturity is rooted in this problem. Spiritually immature people can't fathom that they may be at fault. More to the point, they don't really believe that they are weak, or sinful, or need a Savior. They may acknowledge every detail of Biblical truth about sin and the atonement. But at their core, they have never really faced the brutal fact that they themselves are deeply flawed and need Jesus; not humankind in general, nor their spouses, nor other church members in particular – but they themselves.

The spiritually immature are the ones who know how to apologize, while finding a way to place blame on the other person. They're the ones who say: "I shouldn't have gotten angry, but if you hadn't ..." They're the ones who are convinced of their own wisdom and are the most resistant to someone else's input. When confronted with sin, the first response is "yes, but ..."

Spiritual immaturity is a kind of self-centered, self-serving, self-satisfied conceit. It rarely asks "where am I wrong?" It often asks "where were they wrong?" With the spiritually immature, the gap between "satisfied" and "dissatisfied" is only a mm wide, because that adult wants the world to go like **THEY** want – and right now.

Spiritual immaturity demonstrates just the opposite of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*.⁷ Those traits are outward-looking and other-oriented. Even the two tables of God's law tell us to love God with all and our neighbors as ourselves – again, outward looking. Immaturity tells us to love God – if it's good for me and if He's good to me. Immaturity tells us to love our neighbors, if they love us first and in return.

Christian maturity is based on the fact that it's not all about me. It's all about YOU, since, as Paul says: *with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves*.⁸ And ultimately, it's all about HIM.

These three things: 1) instability, 2) caused by lack of knowledge and wisdom, which is 3) caused by the belief that it's all about me – these things define spiritual immaturity, childishness in the faith.

APPLICATION / OBSERVATION:

Definition of spiritual maturity: Spiritual maturity is the process of increasing in knowledge of God's word, doing God's word, and relationship with the God of the word.

Barometer of spiritual maturity: And the demonstration of this is in faithful unity among the brethren. Obviously, this is something about which Paul has already spoken (vss 3, 13). See also 2 Pet 1.5–8:

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly

⁷ Gal 5.22–23

⁸ Phi 2.3

*affection, and brotherly affection **with love**. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁹

How to grow in spiritual maturity:

- **Be teachable:** Acknowledge ignorance and immaturity! Seek out help and admit weaknesses. This can be humiliating, because it means that you are purposely taking a subordinate position, not a superior one. It means learning obedience, patience, etc. Ask your spouse, what do you see in me that most needs work?
- **Be willing:** Let others lead you, be open to command. Anyone who doesn't know how to follow, isn't fit to lead. I have many times put myself in a position of followership, even though I could have, by rights, taken a position of leadership.
- **Be daring:** purposely engaging in relationships and activities that are calculated to increase our maturity: discipleship, harder tasks, dealing with weaknesses.¹⁰
- **Flee temptation:** Purposely avoiding those things that draw us away from God: *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.* (1 Cor 14.20)
- **Be persistent:** not easily giving up. Too often I have conversations in which I'm told that someone tried something for a couple of weeks and it's just not working. I just preached on perseverance two weeks ago, so I won't go over that again in detail. Just suffice to say that if I go lift weights for a couple of weeks, should I whine that I don't yet look like Mr. Universe?

Family Ethics – Spiritual Maturity In The Family

Ephesians 4.14

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1. Spiritually immature are unstable (see also Jude 12-13)
 - 1.1. In doctrine: newest fad, idea, theology, priority
 - 1.2. In life: disconnect between personal and public lives
2. Spiritually immature lack the knowledge and wisdom of the faith
 - 2.1. Instability <- lack of knowledge / wisdom
 - 2.2. Double-minded, "chasing one's spiritual tail" (see James 1.5-8)

⁹ (2 Pet 1.5–8, also Prov 1.2–7)

¹⁰ Consider Rom 12.2.

- 2.3. *Press on toward the goal* of knowing Jesus (Philippians 3.12-15)
3. Spiritually immature believe that it's all about me (world does revolve around me!)
- 3.1. Instability <- lack of knowledge/wisdom <- self-centered, self-serving, self-satisfied
conceit: inward looking
- 3.2. Fruit of the Spirit and two tables of the law are outward looking (Galatians 5.22-23,
Luke 10.25-28)
- 3.3. It's about others, ultimately about Him (Philippians 2.3, 3.12-15).
4. Observations / Applications
- 4.1. Attempt at definition: Process of increasing in knowledge of God's word, doing
God's word, and relationship with the God of the word.
- 4.1.1. Re-integration (from fallen state) of who we are back into what we were meant to be.
- 4.1.2. Looking like Jesus, conformed to His image, having His mind.
- 4.1.3. Process by which one increases in Biblically appropriate knowledge and behavior and
relationship with God and man.
- 4.2. Barometer of spiritual maturity: faithful unity among the brethren.
- 4.2.1. 2 Pet 1.5-8: process of growth leads to love
- 4.2.2. See also 1 Corinthians 3.1-4, 13.11-13.
- 4.3. Ways to grow in spiritual maturity
- 4.3.1. Be teachable – open to criticism
- 4.3.2. Be willing – open to command
- 4.3.3. Be daring – open to challenge
- 4.3.4. Be careful – flee temptation
- 4.3.5. Be persistent – pursue the goal

**Reformation, Renewal and Revival : Define Spiritual Maturity - Barna Group
Posted by David Virtue on 2009/5/13 8:50:00 (48 reads) Define Spiritual Maturity
Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity
The Barna Group May 2009**

America may possess the world's largest infrastructure for nurturing human spirituality, complete with hundreds of thousands of houses of worship, thousands of parachurch organizations and schools, and seemingly unlimited products, resources and experts.

Yet, a new study from the Barna Group identifies an underlying reason why there is little progress in helping people develop spiritually: many churchgoers and clergy struggle to articulate a basic understanding of spiritual maturity. People aspire to be spiritually mature, but they do not know what it means. Pastors want to guide others on the path to spiritual wholeness, but they are often not clearly defining the goals or the outcomes of that process.

The research was conducted by Barna Group in partnership with Living on the Edge (www.livingontheedge.org) and included a nationwide, random sample of adults and a similar national survey among Protestant pastors, exploring definitions of, perceptions about, and perceived barriers to spiritual maturity.

1. Five Challenges

The study showed five significant challenges when it comes to facilitating people's spiritual growth.

1. Most Christians equate spiritual maturity with following the rules. One of the widely embraced notions about spiritual health is that it means "trying hard to follow the rules described in the Bible" - 81% of self-identified Christians endorsed this statement, and a majority agreed strongly (53%). Even among those individuals defined by their belief that salvation is not earned through "good works," four out of five born again Christians concurred that spiritual maturity is "trying hard to follow the rules."
2. Most churchgoers are not clear what their church expects in terms of spiritual maturity. An open-ended survey question asked churchgoers to describe how their church defined a "healthy, spiritually mature follower of Jesus." Half of churchgoers simply said they were not sure, unable to venture a guess regarding the church's definition. Even among born again Christians - that is, a smaller subset of believers who have made a profession of faith in Christ and confessed their sinful nature - two out of five were not able to identify how their church defines spiritual maturity. Among those who gave a substantive response, the most common responses were having a relationship with Jesus (16%), practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study (9%), living according to the Bible (8%), being obedient (8%), being involved in church (7%), and having concern for others (6%).
3. Most Christians offer one-dimensional views of personal spiritual maturity. A second open-ended question probed self-identified Christians' personal definition of what it means to be a healthy, spiritually mature follower of Jesus, regardless of how they believe their church defines it. One-fifth of self-described Christians were unable to offer an opinion. Other identified elements included: relationship with Jesus (21%), following rules and being obedient (15%), living a moral lifestyle (14%), possessing concern about others (13%), being involved in spiritual disciplines (13%), applying the Bible (12%), being spiritual or having belief (8%), sharing their faith with others (6%), and being involved in church activities (5%). Born again Christians were similar in all respects to self-described Christians except they were more likely to mention having a relationship with Jesus (30%) as the sign of spiritual maturity. Further reflecting a lack of depth on the subject, the open-ended questions typically produced, on average, just one response from survey respondents, despite the fact that interviewers repeatedly probed for additional or clarifying comments.
4. Most pastors struggle with feeling the relevance as well as articulating a specific set of objectives for spirituality, often favoring activities over attitudes. The research among pastors highlighted several inter-related challenges. First, while nearly nine

out of 10 pastors said that a lack of spiritual maturity is the most significant or one of the largest problems facing the nation, a minority of pastors believe that spiritual immaturity is a problem in their church. A second challenge is that only a minority of churches has a written statement expressing the outcomes they are looking for in spiritually mature people. A third challenge is that pastors often favor activities over perspectives in their definitions of spiritual maturity. Their metrics for people's spirituality include the practice of spiritual disciplines (19%), involvement in church activities (15%), witnessing to others (15%), having a relationship with Jesus (14%), having concern for others (14%), applying the Bible to life (12%), being willing to grow spiritually (12%), and having knowledge of Scripture (9%).

5. Pastors are surprisingly vague about the biblical references they use to chart spiritual maturity for people. One of the reasons churches struggle with making disciples may relate to the lack of clarity that pastors have about the underlying biblical passages that address the process of spiritual maturity. This is most clearly reflected in the huge proportion of pastors who give generic responses when asked to identify the most important portions of the Bible that define spiritual maturity. In fact, one-third of pastors simply said "the whole Bible." Other generic responses included "the gospels" (17%), the New Testament (15%), and Paul's letters (10%). In all, the survey showed that three-quarters of pastors mentioned some type of generic answer to this query. In addition, one out of every five pastors gave a semi-generic response, such as "Romans" or the "life of Christ."

As for verse-specific responses (mentioned by just one-fifth of pastors), the most common passages included: Galatians 5, John 3:16, Ephesians 4, Matthew 28, and Romans 12:1-2. Just 2% of pastors specifically identified the Galatians 5 passage relating to the "fruits of the Spirit," which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Theme specific answers represented just 7% of responses, including the Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and the Beatitudes.

2. Five Opportunities

The research also identifies a number of opportunities that can be leveraged to address the problems related to spirituality maturity.

1. Christians and pastors have clarity about the major boundaries that must be addressed to tackle the problem. What are the perceived reasons that people do not grow spiritually? Self-identified Christians were asked about the obstacles they experience while pastors were queried to see how well they understand the barriers facing their congregants. Church leaders believe the three primary obstacles to people's engagement are lack of personal motivation (32%), other competing obligations and distractions (26%), and lack of involvement in activities that nurture growth (19%). In this respect, they do not seem too far off in their perceptions. Born again Christians identify distractions (24%), lack of motivation (20%), and lack of involvement (13%) as challenges they face, even if two of the three are mentioned less frequently by adults than pastors. Born again Christians, however, are more likely than pastors to identify sinful behaviors and habits as tripping them up (14% of believers versus 8% of pastors).

2. While most Americans are relatively content with their spirituality "as is," millions aspire to grow spiritually. Most adults think of themselves as both spiritually healthy as well as spiritually satisfied, which is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that most people's satisfaction can lead to complacency. One opportunity is to connect with the 18 to 20 million Americans who describe themselves as spiritually unhealthy or as dissatisfied with their personal spiritual maturity. Still, a majority of adults say they are "completely" (14%) or "mostly" healthy when it comes to spirituality (40%); nearly two-thirds of Americans describe themselves as "completely" (22%) or "mostly" satisfied with their spirituality (43%). The opportunity among these individuals is to help them move beyond complacency and embrace a deeper understanding of spiritual growth.
3. Compared to older believers, Christians under the age of 40 are less satisfied with spirituality and less "rule oriented." Young Christians show signs of spiritual openness that older adults do not. People under the age of 40 are different than those Christians over 40 by being less satisfied spiritually and also rating their spiritual health less favorably. In addition, the generational difference over rule-following was striking: most Elders (ages 63+) and Boomers (44 to 62) strongly endorsed the spiritual metric of rule-following (66% and 56%, respectively); however, fewer than half of Busters (25 to 43) and Mosaics (18 to 24) embraced this view (45% and 33%). Among the young, this signals a dangerous propensity to rethink the Bible's standards, but it also shows unique responsiveness to grace and forgiveness.
4. Pastors realize they need more help when it comes to assessing spiritual health. Just 9% of clergy said they were completely satisfied with their ability to measure and assess the spiritual health of their congregation. Still, few pastors (8%) were expressly dissatisfied, leaving a majority of leaders moderately satisfied. Perhaps churchgoers would become less complacent about self-evaluation as pastors embrace more effective forms of evaluation for their congregations.
5. Pastors tend to be harder on themselves than are congregants. About 1 out of 10 pastors said the church itself was a barrier to people's growth, while none of the churchgoers offered a similar critique. Similarly, when asked to rate the church's ability to help people grow spiritually, pastors were significantly less likely (6%) than churchgoers (33%) to give the organization high marks, reflecting the fact that pastors are often their own toughest critics. The opportunity is to forge a greater sense of partnership and mutual esteem between leaders and laity to address the challenges, to work against self-deception in the process, and to craft deeper, more appropriate routes to spiritual maturity. Implications

David Kinnaman, President of the California-based research firm, directed the research project. He pointed out several implications of the study:

"America has a spiritual depth problem partly because the faith community does not have a robust definition of its spiritual goals. The study shows the need for new types of spiritual metrics. One new metric might be a renewed effort on the part of leaders to articulate the outcomes of spiritual growth.

Another might be the relational engagement and accountability that people maintain. Of course, spirituality is neither a science nor a business, so there is a natural resistance to ascribing scientific or operational standards to what most people believe is an organic process. Yet, the process of spiritual growth is neither simplistic nor without guidelines, so hard work and solid thinking in this arena is needed."

"As people begin to realize that the concepts and practices of spiritual maturity have been underdeveloped, the Christian community is likely to enter a time of renewed emphasis on discipleship, soul care, the tensions of truth and grace, the so-called 'fruits' of the spiritual life, and the practices of spiritual disciplines. A related challenge is that as spiritual formation becomes 'trendy' it will inevitably become 'watered down' with products that over-promise or are simply counter-productive. Leaders have to take on this issue more effectively, and part of that task is weeding out the good from bad."

3. Research

This report is based upon nationwide telephone surveys conducted by The Barna Group with random samples of adults, age 18 and older, and Protestant clergy. The survey among adults was conducted in August 2008 among 1005 adults randomly selected from across the continental United States. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample is ± 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The survey among pastors included 611 clergy, with a maximum margin of sampling error of ± 4.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Statistical weighting was used to calibrate the sample to known population percentages in relation to demographic variables.

"Born again Christians" are defined as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents are not asked to describe themselves as "born again."

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