

Growing Stronger Together
God's Call to Maturity • Message 5
JC Thompson
September 21, 2025

Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Pray for a love of God's word and a desire to study it.
- Ask God to help you find community and grow with others in faith.
- Ask God to make you a person who invests in others spiritually.

Scripture Reading:

I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus. I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one. I have written to you who are God's children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God's word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one.

1 John 2:12-14 (NLT)

A. Introduction

(Romans 12:1-2. C/R: Romans 8:29)

Good morning, Brookwood Church. We are continuing our series on *Growing Stronger Together*, and today, we are going to be speaking on a subject that I believe I am an expert in, and that is maturity.

Seriously, as I received my assignment for this talk, I was thinking, *OK, give this one to the youngest of our teaching pastors*. Did Bryan know what he was doing, or was he simply like, *Nah, I'm not touching that one*.

I thought I would just set the stage for today by sharing a clip that I recently saw on YouTube that I thought was the perfect picture of our current age's understanding of maturity.

While I do not condone the language, nor the act of the ding-dong ditch, I absolutely love the fact that this dad is doing this with his child, and I am trying to determine if this is something that I need to disciple my children in.

But what is maturity, really?

Right now, I'd like for you to think of someone whom you view as mature. Now I'd like for you to think of someone who is immature. We have a lens; whether we have this framework on a sheet of paper or not, we do have a way in which we determine if someone is mature or immature.

Which one is easier to define in your mind?

You've probably heard someone say, *You're so immature*—but what did they really mean by that? What type of maturity were they looking for?

Do you picture someone boring? Quiet? Maybe older... and kind of checked out?

What if our definition of maturity is just age plus manners, but God's definition is something far more dangerous and beautiful?

What if maturity isn't about "settling down," but about becoming someone unshakable? What if God desires for His children to have roots so deep that the world cannot shake them down?

You don't grow mature by accident, but you grow deep by design.

And God's Word doesn't just tell us to grow; it shows us how.

Goal of Maturity is to become like Christ.

Romans gives us two very distinct options for our discipleship. It utilizes the same word.

Conform simply means to make into a similar form, character or nature.

In Romans 12, we are urged not to conform.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be **conformed** to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

In Romans 8, we are urged to be conformed.

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed** to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Romans 8:29 (ESV)

Conforming to Christ is the ultimate goal or prize of being a Christian. But JC, I thought heaven was the goal.

Heaven is the reward, Christ is the goal. Knowing Him, loving Him, becoming like Him.

Heaven is given to all of those who have been saved by Christ through faith. It is a spiritual reality for the children of God, but it is not the goal. Christlikeness and a growing faith are the goal.

That growth happens over time with effort.

It is important to understand this, though: **You don't grow mature by accident, you grow deep by design.**

No one stumbles into Christlikeness. It's not passive. It's intentional. John is showing us a spiritual growth chart that we can measure ourselves by.

General address to children. The Greek word teknia here just simply means born ones. John begins this section of Scripture with a general address to all believers. You have received forgiveness of sins. You've been forgiven.

John starts his address in this section of his letter by addressing any who would read who are a part of the family of God. Because we are saved, we have received the forgiveness of our sins.

But then John speaks directly to groups of people who might be at different stages in their spiritual maturity.

B. Characteristics of Maturity

(1 John 2:12-14. C/R: 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Peter 3:18; Philippians 2:4)

I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus. I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one. I have written to you who are God's children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God's word

lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one.

1 John 2:12-14 (NLT)

I would like to give you some stages to begin to use as a chart on the journey of growth. I think it is important to note that the letter of 1 John is given to us to know that we have eternal life, and John gives us markers or tests of our faith throughout this letter. I think it is a great place to start for those who are coming to know Christ.

John speaks to three groups of people in today's passage: mature in the faith, young in the faith, and children. In some translations, you will see Fathers, Young Men, and Children.

So, let's speak to these groups and the things that seem to characterize where they are on the journey of faith.

1. THRILL of New Life

First, let's look at those young in the faith.

Children (paidia – little child) – The people represented in this group are new to the faith.

They experience the kindness of God and the forgiveness of sins. They have overwhelming feelings and excitement about new faith. You saw many of their faces last week when they were baptized. Joy, Peace, Satisfaction, Thrill. We shouldn't demonize those feelings as immature; in fact, we need to be reminded of that joy.

Illustration of Foster Kiddo #1 – Wide mouth anytime experiencing something new.

This is a good picture of childlike faith: The Bible says that in order to enter the kingdom of God, we must become like little children—dependent, offering nothing, receiving someone else's provision. We are expected to grow up, but not grow out of that dependence.

They may sometimes struggle with appropriate boundaries. They want to get everyone at the church to do something; the thing that got them to Christ must become a requirement for someone else. It all comes from a heart that is good and growing.

But know this as well, babies are vulnerable. If you are new to the faith, it is why we say, Satan will be after you. The younger in our faith need protection and nurturing from our community.

2. GROUNDED and GROWING

Young Men – Growth, understanding, responsibility; they know the word. Move from feelings to theology. They overcome the evil one by being strong, and they are strong because the Word of God abides in them.

Those who are maturing in their faith, in this passage described as young men, begin to demonstrate strength through their knowledge of God. This is gained through sitting under the preaching of the Word and by personal study.

This group of believers begin taking personal ownership of their faith and decisions. I think of teenagers here, where they begin to face real-life consequences without rescue from their parents. They learn economic realities and personal responsibility. They carry the weight and responsibility of their own mistakes.

This group of believers start to develop resilience and conviction as they experience the trouble of the world that the Bible describes.

How do we move from the Thrill of New Life to Grounded and Growing? We get in the Word; we learn who God is and who we are. We study and grow in understanding. This Word in us gives us the strength to overcome the evil one.

When you get in the Word, you are not swayed by false teaching. Someone says that the Bible isn't true, and the miracles didn't happen. Nope. Christ was just a man. Nope. Christ was just a prophet, but not God. Nope. God is not a Triune God. Nope. We can nope false teaching because we know the Word.

3. LEGACY of LOVE

John also describes those who are mature in their faith.

What are some characteristics of those mature in the faith believers?

Invest in others rather than just themselves. Fathers and Mothers are responsible for other people.

There is a settled nature and perspective on what truly matters. They are not shaken by the world.

They demonstrate quiet strength like an "oak tree" with deep roots. Continue to serve others rather than retiring from spiritual life. Please don't give up. Don't check out. Don't believe the lie that you've already done your part. Retirement isn't the goal.

These are people who ask the right questions. They've gotten off the fast track, they begin to look at their lives through the eyes of their children and grandchildren and not just themselves.

They have spiritual wisdom that comes from experience. They have learned things about God that only come about through suffering and trials. They tend to draw out the best in others through intentional investment.

If that's you. If you've walked with Jesus faithfully for decades, I just want to say thank you.

In addition to the general maturing in the faith, I also want to point out something specific here in our differences between men and women.

We have an epidemic of fatherlessness in this country. We need men to step in, get involved, and provide their strength to those who do not yet have the strength to care for themselves.

We need spiritual fathers to be the bedrock of this church. And we need them to be excited that new people are coming and experiencing new life and Christ.

We also need the nurturing that mothers provide to be well-represented here. Your strength is delivered to us in a distinct way. I have received more hugs, kisses on my cheeks, and words of encouragement from the mature women in this church than I have ever really needed. In addition, there are some women that I truly believe could call fire down from heavens like Elijah.

But can I tell you, when I go to the Senior Adults gathering on Thursdays once a month, I have never been more nurtured and encouraged in any other environment in our church.

The next generation needs you. This church needs you. We need your prayers, your presence, your wisdom. Your legacy isn't just what you've done, it's what you're still becoming and sharing what you've learned along the way.

While we know that this is the route or journey of maturity, you can't skip stages. You have to work through each one. Regardless of where you are in this journey, it is important to have a roadmap and a place you are aiming at.

How do we aim our maturity? I think there are three specific areas to aim at:

1. Knowledge of God – theos – God, logia – collection of words or stories, also the study of. This comes from time and study in God’s word. All you need is a Bible, but a good commentary and a concordance are the most common tools. I would tell someone getting started with the discipline of study to use paper rather than their phone. The temptation to Google what something means is off the charts; these tools keep you focused and grounded.

Study the Bible, read it aloud and talk about what it means. Use the Bible to help you understand the Bible.

Mark Taylor Discussion Guide Use: Recommended Resource – *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer

2. Love for God and People – Prayer. Pray the Scriptures. If you don’t know what you feel about God, you can know what God feels about you. It isn’t enough to know about God, but the true aim of our life is to know and love God.

Mark Taylor Discussion Guide Use: Recommended Resource – *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund

3. Transformation – Without Holiness, no one will see the Lord. This is Christlikeness, that we become like Christ. We get a holiness deposit when we become a follower of Christ. We are counted holy, then we begin a lifestyle of cooperating with God and the Holy Spirit working out what is now within us.

Mark Taylor Discussion Guide Use: Recommended Resource – *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges; *The Hole in our Holiness* by Kevin DeYoung

This triumvirate of things is difficult to arrive at on your own. You need a community.

This series is this idea. I want to give you a practice for each of these things in your groups to grow.

1. Theological Understanding of God – study the Bible, read it aloud and talk about what it means. Use the Bible to help you understand the Bible.
2. Love for God and People – Pray and Follow Up. Seriously, write down requests, pray for your lost friends and neighbors. Then give a testimony update on those requests.
3. Holiness – confess where you are missing the mark. Share with others where you are struggling.

Options:

9 am Challenger – this is a test.

11 am Pastoral warmth – it's a process.

Who are you doing this with? Well, it is why connection is important here. We said this before and will continue to say it. It is everyone's job here to get the disconnected connected.

Everyone. All of our groups should be asking, *How are we making space for new people?* And when you are here on Sunday, our eyes should be open for people that might be disconnected.

The best way to get someone connected is through a group.

New Groups Kickoff

1. If you're in your **20s to early 40s** and you're not connected to a group.
2. **Just show up** to the New Groups Kickoff at 4 pm today (September 21) in the Chapel upstairs.
3. In less than 2 hours, we'll take you through a process to **form new groups** out of those who attend.

Our world doesn't need more opinionated Christians. It needs mature ones rooted in love and truth, living in the real world with real people who need the gospel.

Closing –

John, after speaking about maturity and growth in Christlikeness and encouragement to remember what God has already done in these believers, then moves to close in the same way that will close today.

As we mature, there is an orientation or aim, and there is a cost. We are probably more aware of this today than we have been in the recent past. I think that often, as followers of Christ, we read things like "Count the cost" of following Christ and "The world will hate you because they have hated me" with a sort of nostalgia. I think, honestly, many of us have felt that. While that may have been true at one time, it is no longer true.

They don't really hate us; they just don't agree with us. But John gives this stark encouragement as his church people were being opposed by a group of people called secessionists. This group did not believe that Jesus was the Christ. John calls them antichrists and liars. They rejected the belief that Jesus was a real flesh-and-blood human being, and they

were continually being shaped by the world's narrative and truth claims rather than by the truths of the gospel message.

The way that John describes the ability of his church to overcome this group of people is by God working through them through the Spirit of God that God has given to believers.

Today I want to offer this stark challenge to you. Something to aim at. Something to reflect on. Something that has felt more true these past few weeks than ever before in my lifetime.

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

1 John 2:15-17 (NLT)

Church, before we close, I want to invite you to come to the table together—to take communion.

Because here's the truth: We don't grow mature by accident—but we don't grow by sheer effort either.

We grow by grace. We grow because Christ first gave Himself for us.

Communion isn't just a tradition. It's a recalibration. It's a reminder of the One we are being conformed into, Jesus Christ.

So, if you're a follower of Jesus today, I invite you to take the bread and the cup with me. If you're not yet a follower of Christ, just observe, reflect, and consider His love for you.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19 (NIV)

Take the bread and eat.

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Luke 22:20 (NIV)

Take the cup and drink.

Let me pray for you. If you want to find a way to get connected, check out the Information Desk in the Concourse. If you need someone to pray for you, our Care Volunteers will be down front.