

5 Signs of Spiritual Maturity...

That Actually Show You Lack It

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Discipleship is an organic, life-long process. It has something to do with what the ancients called “sanctification”. The process of becoming more and more holy, a term, which stripped from its strangeness, simply means to be ‘set apart’. Basically, it means you are different than you were. And that process continues until you die. I’ve outlined a few of the markers of more authentic spiritual maturity in this post, and again here.

In the meantime, if you want to keep growing, here are 5 signs that pass for spiritual maturity in our culture that probably show you lack it.

1. PRIDE IN HOW MUCH BIBLE YOU KNOW

Since when was it a good thing to be proud of how much bible you know, and to look down on people who did not know? As Paul points out, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Clearly, he knew what he was talking about.

Some Christians strut their biblical knowledge like it was an accomplishment. That is so wrong. I won my share of sword drills (remember those?) when I was a kid, and I take time to read and study the scriptures pretty much every day, but as far as I can tell I’m supposed to use that knowledge to function as a bridge to people, not as a barricade showing everyone else how righteous I am. Because, incidentally, last time I checked I was not that righteous.

Use the bible as a bridge to the culture, not as a barricade against it. To do otherwise puts us on the same ground as another religious group Jesus had strong views against. And it was never about what you know or do not know, but about what God knows and who God loves.

2. TRUTH WITHOUT GRACE

In a similar vein, being all about truth is a problem as well. I love how John phrases the arrival of Jesus: that Jesus came filled with truth and grace. One of the things I love most about Jesus is that truth is never separated from grace, and grace is never separated from truth.

He was always grace-filled as he spoke what is true...in that the truth is always designed to lead toward grace. Yet someone ‘mature’ people feel it is okay to land on one side of the equation. *I am a truth person*, we tell people. No...maybe you are just a jerk. Whenever I am tempted to speak truth, I always have to come before God to ensure it is equally motivated by grace.

3. GRACE WITHOUT TRUTH

The opposite of course is also true. In the same way truth is not truth without grace, grace is not grace when separated from truth. Some ‘mature’ people on the other side of the theological spectrum avoid the truth side of the equation as though love floats with no backbone. No, grace has a backbone. We nailed it to the cross. You cannot separate grace from truth any more than you can separate truth from grace.

It is an incredibly difficult line to find, but we must find it. Grace without truth is not maturity any more than truth without grace is truth. Clearly, we need a Saviour on this issue. And it is a good thing for us He embodies both.

4. HARSHNESS TOWARD OUTSIDERS WHILE CUTTING INSIDERS SLACK

Many people who consider themselves spiritually mature love to talk about how awful the world is. And it is pretty terrible. Pick a headline almost any day. It is awful.

God identified that as early as Genesis 6 (and if you take our theology seriously, he *always* knew it would be this way, which is a little mind-bending if you think about it). The passage from Genesis is worth quoting:

The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So, the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart.

So, what did God do? He started again. What followed was an ark and a rainbow. And ultimately God's decision on his heartbreak was addressed in Jesus who came, as our favorite but often totally-missed-the-point verse tells us, God so *loves* the world and gave himself up for it not to condemn it but to save it.

So why do so many Christians behave like God hated the world? Because the world is corrupt and sins, is the answer we hear back. But the truth of the matter, Christian, is that you are corrupt, and you sin. But instead, we rail against the world's sins as though it should not be sinning while cutting ourselves tons of slack on our moral failures.

What would happen if we started talking about church sins like gossip, gluttony, division, and faction with the same conviction we use to talk about sexual sin? So...what if the church started to take its own sin more seriously than we take the world's sin? I think that's what we're supposed to do.

Finally, if you are still not convinced, study Jesus. You will discover he extended invitations to notorious sinners and outsiders and reserved his harshest words for the religious people of his day.

We simply have it backwards. If God so loved the world, who decided we should not? And if you were trying to win people to open their lives to a loving God, why do you think leading with judgment is a great strategy? Very few people get judged into life change. Many get loved into it.

5. TELLING PEOPLE YOU'RE MATURE

This one mystifies me. I have had more than a few people pull me aside over the years and ask, "So what do you do for spiritually mature people like me?" Stand back while people like you part the Red Sea, I guess.

Telling people, you are mature is like telling people you are wise...it is kind of proof you are not. The most mature people, in my view, also tend to be the humblest. If you are strutting your maturity, it's pretty clear you've got some growing to do.