

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
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## **Beloved, Let Us Press on To Maturity!**

**1 John 2:12-14**

**Keywords:** Sanctification, Community, Fellowship, biblical change, 1 John 2:12-14.

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In our nation of individuals it is easy to see that a goal as a Christian is to become mature in Christ. But in the biblical world this is not the case; rather it is a drive to have the church grow corporately. This certainly does not mean individuals will not grow, but that it is not enough that you, yourself are growing. You are called by God to help those around you grow as well. This message is the first of a series that is calling the local church to grow and mature as a Body of Jesus Christ.

## **Dismiss**

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Today it is my goal to lay the ground work for a series of messages on the ‘Marks of a Maturing Church.’
  - 1. I hope to help us all sharpen our focus on this issue, for it will allow us to rightly see ourselves, individually, and more importantly, as a church.
  - 2. **Romans 12:3**, “For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”
  - 3. In the same way, we need to give pause and look at this church. We need to consider if we are pressing on to maturity. Do we know what a mature church looks like? How comfortable would each of you be in identifying key marks of spiritual maturity in a church?
  - 4. Well that is the purpose of this series, and I hope it will bring much light to our minds and might serve as a source of encouragement and a basis for the things we do over the next year.
- B. The idea of maturity in the bible.
  - 1. **1 Corinthians 13:11** When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

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- a. Nothing wrong with being childish—if you are a child.
  - b. But there is something very wrong to stay in that state. It is not natural, it is not the way God designed us to live.
  - c. Each adult here can probably think of that day they made a circuital thinking switch, one from being a child to adulthood.
  - d. Well, spiritually speaking this is true for each believer here.
2. All of us are found somewhere on the road of maturity. None of us have arrived and all of us must remember this and be willing to remind other believers of this.
- C. Let me now take you to a few passages that speak of this need to grow, then we will look at an example of the stages of spiritual growth.
1. Hebrews 5:12 - 6:3.
    - a. There is the assumption that growth ought to occur.
    - b. The writer actually is becoming concerned that these people he is writing to are only professing believers. That they have not truly repented of the works of the law and been made new by the Spirit.
    - c. And the basis for this is that there is not a pattern of growth in their lives.

A principle you draw from this passage is that there is not such thing as simply “coasting” in the Christian life. When you stop growing, you begin to regress.

2. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.
  - a. Part of maturing as a believer and as a church is learning where the real battle lies.
  - b. It is so often started in wrong thinking. And wrong thinking is so often started through wrong instruction.
  - c. But the way to destroy false doctrines is to take the mind captive to the obedience of Christ.
3. Colossians 1:28.
4. Philippians 1:6.
  - a. Plural “you.”
  - b. Singular “work.”

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c. This passage is speaking of a corporate maturing.

## II. Example of stages of spiritual growth—1 John 2:12-14.

A. “Little children.”

1. This is the place that all believers begin.
2. And isn't it a good place? It is a simple declaration but it is also a definite declaration.
  - a. Perfect indicative.
  - b. Indicative=reality.
  - c. Perfect means that it is something that occurred in the past and the effects continue to the current time.
  - d. But not just some sins, or only the sins up to that point. No, the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that all of the sins of a person are forgiven.
3. Now notice how this forgiveness is granted to all believers.
  - a. ‘For’ means ‘on account of’ or ‘for the sake of.’
  - b. It does not say that the forgiveness is simply from Jesus or by Jesus.
  - c. But rather, it is ‘on account of His name’s sake.’ In the Greek the word ‘name’ is emphasized. The term focuses us not merely on Jesus, but upon all that Jesus has done and stands for.
  - d. Now this simply means that the forgiveness is based upon the work of Jesus. God forgives us of our sin because of the work of Jesus upon the cross.
4. And this is the beginning place for all believers. This simple, glorious, joyful news that our sins are forgiven.
5. Though each Christian is to grow in their faith and maturity, no Christian is to **out**-grow this foundational truth.
6. But have you? Have you somehow had your faith short-circuited? Are you too centered upon sins rather than the one who forgave you of your sin?
7. Have you begun to listen to the whispers of Satan as he reminds you again and again of sins of the past? Do you find your mind thinking again and again of the failures and stumblings?

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8. Then I encourage you to find your way back to the beginning, for it is a good beginning. God has forgiven all your sins.
  9. They are as far as the east is from the west. They shall never be remembered by our heavenly father. They have been cast into the depths of the ocean.
    - a. Why dive down there and seek to gaze at them again in sorrow?
    - b. Let them lie there, covered under the perfect blood of Jesus Christ.
  10. It is a true statement and there are some here I am sure who need to hear it once again.
    - a. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that through His work on the cross there is forgiveness of sin.
    - b. You simply must come in faith, placing your trust not in your efforts nor your good works, but in the work of Jesus.
    - c. Will you even right now simply lay down your efforts and self-goodness? And now, in prayer, seek the forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ. Will you not now turn from you sin and to God the Father through His Son?
    - d. The promise is true, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43).
  11. Well this is the first step in the Christian's life, trusting Christ, and being forgiven.
    - a. And as I said, it is a good place to be and a good thing to always remember—forgiven, forgiven by God my Father!
    - b. But it is not a good place to remain. Just as a child must grow and mature, so to must a young believer begin to grow.
- B. "Young men."
1. Now we move to the next stage of the believer's life.
  2. And this stage is described as that of a young man. This is not just a teenager type, but it would extend into the 30's.
    - a. It speaks of the prime of life. Physically this starts at puberty and extends to the 30's.

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- b. It is the time for growth, energy and risk.
3. The first mention is in the middle of 13. Notice what he says about this stage, “you have overcome the evil one.”
4. The second mention is at the end of 14. Notice what he says about it this time, “you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one.”
5. The key point in both is that the spiritual young man has overcome the evil one, another way of saying that he has overcome Satan.
  - a. This is interesting and I can say it is very true.
  - b. The young believer is often tossed about by various teachings and various teachers.
  - c. This is what **Ephesians 4:14** says, “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”
  - d. This is one reason why new and young believers must be immediately directed to a sound church.
    - (1) If not, then they are being left out in the world without the training and maturity that is needed to battle Satan and overcome him.
    - (2) They become like the small orphan children we hear about in Africa and India.
6. But how do we become a spiritual young man? Two ways:
  - a. First, the Word of God abides in them.
    - (1) This is truly the first step.
    - (2) God has ordained that this is the means by which a person grown in their salvation.
    - (3) 1 Peter 2:1ff.
    - (4) Hebrews 13:7.

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- (a) Note that there are those who are responsible to deliver the Word.
  - (b) And the assumption is that those who do so are mature.
  - (c) Therefore, they are to be imitated by those who are spiritually younger.
- (5) It is said in Acts 18:11 regarding Paul in Corinth, “And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”
  - (6) Look at how this is described in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.
  - (7) And so the spiritual young man is one who begins to grow in the knowledge of the Word.
  - (8) But not just in the knowledge, but the Word is said to **abide** in Him.
  - (9) The word describes a person who has settled down, doctrinally speaking.
  - (10) The major points of theology and truth has been mastered and understood.
  - (11) There is the ability to see and hear truth, as well as discern error.
  - (12) The Word of God is comfortable with this person and the person is comfortable with the Word.
  - (13) And the result. . . .
- b. They are strong.
    - (1) This strength comes from a steady diet of the bible.
    - (2) It is built through a believing in the great promises of God to every believer.
    - (3) This person starts with the promise that his sins are forgiven and begins to build from there.
    - (4) Look at Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:18-19.

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- (a) This is what the young man has come to see and understand.
  - (b) The power of the Almighty God, the maker of the heavens and the earth. That power, the surpassing power that never weakens nor fails is flowing within him!
  - (c) The power is his because he belongs to the Lord, who is His Head. And through Christ the power of God is found, believed and used against all the forces of darkness.
  - (d) Which is what Paul says later on in Ephesians 6:10.
    - i) Notice what verse 11 then says.
    - ii) The strength of the Lord is found in the armor that is from God.
    - iii) The result is that we withstand the “schemes of the devil.”
    - iv) This is exactly what John is saying in our passage today.
7. It is through the strength of God and through a solid foundation of sound doctrine that a person becomes a spiritual young man.
8. And all churches become blessed as more and more of the people move out of spiritual childhood and into spiritual young adulthood.
9. But there is one more place for the believer to grow into. . . .
- C. “Fathers.”
- 1. Twice they are described as one who has known “Him who has been from the beginning.”
  - 2. What is meant by this?
  - 3. The spiritual father is that person who has gone beyond the knowledge of the Word of God and has grown into a deep and abiding relationship with the God of that Word.
  - 4. There is a depth to this man or woman’s walk.

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5. They have an intimacy with God that is not seen in the spiritual children and young adult.
6. A spiritually mature person is one who knows the heart and passion of his heavenly Father.

An example of this is seen in the normal development of a person . They start out as a child. And for them, their father is bigger than life. He is indestructible and cannot feel pain. He is one they love and delight in, but there is so much that they do not understand about him. There is really a very immature view of their father. As they grow into adulthood there comes a greater appreciation that he knew more than they thought. There is a desire to learn from him, listen to him and remember things that he taught them. But I have found, at least with myself, that as I now am middle aged, that I just like being with my father. I don't care if we talk. He is my father, and there is an intimacy there that was never there before.

I think it is sort of like that.

7. I think of Moses, who it is said that God would speak to him face to face, just as a man speaks to a friend (Exodus 33:11).
8. James tells us that Abraham was known as “the friend of God.” (James 2:23).

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. Here, then, is a good example of a normal, healthy church.
  1. A wonderful mix of believers in all points along the journey of faith.
  2. And no church shall ever fully mature in all its members, for God shall always be adding to the number and there shall always be the challenge of working and ministering and worshiping among others who may be further along, or not as far along.
  3. But in this type of church, there is a sense of vibrancy and joy, as the Word of God continues to grow, and God himself is more and more properly worshiped.
  4. This is the elders' desire here at MDF. And over the next several weeks I hope that we can unfold from the bible how this all works out.



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## Small Group Questions

- **When you consider these three places in a Christian's life where would you see yourself?**
- **When is it good to be a spiritual child? And when is it not? Why?**
- **What are some challenges you see in the challenge of helping the Body at MDF grow in maturity rather than merely looking toward yourself?**
- **What changes do you see that need to be made to make this process easier, or at least more accessible?**