

## **The Godly Man as Christ's Representative** *Character & Guidance System of a Disciple*

### **Moving Toward Maturity**

How many Christians have known Christ for 15-20 years and yet they are immature, baby Christians? Too many! It is possible to live the first year of the Christian life 20 times instead of living 20 years of the Christian life. Probably most of those who remain babes even though they have known Christ for some time simply have not known how to grow to maturity. Perhaps they have not understood how vitally important it is to grow as a Christian. This is not a new problem. Listen to the writer of Hebrews:

“Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for some one to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For every one who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity ...” (Hebrews 5:11-6:1a)

Teacher, pray that no one in your class will be able to say afterwards, “I don't know how to grow and mature in my Christian life.” Pray each one will be challenged to “press on to maturity.” Pray they will be able to discern their own character strengths and weaknesses and will take positive action to strengthen the weaknesses.

There is a good deal of material in this lesson to try and digest all at one time. You may wish to divide it into two sessions. If so, we suggest you go through question 5 for one lesson and begin with the paragraph following question five for the next session.

### **A. Object Of The Lesson**

1. To help each one discover his own character strengths and weaknesses.
2. To encourage each one to take positive action to strengthen his own character.

### **B. Discussion Questions**

1. How do we “grow in grace”? (II Peter 3:18, Hebrews 5:14, Acts 20:32. Through the Word. It is the exercise of faith. i.e. trusting God more which produces maturity.)
2. How can we accurately measure Christian growth? (By our faith and love. II Timothy 1:5. By our attitudes, response to life, our talk, our interests, the way we spend or invest time, our mind set, use of money, etc.)
3. What would happen if a person was out of balance in:
  - a. Positive, attitude? (Could become eccentric, and unrealistic, not facing the facts, begin seeing things through rose-colored glasses.)
  - b. Drive? (Could become hard, unbending, production oriented, hyperactive)

- c. Persistence? (Could become insensitive, hold on too long, be inflexible)
  - d. Mature personality? (Immature responses to persons and circumstances)
4. How can we personally develop each of these characteristics?
- a. Positive attitude? (Memorize Philippians 4:8. Believe that God is in control, He knows what is happening, He has all power, He loves you. Remember: Whatever circumstance causes you to be negative is only temporary. "This, too, shall pass away.")
  - b. Drive? (Decide what God wants you to do and take action. Do not pamper the flesh and do not let your emotions control you. As an act of the will take positive action. Stop wasting time. When one task is finished, start another immediately. The greatest loss of time is in getting started. Ephesians 5:15,16.)

## **Do It Now**

He was going to be all that a mortal should be - Tomorrow.  
 No one should be kinder or braver than he - Tomorrow.  
 A friend who was troubled and weary he knew,  
 Who'd be glad of a lift, and who needed it, too;  
 On him he would call and see what he could do - Tomorrow

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write - Tomorrow  
 And thought of the folks he would fill with delight - Tomorrow.  
 It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,  
 And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;  
 More time he would have to give others, he'd say - Tomorrow.

The greatest of workers this man would have been - Tomorrow  
 The world would have know him had he ever seen - Tomorrow.  
 But the fact is, he died, and he faded from view,  
 And all that he left when living was through  
 Was a mountain of things he intended to do - TOMORROW.

## **Redeeming The Time**

I have only just a minute  
 Just 60 seconds in it,  
 Forced upon me - can't refuse it.  
 Didn't seek it - didn't choose it.  
 I must suffer if I lose it,  
 Give account if I abuse it  
 Just a tiny little minute,  
 But eternity is in it.

c. Persistence?

## **Press On**

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not;  
Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not;  
Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not;  
The world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone  
will get the job done.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 in the Living Bible says, "Finishing is better than starting!"

"The king of Israel answered, 'Tell him; let not the man who girds on his armor boast like the man who lays it down.'" (I Kings 20:11, Berkeley)

Dr. V. Raymond Edman, a well known educator and writer every year would give a message to the students of his college entitled: "It's Always too Soon to Quit."

d. Mature Personality? "until we all may arrive at the unity of faith and that understanding of that Son of God that brings completeness of personality, tending toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13, Berkeley) As we know Him better we mature in our personality. This is the only means for maturing in our personality. Colossians 3:9,10 (20th Century New Testament) says: ". . . get rid of your old self and its habits, and clothe yourselves with that new self, which, as it gains in knowledge, is being constantly renewed, in resemblance to Him Who made it."

5. Which of the traits do you feel is the most important and why? (From question 4)

6. Share which two traits of character you want, and why.

7. Did you learn anything new or helpful from the study of the three main areas (psychological, physical, and spiritual) which cause people to falter in their Christian life? Share what was helpful to you.

8. Let's consider some of these psychological problems which can cause us to "fall off."

a. What do we mean by a "wrong mind set"? (Pessimistic outlook and

always looking on the negative side, undue emphasis on material things, inclination to pleasure instead of obedience, and responding on the basis of the immediate and not the ultimate. Hebrews 11:26. Wrong mental intake, i.e. useless garbage (soap operas, some magazines, dirty books, daydreaming) versus scripture. Proverbs 4:23).

How can a wrong mind set be changed? (Confess it as sin, determine to do something about it, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, take positive action to increase the intake of the Word of God.)

b. What are we prone to be afraid of? (The unknown, the uncertain, the future, failure, etc.) What is the source of fear? (Review II Timothy 1:7 and I John 4:18 in the Living Bible) What is the antidote for fear? (trust)

c. What does it mean to be “production oriented?” (being more interested in “measurable results” than operating by spiritual principles.)

d. What is worldliness? (It is not a list of do's and don'ts. It is an attitude of heart.)

e. Guilt - How can we be rid of guilt? (By realizing that God not only forgives, but forgets each sin we confess. Micah 7:18,19 in the Living Bible says: “Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among his people? You cannot stay angry with your people, for you love to be merciful. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will tread our sins beneath your feet; you will throw them into the depths of the ocean!” Someone has said, “God throws our sins into the deepest sea and then posts a sign there which says, `NO FISHING HERE!’“

f. What would cause disappointment with God? (Feeling He has failed to answer a prayer, as you wanted it answered. Feeling He has dealt you a low blow because of the way He made you, the environment He allowed you to be brought up in, or the parents He gave you ... Things that you cannot change.)

g. Why are we often disappointed with others? (Usually because we expect more from them than they can or will give, or because we've gotten our eyes off of God and on to people and expect from them what only God can give to us or do for us.)

h. Why do we become disappointed with ourselves? (Generally it is because we don't accept ourselves the way we are. We don't like the way we are made (appearance); or we aren't happy with the abilities and skills we do have, but rather concentrate on the abilities or skills we don't have - things we can't do; or we're not happy with the parents we have, or the environment we live in or have had to live in. We blame all these things for our unhappiness and behind it all we blame God for it all! So, really, our disappointment with ourselves and others goes back to our disappointment with God. When we are unhappy about our appearance or skills or parents, etc., we set up a wall of bitterness and resentment between God and us, and between other people and ourselves. What a terribly tight, hemmed-in way to live!) How can one change this situation?

1. By acknowledging our bitterness toward God for our dissatisfaction in any of these areas. Confess it as sin.
2. Ask God's forgiveness.
3. Thank Him for the very thing you've been bitter and resentful over.
4. Determine to work with God (not against Him) in developing inner qualities in your life.

i. What is meant by playing to the wrong audience? (John 5:44; Proverbs 29:25; I Corinthians 7:23.) It means getting your self image feedback from men instead of God. When I'm playing to the wrong audience, I look to people for approval, for a sense of self-worth (e.g. "do you love me?" "Am I worthwhile?") I may or may not get back a good response. A person's response to me may come across negatively because he/she has had a bad day, or doesn't feel well, etc. When I play to the right audience (Jesus Christ) I always get the same positive response. Christ always says "YES!" You have worth to me. You are so worthwhile and precious to Me and so loved by Me that I gave my life for you so we could be together eternally." Never do we get back any negative feedback from Him!

j. What did you learn about bitterness and rebellion? What does it mean in Hebrews 12:15 that "thereby many shall be defiled?" (Unfortunately you cannot keep bitterness to yourself. It is like an infectious disease. It affects others. It affects what you do and how you think.) Look at I Sam. 15:22,23 to see how God views rebellion. How can one get rid of bitterness and rebellion? Often bitterness and rebellion are tied in with anger towards God and lack of self-acceptance and the same four things apply:

- 1) Confess as sin. State specifically what you are bitter and rebellious about.
- 2) Ask God's forgiveness
- 3) Thank Him for the very cause of your bitterness and rebellion
- 4) Determine to cooperate with Him in developing the inner qualities you need to overcome these negative feelings.)

Teacher, it is important to point out that the most vital way to guard against "falling off" in any one of these areas, or in "getting back on" if you have fallen off is by the "renewing of the mind", that is, building new thought patterns through the Word of God. For instance, if a man is prone to fear, he should meditate on and memorize many verses having to do with God's protection and care, what His Word says about fear, verses on how we can trust Him, etc. (II Timothy 1:7; I John 4:18 LB; I Peter 5:7 Amplified)

Or if a sense of guilt is a problem, memorize and meditate on what God does with confessed sin (verses on forgiveness and cleansing such as Micah 7:18,19 LB; I John 1:9 LB; Isaiah 44:22; Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 103:10-12; Psalm 130:3,4, etc.) Memorizing and meditating on such positive portions of

Scripture rather than on the negative emotions we feel will help us rebuild thought patterns.

9. Share your answer to #7.

10. Have the men turn to question 10 and assign each person 2-3 of the statements (numbered A-L). Ask them to spend a few minutes meditating on their assigned statements and then be ready to share why these are important and how they feel these help to maintain balance and keep one progressing in the Christian life.

(Teacher, you might want to make this comment: *If you believe these four things - that God is in control, that He can do anything, that He knows what is going on, and that He is personally interested in you - then you will be "panic proof"!*)

11. On question 10 what two needs did you list there and why? What was your application in these areas?

### **C. Suggestions For Conclusion**

Let's bow our heads and meditate on these thoughts:

1. How long have I been a Christian? Am I maturing as I should be for the length of time I have known Christ - or am I still on "milk" when I should be on "solid food"?
2. Am I moving on toward maturity or falling off psychologically? physically? Spiritually?
3. Is there something I need to call by its real name – SIN - and confess it, ask God's forgiveness and thank Him for it and purpose to cooperate with Him in overcoming it? Is there anything I need to settle with God now in order that I might press on to maturity? If so, let's spend these closing moments transacting this business with God.

Teacher, after you have given them a period of time in which they can verbalize these prayers and commitments to God, either silently or out loud, then you might close with this reassuring word from God's Word: "Hosea 6:3 in the Living Bible says, 'Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know Him and He will respond to us as surely as the coming of dawn or the rain of early spring.' How sure is the coming of dawn? or the rains of early spring? So much more sure will our God hear and answer our prayers!"

### **D. Additional Scriptures**

Luke 10:27; Luke 6:27,28; Proverbs 28:13; Ephesians 2:2; Galatians 5:17; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; James 1:25; I Chronicles 28:20; Joshua 1:2-4; Philippians 2:5-8; Mark 10:42-45.

### **E. Possible Projects**

1. Determine to go to sleep each night meditating on a verse you have memorized to help reprogram your mind in one specific area.

2. Provide each person in the class with a list of good and bad characteristics of each temperament. (taken from Transformed Temperaments or Spirit Controlled Temperaments by Tim LaHaye. Have each one check his strengths and weaknesses and determine which major group he is in. Be ready to share it with the class the next week.

#### **F. Extra Helps**

Is Christianity Credible? by Kenneth Taylor

The Abundant Life by Ray E. Baughman

Audio 842 - How to End Well

Audio 113 - From Pablum to Porterhouse

Audio 980 & 981 Plan and Power for Maturity

Audio 882 - Going on to Maturity

Audio 1124 - Attitudes toward Circumstances

Audio 1167 - Scripture Saturation

Audio 3005 - Thanksgiving to God

Audio 2256 & 2258 - Imparting Character

Audio 978 & 979 - Problems and Peril of Immaturity

Audio 980, 981 - Plan and Power for Christian Maturity