# **Maturing in Christ**

Today's world is flooded with inventions that meet people's needs quickly and easily: instant foods, instant communication, instant information available on the Internet. We must remember, however, that there is no such thing as "instant maturity" in following Jesus. Becoming a believer begins a lifelong adventure of knowing God better, loving Him more, and being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Romans 12:2 (KJV)

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

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. ([Romans 12:2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+12%3A2), MSG)

**Your Starting Point**

1. Read [Colossians 2:6-7](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Col+2%3A6-7). How did you begin your life in Christ?

How should you continue to grow?

2. Consider [Romans 5:1-5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+5%3A1-5). Because of your justification by faith in Christ, what practical benefits are yours to experience?

Why can this give you hope?

3. Read [Ephesians 1:1-14](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+1%3A1-14) and list several things you have as a result of being in Christ.

4. You took your first step toward spiritual maturity when you put your faith in Christ. Record here the important points of the gospel message you believed, including scriptural references for each.

**Moving Toward Maturity**

5. Read [Ephesians 4:11-16](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+4%3A11-16).

a. What is God's desire for you? ([verses 13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+4%3A13),[15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+4%3A15))

b. What are some characteristics of immature believers ("children" or "infants")? ([verse 14](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+4%3A14))

c. According to this passage, what characterizes a spiritually mature person?

d. What part can others play in our maturing? (See also [Hebrews 3:13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Heb+3%3A13) and [Ephesians 5:19-21](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+5%3A19-21))

6. Contrast man's old nature with the believer's new nature. ([Ephesians 4:22-24](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+4%3A22-24))

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Old Nature** | **New Nature** |
|  |  |

7. Consider [2 Corinthians 3:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Co+3%3A18).

a. Into whose image are you being changed?

b. Who brings about this change?

c. Are you completely changed all at once? Explain.

8. What do the following verses in Romans tell you about your relationship to Christ?

a. What has already happened to you? ([5:8-9](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+5%3A8-9))

b. What should you be doing now? ([6:19](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A19))

c. What can you expect in the future? ([8:16-18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+8%3A16-18))

Three aspects of salvation in Christ are helpful in understanding God's plan for believers:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Justification | *Past* tense—I have been saved... from the penalty of sin. | My *position* is in Christ. |
| Sanctification/ Transformation | Present tense—I am being saved... from the power of sin. | My *condition* is becoming like Christ, |
| Glorification | *Future* tense—I will be saved... from the presence of sin. | My *expectation* is to be like Christ |

When you look at your salvation—past, present, and future—how does this give you hope?

9. Think carefully about [Colossians 3:2-4](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Col+3%3A2-4). How do these verses relate to the preceding chart?

**The Process of Growth**

10. There are many similarities between physical life and spiritual life. What do you learn about these similarities from the following verses?

[1 Thessalonians 2:11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Th+2%3A11)

[1 Timothy 4:8](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Ti+4%3A8)

[1 Peter 2:2-3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Pe+2%3A2-3)

From your experience or observation, what is another similarity between physical growth and spiritual growth?

11. Meditate on [Romans 6:11-13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A11-13).

a. What should you count as true about yourself? ([verse 11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A11))

b. What should be your present relationship to sin? ([verse 12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A12))

c. What must you not allow? ([verse 13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A13))

d. What action should you take? ([verse 13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A13))

e. How would you explain the truth of [Romans 6:5-6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A5-6) in your own words?

12. God intends for you to reign in life ([Romans 5:17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+5%3A17)), not for sin to reign in your life ([Romans 6:12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+6%3A12)). What application do these verses suggest for your life?

13. Paul stated that believers are saved through faith ([Ephesians 2:8-9](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+2%3A8-9)), but your relationship to God does not end there.

a. According to [Ephesians 2:10](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+2%3A10), what are you?

b. What did He create you to do?

c. What is God doing now? ([Philippians 1:6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Php+1%3A6))

d. What is one particular area of your life where you sense God has been working recently?

"What would it mean, I ask myself, if I too came to the place where I saw my primary identity in life as "the one Jesus loves"? How differently would I view myself at the end of the day?

—Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*

**Prayer Pause**

Our outer person is merely God's frame—the real picture is the inner person that God, the Artist, is still creating. As you reflect on your life, be thankful for all that God is doing in you. Conflicts in your life should encourage you because they indicate that God is still working in you, changing you to be like Christ. Take a moment to express your gratitude to God for what He has done, is doing, and will do for you.

**How to Live**

14. Using [1 John 1:6-10](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Jn+1%3A6-10), contrast those who walk in fellowship with God and those who do not.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **People in Fellowship with God** | **People Not in Fellowship with God** |
|  |  |

**The Mature Life**

15. Read [Hebrews 5:13-14](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Heb+5%3A13-14).

a. What is a mark of a mature believer?

b. In what ways do you encounter good and evil in your daily life?

c. When you face evil, do you usually desire that justice or mercy will triumph? ([James 2:12-13](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jas+2%3A12-13))

The mature Christians I have met along the way are those who have failed and have learned to live gracefully with their failure. Faithfulness requires the courage to risk everything on Jesus, the willingness to keep growing, and the readiness to risk failure throughout our lives.

—Brennan Manning, *Reflections for Ragamuffins*

16. What attitude should mature followers of Jesus possess? ([Philippians 3:13-15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Php+3%3A13-15))

17. Read [1 Corinthians 15:58](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Co+15%3A58). While awaiting eternity with Christ, what should believers be doing?

What assurance from this verse can motivate you to do this?

18. What are some areas in which you can experience spiritual growth?

[1 Timothy 4:12](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Ti+4%3A12)

[2 Peter 3:18](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Pe+3%3A18)

[1 John 4:16-17](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Jn+4%3A16-17)

19. Toward the end of his life, Paul wrote a letter to Timothy, his son in the faith. Read [2 Timothy 4:7-8](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Ti+4%3A7-8). What statement was Paul able to make concerning his earthly walk with Christ?

What did he expectantly await in the future?

**Suggested Verse for Meditation and Memorization**

[**Colossians 2:7**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Col+2%3A7)

Rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

**Points to Remember**

* God intends followers of Jesus to mature and become like Christ. God has saved His children from the penalty of sin. While on earth, they struggle with sin, but they can anticipate a sinless future with Christ as glorified beings.
* Faith in Jesus Christ marks the beginning of spiritual growth. Believers have God's resources available to help them grow.
* Spiritual growth is similar to physical growth. It takes time as God works in believers' lives. Believers should reign in life, recognizing that God is bringing to fulfillment the work He began in them.
* Growing in Christ is similar to walking. Led by the Spirit, followers of Jesus are to walk in faith, in love, and in fellowship with Christ.
* A mature believer is one who continues to follow Christ, faithfully serving Christ and experiencing His grace and love. God does not forget the work of the believer and will one day reward him.

**Going Deeper**

List the names of several believers you know personally and view as spiritually mature. Call, e-mail, or visit one of these people. Ask these questions and record his or her answers in the space that follows:

What has God used to mature you?

What have you learned during your journey toward spiritual maturity?

Other questions?