

Lesson #22

Five Levels of Christian Growth

Training and Ministry

Growing up from infancy, coming to a place of maturity and being able to support others is a normal progression in the natural and it should be in the spiritual. From the book of Hebrews we saw that learning the foundational teachings and putting them into practice results in growth and spiritual maturity (see Heb 5:12-6:2). There are plenty of other places in the Bible that encourage us to grow to maturity. Peter tells new Christians to "...desire the pure milk of the word that you may **grow** thereby...." (see 2 Peter 2:2). The purpose of the ministry gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature** man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the **fullness of Christ**" (see Ephesians 4:12-13.)

God can use anyone, including the immature, to minister to others, but in general, the time for ministry comes after a time of equipping and training. Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy saying:

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

— 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)

There are two general categories that apply to spiritual maturity: 1) **Training in Righteousness**, as mentioned in the passage above, and 2) the **Ministry of Righteousness**, which is mentioned in the passage below:

⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

— 2 Corinthians 3:9 (NASB)

The passage containing the foundational principles speaks of the ministry of righteousness being for the mature, those who are teachers of *the word of righteousness*:

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the **word of righteousness**, for he is a babe.

¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

— Hebrews 5:12-14 (NKJV- emphasis added)

From this passage we can conclude the following regarding Christian growth:

- Training is when we are receiving, ministry is when we are giving ministry.
- Training in Righteousness is for immature Christians, Ministry of righteousness is for those who are of full age.
- Training in Righteousness is the milk and the Ministry of Righteousness is the Meat.
- Training is when we are learning, ministry is when we are teaching.

Five Levels of Growth

There are many ways of applying the five foundation principles to life practice and experience. Below we will look at how the five principles correspond to five levels of growth, with the first three representing training and the last two representing ministry.

Level 1: Believer

To become a Christian and therefore a member of Christ's body is a simple matter of believing the word of God and having faith. We believe with our hearts and confess with mouth.

⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

— Romans 10:9-10 (NKJV)

This is where our personal relationship with Jesus is initiated. This produces repentance and a change of heart and actions which we refer to as the new birth. Therefore, becoming a believer, corresponds to the first foundational principle, repentance from dead works and faith toward God. To many, becoming a believer and being saved from eternal damnation is the entire goal. But this is only the beginning of the Christian life. This is why Peter says, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2 - NKJV).

Level 2: Follower

Believers who continue in the faith and seek more of God than simply being saved from eternal damnation become followers. Those who follow Jesus soon recognize the need for continued transformation, something often referred to as sanctification, holiness, mind renewal, etc. To follow Jesus is to embrace the second principle which is called baptisms or washings.

Notice the plurality of these words. There are many steps one must take on the journey of sanctification. In most cases, the first step of transformation taken by a follower is water baptism. Through an encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus, Paul (Saul) became a believer. Immediately, he followed the instructions he was given and went to the house of a man named Ananias who said to him: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins... (Acts 22:16), calling on the name of the Lord.'

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

— Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

Level 3: Disciple

The next level of growth is discipleship. To be a disciple is more than simply following; it is to become a pupil who is in training to emulate the ways of the Lord. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who has been fully trained will be like his teacher (see Luke 6:40). In discipleship we develop a relationship with mature Christian teachers and receive an impartation (see 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7,17). Discipleship therefore corresponds to the third foundational principle, The Laying on of Hands.

A discipleship relationship is not a denial of our individual relationship with God, but a recognition that we cannot stand alone. This is God's design to keep us from becoming too independent (see 1 Cor 12). God deposits His riches in imperfect human vessels and calls them pour it out to others. It is the disciple's place to receive the impartation God has for us from them.

There may be times when a church or its leaders stray so far from the truth that remaining there is unwise and moving on is the right thing to do (see 2 Cor 6:17). There may also be times when we are led by the Holy Spirit to move or must expand the circles from which we receive impartation. But if we want to be disciples, we must stick it out where God has placed us and receive the impartation God has for us there. This is the type of relationship Paul had wit Timothy.

¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

²⁰ For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.

²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

²² But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel.

— Philippians 2:19-22 (NKJV)

Level 4: Witness

The next level of growth after being a disciple is to be a witness. It is one thing to *witness* and quite another to "*be*" a witness. Being a witness moves us out of training in righteousness into the ministry of righteousness.

Being a witness includes demonstrating the power of the coming kingdom. In Acts 4:33, it is recorded that the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, Paul described his preaching as a demonstration of the Spirit and power (see 2 Cor 12:12). Because a witness demonstrates the kingdom which will appear at the resurrection. Therefore, this level of growth corresponds to the fourth foundational principle, The Resurrection of the Dead.

⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

— Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

Level 5: Teacher

The person who moves into the ministry of righteousness is becoming mature and will undoubtedly influence others. The Greek word for teacher is *didaskalos*. It is translated *master* more often than *teacher*. Most anyone can be used by God to teach on some level. But when one is of full age and

becomes one that others look to and follow, there is greater level of responsibility that we should be aware of. James warns about the level of responsibility and accountability that comes with being a teacher.

¹ My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

— James 3:1 (NKJV)

In his role of teacher and overseer, Paul, had to make such judgments as demonstrated by the circumstance where he delivered a person over to the destruction of their flesh that their soul might be saved saying: "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed" (1 Cor 5:3 NKJV). Also see Titus 1:10-16 and Acts 5:1-11.

Teachers who partake of solid food and feed others must discern good and evil (see Heb 5:14). These are overseers who watch over the souls of others (see Heb 13:17). Discerning good and evil is essentially that same as judging. For this reason, this level of growth corresponds with the fifth foundational principle: Eternal Judgement.

The principle of leaders being taught and then judging is seen in the Exodus 18 when Moses was setting up the governing structure of Israel.

²⁰ And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.

²¹ Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

²² And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

— Exodus 18:20-22 (NKJV)

Summary Chart

The chart below condenses and summarizes the points made in this lesson.

Level of Growth	Foundational Principle	Category
Believer	Repentance from dead works and faith toward God	Training In Righteousness
Follower	Doctrines of Baptisms (Washings)	
Disciple	Laying on of Hands	
Witness	Resurrection of the Dead	Ministry of Righteousness
Teacher	Eternal Judgment	

It has been said that the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. The reality check provided in this lesson will help us understand where we are in the race that we are running so we can pace our selves in a proper way. In the next lesson, we will look more closely at this race and some important pointers for spiritual runners.