

The Marks of Maturity

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again, and we'll get started in our message this morning. We are continuing with our series on growth. And the first question is, what makes Christianity different?

It's a good question to think about. What makes followers of Jesus or what makes a relationship with God different than any other, and I use air quotes, religion in the world?

Well, the first thing, for one thing, Christianity begins with a spiritual birth, not a ceremony. It begins with being born into the family of God.

It begins with a supernatural event rather than simply joining a religion or being born into a religion. And secondly, it begins with a relationship with a Savior, not a religious right. And so Christianity is different in that it is a relationship that is born out of belief.

[1 : 06] It is not something that we are born into. It's not something that we join. It's something that comes from a change of mind, which in turn leads to a change of heart.

And when the Holy Spirit comes in, we receive that brand new nature. So that is what is different about Christianity. We've already looked at the indicators of infancy in the series.

So this morning we ask ourselves the question, how do we recognize spiritual maturity? How do we recognize when we are growing in Christ? How do we recognize when we have reached that point of spiritual maturity?

Well, the first thing we are going to do is look this morning at our main portion of the Bible this morning in the book of Ephesians chapter number 4 and we will be in verses 7 through verse 16. I've chosen to include verses 7 through 10 this morning to give us a little bit of introduction to our key passage this morning. We won't be spending a lot of time there except to give a little bit of an explanation about what we believe is being said by the Apostle Paul in these short few verses.

[2 : 28] So after discussing the basis of unity, which was verses 1 through 6, why we can be unified as the body of Christ, Paul is now analyzing the means through which we achieve unity.

How do we achieve the unity that we have? So verse number 7, he says, But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore, he says, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Now, this is the parenthetical portion of this section.

Now this, he ascended. What does it mean but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

[3 : 58] So, Paul has been talking about the gifts that he has been given us, or that has been given to us. Paul previously discusses the unity of the church.

Now he begins to discuss the diversity within the church. This is why we're one. This is why we have unity. But then Paul brings out the beauty of diversity.

And this is why we're different. And this is what God has done. And this is how God has gifted each of these believers in the church to carry out and to not only secure unity and preserve unity, but to also perpetuate the unity in the church.

So from God, each believer receives grace or enablement as Christ apportioned. Meaning to each believer, to every one of us, he's given a gift or giftedness, a divine enablement to carry out the work of the ministry, the work of the gospel.

So each believer is to function in Christ's body, by God's enablement, proportionate to the gift that he has given us, or the spiritual ability bestowed on him.

[5 : 18] No more, no less. And so he says he's given these gifts to us proportionately, and it is in the proportion of the gift that he's given us that we do the work that he's given us to do.

And so there are some things that we would love to do, but he hasn't gifted us in that way. You know, there are some of us that say, well, I wish I had the gift of mercy.

I wish I had the gift of exhortation. And we say, well, I would love to do that. Well, if God didn't give you that gift and he didn't wire you that way, then when sometimes when we try to do it, it comes off as this is something that we're trying to do on our own, and it really doesn't come off very well.

And so God expects us to minister to others proportionate to and according to the gift that he has given us. Now, it doesn't mean that if we don't have the gift of mercy that we can't show mercy. It just means that he's given believers these gifts. He's given gifted people to the church to accomplish certain things. Now, Ephesians 4, verse 8, is a quotation from the Old Testament when he talks about when he ascended on high and led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.

[6 : 43] Most think that it quotes Psalm 68 and verse number 18 with five minor and two major changes. Now, this is a little bit difficult for us to understand exactly what it's meant, and not every Bible commentator agrees on what Paul meant when he said this or in some what was meant by this.

The two major variations that we see, we're not going to spend a lot of time here because we can get lost in the weeds if we spend a lot of time on this verse to try to figure out exactly what is being said, but the two major variations are the change, number one, from the second to the third person. That is one of the changes in this quotation here. And also the change of direction from having received gifts in the Psalm passage to the giving of gifts in Paul's passage here.

I think it's better that we think of Paul was not necessarily quoting a single verse from the Old Testament, but that Paul was trying to capture the entire meaning or context of the 68th Psalm because there are a lot of words that are similar that he uses, but they're changed up a little because Paul had a particular message that he wanted to get across.

And so the essence of the Psalm is that a military victor has the right to give gifts to people that are associated with him. So typically what would happen when a military general or a king would go out on a campaign and they would conquer another land, they would return and they would then give gifts of the part of the spoils to those people that had given allegiance to them.

[8 : 37] And so it was within the military leader's prerogative to give gifts to the people that were loyal to him. And so this is the gist of what we see in Psalm 68 and also what the Apostle Paul is using here in chapter number 4.

And Christ, what did Jesus do? He basically, we have been captive, we have been brought captive to Christ by his victory over sin and death.

But it's not like we have been captured by an enemy. We have been bought back. We have been taken, so to speak, out of the enemy's hands and the gifts have been given to us.

And so that's kind of what makes the difference here. Whereas Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of gifts given to believers, what do we see in Ephesians chapter 4?

We see gifted men that are given to the church for a particular purpose. And so that's a little bit of the difference that we see in the three gift-giving passages, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and then here in Ephesians.

[9 : 50] And he's speaking more of these gifted believers. Now, verses 9 through 11. Remember we said there's a parentheses. In verse 8, there is this very loose quote from Psalm 68.

Verses 9 to 11 serve as a commentary. And so Paul says, oh, this is what was meant by this quote. On the two words in verse number 8, namely, ascended and gave.

Verse number 11, he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets. And this was something Paul did periodically in his writings. He would write something and then he would, in a parenthetical statement, say, and give a little bit more background or a little bit more teaching on what he said. So this is what we see here. So Paul is commenting on this. And in this parentheses, he is talking about what Christ could do before he could ascend.

He had to descend. This is what Paul is explaining. Now, what we might ask ourselves, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.

[11:08] And now this, he ascended, what does it mean but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth. Now, that's what gives commentators the problem.

What was meant by that? There are some who say, and there are three ways of taking it, and it all hinges on the little word of.

It's amazing how sometimes just a little word or a little preposition or a little adverb gives us some difficulty.

What does it mean? It could mean a number of different things. So what does it mean? Well, the Greek, now we're going to give you a Bible lesson here this morning.

The Greek has different moods. The Greek has a lot of different variations or more variations than the English has. And so a word can have different moods depending upon how you say it and depending upon what you mean by it.

[12:07] But you use the same word, but you use it with a different meaning. It's similar in the English language because sometimes a word might mean different things.

Some adjective or a preposition, rather, might mean some different things by how you say it. So a couple of ways that we could take it. Three ways. The first, into the lower parts of the earth could mean, namely, the earth.

Literally, the earth. And that would have been a genitive of apposition. And that was maybe what Paul was talking about. Secondly, it could mean into the lower parts or into the parts lower than the earth.

A genitive of comparison. Parts lower than the earth. Fourth, this would mean that Christ descended. Now, this is what some people believe this means. That Christ first descended into hell. First, Christ descended into Hades and between his death and resurrection. Thirdly, it could mean, it could refer to Christ's death and his burial in the grave.

[13:14] He was ascended. He ascended on high. But first, he had to be descended into the earth and be buried. Of course, we know that he was buried in a tomb with a rock that was over it.

Most commentators feel that this third meaning best fits the context of what the Apostle Paul was talking about. Because Christ had victory over sin and over Satan because he died.

And to prove that he died, he was buried. So, without really getting too far into a lot of this, mainly what it means is Jesus Christ has a prerogative to give gifts to us.

He died, was buried, and he rose again. And so, without getting into the weeds and getting into more details than that, suffice it to say that before Jesus could ascend up into heaven, he had to die and be buried.

And that's where Jesus Christ ends up. So, Christ was sent into the heavens in order to fill the whole universe. Verse 10, He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, and that he might fill all things.

[14:35] And that's when he takes verse 11 and then goes into the gifts that he is giving. And verse number 14, That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, verse 15, Speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, join and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

So, Paul has been talking in the first six verses of chapter 4 about we're unified. We're one body. Although we're one body, one body is made up of a bunch of members, believers.

And each of these believers has a specific gift or giftedness that has been given to that individual believer as it was apportioned by Christ. And that's how we minister.

We minister according to the gift that we're given. If we're a teacher and those who are teaching, there are those who teach who love it and who are energized by it.

And there are some who, when asked, can you teach this class or can you teach something? And they're going, oh, and you hear this groan. And, oh, I don't know.

[16:09] And it's hard work. And it's almost like when they're done, they're deflated because it took all of their energy. And that's the way the spiritual gifts work. When we're working in the area of our spiritual giftedness, it comes easily.

And we feel like, oh, this is great. This is awesome. And so, that is why those who have this gift of evangelism are marvelous evangelists.

They can talk to people about Jesus and lead someone to Christ in the most unlikely circumstances. But others, who don't have that gift of evangelism, have to work hard at it and can do it.

We're all called to be evangelists, but not every one of us has the ease of being able to do it. Same thing with mercy. Some of us have to work at showing mercy.

Some have to work at showing, or giving exhortation. Some have to work a little bit harder. So, we serve based upon the gift that was given us.

[17:12] So, all that's background. Now, let's look at the marks of a mature believer. The first one that we see is, the mature Christian is a believer with a mission.

A mature believer, now if you have your notes, we have, number one, the mature Christian is a believer with a mission.

Verse 11, and he gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors, and some teachers. Your translation might say perfecting, but the meaning of the word here, or the original word that Paul used, means maturing.

He has given these gifted men to the church for the maturing of the saints. So, we could read it this way.

So, the purpose of these gifted men is for the equipping of the saints for maturity, for the equipping the members of the body of Christ to be able to grow and become mature believers in Christ.

[18:18] So, the gifts of the Lord to the church are to bring believers to maturity. That's the whole goal. That's the whole purpose of these spiritual gifts.

So, the apostles are gifts, and they bring the church into maturity through their writings. And so, we have all of the writers of the New Testament.

They have taken God's, the message from God through His Holy Spirit, and wrote it and gave it to the church. Evangelists, through their special ministry, and pastors and teachers, have the primary responsibility in bringing about Christian growth in the body of Christ.

Now, we also see the common mistake in understanding the pastoral role that many come to believe. The pastor has become the person that's expected to do all the work in the local church or in the body of Christ instead of equipping others and maturing others to do it.

So far as the ministry of the local church is concerned, it's really not the pastor's job to do the ministry of the church. It's his job to see that it gets done.

[19:35] And so, it gets done by equipping the body of Christ to do the work the body of Christ is expected to do. Now, it doesn't mean the pastor doesn't evangelize. It doesn't mean the pastor doesn't show mercy.

It doesn't mean the pastor doesn't do all of these things as well, because who's the pastor beside the pastor? A member of the body of Christ. Christ. So, we serve together. It's not a matter of being above and below.

It's a matter of serving, working, and serving together as a team. And there is a leader of the team, and the team works together, but it's the leader's responsibility to equip the team.

It's like a player coach. Some teams have player coaches. They coach the team, but when the time comes, they're there on the field with the team. And so, they're serving together, but they're still the leader of the team.

Same thing with the pastor. The problem is, instead of being participants, many Christians have become spectators, and we expect a show on Sunday mornings.

[20:38] I come, and you put on a show, and I enjoy the show, and I sing, and I clap, and I go home and say, wasn't that a great service? Unfortunately, in many churches, that's the way it is.

And unfortunately, sometimes, throughout the body of Christ, it has a tendency to become that. We expect the leaders of the church to do the work of the ministry, and many people go home and just wait for next Sunday.

But what we're going to see here is that God has given gifted men to equip the church to mature believers so that the body of Christ can do the work of the ministry.

Pastors perform, and their people go home and talk about it. Too many believers feel their responsibility ends in paying pastors and supporting missionaries. And we were talking, we've been talking about supporting ABC Crisis Pregnancy Center.

You know, it's easy to give money for someone to do something. But then maybe we just need to get involved and do some physical things, a diaper drive or getting clothes for those who come to

the Crisis Pregnancy Center.

[21 : 53] So I think we need to go above and beyond just giving money and have a physical, vested interest in serving others. So it's getting involved.

So mature believers see their mission in life as doing the work of the ministry. So that's our mission. Our mission is to do the work of the ministry, serving others, loving others, meeting physical needs, meeting spiritual needs, fostering the unity in the body of Christ, reaching out to others with the love of Jesus and the gospel.

Now, the gospel is a message, but I think we need to preface and I believe that we need to precede the message with showing the love of Christ to others around us in our life, in our lifestyle, in the way we act in the grocery store, in the way that we act when someone does something that we feel that we're being shortchanged or we feel that we're not being treated properly.

The world is looking. People around us are looking. How does this Christian, how is this Christian going to act? Are they going to act with grace? Or are they going to get upset and act just like everybody else does?

So the world is watching and so we love people and we're able to then share the message that can change their hearts once we see the Holy Spirit change their minds.

[23 : 24] So the first mark of spiritual maturity is a believer with a mission. See, there are a lot of Christians around the world that don't have a mission.

It is just a religion to them. They go to church, pay their tithe, give their money, but most of the time a Christian without a mission gives their dollar and thinks that's sufficient rather than giving as God has blessed us and giving back to Him or think it's we pay people to do the work of the ministry or we have deacons and we have elders and it's their responsibility rather than every one of us having a mission.

So the first mark of spiritual maturity is you ask any believer, go around, you could go on the street, anybody, do you claim to be a Christian? Yes. Then what is your mission?

What answers do you think you might receive? You guys talked to me this morning. We're informal. What do you think the average Christian, the average churchgoer who claims to be a Christian and who may be a believer, what do you think they would say is their mission?

Now let's not get overly spiritual to think because sometimes we have to realize that not everyone is as mature as other believers. So what do you think? Talk to me this morning.

[24 : 54] Okay, be kind and help people. I've heard that before. What else? Okay, be honoring to God.

Good. That's our mission. Come on. What else? What else do you think people would say? Not what you would say necessarily, but what do you think Christians might say who maybe don't get or haven't really caught what the Apostle Paul was talking about?

I go to church. I've heard people say that. I've asked people, are you a Christian? Do you know Jesus as your Savior?

And they say, well, I go to church. What else? What else do you think would, because some people think that's the end of their mission. Be a churchgoer. I honored God by going to church. What else?

This is good. I like this interaction. I give to charities. And I think a lot of people think that just giving to a charity, now I think we do need to give to charities.

[26 : 00] I think we, first of all, the Bible teaches us that we are to bring our tithes into the storehouse, that we are to first primarily give our tithes and offerings to the local body of believers so we can carry on the ministry.

But I think that's not where it has to stop. Why can't we give to ABC Crisis Pregnancy Center on our own? Why can't we give to other charities who are doing great things around the world on our own? So they might think, well, that's my mission is to just to give to charities. What else? We could probably think of a number of different things that people would say.

But how many that we would stop and say, what do you feel is your mission would say, my mission on earth is to represent Jesus Christ and to make disciples.

Probably very few. Now, there are a number of ways we make disciples. It's not going to always be in the same way, but making disciples is taking someone else and helping them to know who Jesus is and helping them to grow and to do what Jesus did and to live like Jesus lived.

[27 : 16] And so I think we need to understand that one of the marks of a maturing Christian is to be a Christian, a believer with a mission. I'm not just here breathing air.

I'm not just here wasting oxygen. I am on a mission. And until Jesus Christ comes to take us back, we are going to be on that mission, making disciples, sharing the gospel, loving others, and building community, building community.

So we also see verse 12, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Secondly, the mature Christian is a builder of other believers. The maturing Christian, the Christian who is being perfected, and by perfection we don't mean being perfect, when will we be perfect? Well, we are going to be perfect when? When we get to heaven, exactly. We will no longer have this sinful nature, we will no longer be weighed down by these fleshly bodies and our fleshly desires.

[28 : 31] So we're going to be perfect then, but we are being perfected and we are maturing. And so the second mark that we see here in the teaching of the Apostle Paul is a mature Christian is a builder of other believers.

Verse number 12, what are we doing? These gifted men in the body of Christ for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, ultimately to edify the body of Christ.

What is another word for a building? An edifice. Exactly. So the word edifice can mean a building and when we use that variant of that word as a verb, when we edify, it means we build up.

We are building someone up. Edify means to build up or to help along. So Christ is the head of the church. Each believer is a member of the church, the body of Christ.

So we ask ourselves the question, what can we do? What can I do? What can you do to build up the body of Christ? What are some things we could do to build up the body of Christ?

[29 : 52] Encourage others. Very, very good. We need encouragement. You know, some of us need affirmation more than others. But I really don't care who we are, we all need encouragement at one time or another.

Okay, what else? That's a good one. Man? Serve. Serve one another. Yes, exactly. Some have the gift of service.

I love those with the gift of service. Because if everyone was a chief and we had no Indians and I hate to use that, I'm sorry for using that term if it offends anyone.

But if we have too many, if everyone was a leader and no one did the actual work, no work would get done. Because we would all be saying, let's do it, let's do it, let's do it.

But those with the gift of service get their tank filled, so to speak, when they do things for others and when they see things get done.

[30 : 52] There is a sense of accomplishment. There is a sense of purpose when they do something that they know helps the body, helps the family, helps others.

but we serve others. What else? How else can we build up the body of Christ? Teach one another. You know, here's the thing.

Not a single one of us knows everything we should know. care how smart we are. I was listening to a leadership podcast this week and they were talking about the shortcomings of some leaders.

There are some leaders that would never hire someone else who's smarter than they are because they feel threatened by it. and the whole point of what they were teaching, where they were trying to get across was, as a good leader, a good leader should surround themselves by people smarter than they are.

Why? Because we get more things accomplished and we all have something to learn and I don't care how smart a person is, there's always something they can learn from someone else, even if it's just a little bit of common sense.

[32 : 12] So we can all learn. So good. So teaching, teaching is something, is a way that we can edify and build up others. What else? Fellowship. Now that is something that can be, that's a term that's been abused because we just kind of throw it out there and a lot of people outside the body of Christ don't know what fellowship is, but it's a Bible word.

What does fellow, what does fellowship mean? I mean, you take the two words, break them down, what is fellow, fellowship. It's what we have in common with somebody else.

Now here's the thing. Do you realize we have a lot in common with unbelievers? No, we do. We're humans. We have emotions.

We have desires. And so there are a lot of things that we, now when it comes to the things that are important that matter, you can really only truly have, well, we don't have 100% agreement with anybody because then that's not possible while we're here on earth.

But fellowship is where we share what we have in common. And with other believers, we have Christ in common, we have our new life in common, we have our mission in common, and when we are with unbelievers, we have this, we have our struggles in common, common, we have our fears in common, we have health issues that might be in common, and so when we're with someone else who's not a believer, we can build that bridge by saying, you know, I have struggles too, you know, I have fears too, you know, and I struggle with, you know, my hip or my shoulder or whatever.

[34 : 02] Sometimes, matter of fact, Miss Elaine used to talk about when she was going through her chemo treatment, how she had things in common with people who were sitting in the chairs with her, and it was a bridge to share the gospel, you know, hey, we're having fellowship because we're both, we both have the same condition, and then that can be used to build that bridge to say, well, there's something else that we could have in common, and that would be Jesus Christ, and we can share the gospel in that way.

So, fellowship is another way. Building up the body of Christ. We can care for the parts of the body that are afflicted. The Bible says we should be praying for the sick.

The Bible says we should be visiting the fatherless and the widows. James 1, 27, we can take care of the physical needs of the body. We were reminded of the apostle Paul. He wanted to take up the offering for the Christians in Jerusalem.

Those were physical ways that they could care for the body. And for far too long, we've taken, we've left care, we've left all of this to the social agencies rather than the church taking the responsibility the church ought to take.

We can care for the spiritual needs of the body. We can be a peacemaker. You see another couple of members of the body of Christ who are having a disagreement? We can go and we can be a peacemaker, building the unity, building up, edifying the body of Christ.

[35 : 41] We can live and teach the scriptures. We're going to be talking about that tonight as we're going through 1 Thessalonians and the struggles that the Thessalonian church had and Paul and Silas and how they could come to them and say, look at how we lived.

We didn't use this as an opportunity to get rich. We didn't use it. And so they lived what they taught. And so that's another way we can build up the body of Christ.

Live and teach the scriptures. We ask ourselves the question, are you stronger because of someone else? I think all of us can look to someone else who's brought us to the point where we are and who's built us up, edified us.

We can ask ourselves the question, are others stronger in Christ because of you? And secondly, is the body more unified because of you? Or is the body more fragmented because of you?

So that's the second mark. Third mark is the mature Christian has a Bible basis for every belief. And we're going to see this in the next verse that Paul teaches us.

[36 : 46] The mature Christian has read God's word and is not satisfied just like the Berean Christians we've been talking about on Sunday evenings in Bible study.

The Bereans took what they heard and they said, I don't know, let's check it out. And they go to the Bible and they read the Bible like they read it for the first time and say, does that line up? Okay, it lines up with the Bible, so therefore it must be true.

And so the mature Christian has a Bible belief or Bible basis for every belief. Look at verse 14. He says, the reason for this, the reason for these teachers, these pastors, the reason for these gifted men who build up the body of Christ, who teach and help us mature so we can all do the work of the ministry, is that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

So no more children being tossed to and fro with every latest thing we heard on the radio or on TV. Somebody comes up with some brand new doctrine that, oh, that sounds so cool.

Well, there's really nothing new under the sun. And so we need to go back to God's word and say, why do I believe this? And is that true of what this person is saying?

[38 : 13] Also, no longer being snared or attracted to cultic teachings. And there are cults out there that go and pray on people who are church attenders and maybe Christians who haven't matured and don't know why they believe what they believe, and they feed them with things that sound good logically.

It makes sense to the natural mind. And then they take that and they believe it and then, well, I thought I believed that the Bible taught this, but maybe it doesn't.

And so when we are maturing and learning and are studying God's word, we're no longer snared or attracted to cultic teachings. We will be solid in the teachings of scripture.

So the question is, do you know why you believe what you believe? Do you have a true biblical basis? And if someone asks, why do you believe that? Well, pastor said, or mama said, or daddy said, if someone asks you, why do you believe that?

If you can say, well, the Bible says in Ephesians chapter, if you can quote Bible, if you can quote chapter and verse and be able to win in context and also go other places and say, this is why I believe what I believe.

[39 : 31] Then I believe you have a firm foundation as a maturing believer. No more toss to and fro with every wind of doctrine. Because there are a lot of charismatic, and I don't mean that in terms of simply speaking in tongues.

I mean there are a lot of people who have charisma, who can, as they say, could sell ice to an Eskimo, that will come in and maybe teach some things that are not quite right. And if we don't go to scripture, we may not be sure whether it's true or not.

Also, maturity in the word. Maturity in the Bible brings maturity in life. Because where are the answers to life? In God's word.

And as we begin reaching out to others, here's the thing. Jesus was attractive. His message attracted others.

His message attracted others. His lifestyle attracted others. And we say, well, but he was perfect and that attracted sinners?

[40 : 37] Well, he was offering them rest from all this work at trying to be perfect and said, take my yoke upon you. My yoke is easy.

My burden is light. And I will give you rest. And how was he going to accomplish that? By giving them a brand new life. And saying, now it becomes a relationship. And you learn about me.

And I help you through life. And we do this thing called life together. And so, maturity in the word brings maturity in life.

So, in conclusion, let's examine ourselves as we think about these marks of spiritual maturity.

Examine yourself for these marks. Am I a believer who, as we see in our notes, do we do we have a mission?

Am I a believer with a mission? Am I building up other believers? And do I have a Bible basis for every belief?

[41 : 47] And then ask ourselves the question, what areas or what in what areas do I need to grow? What are my greatest needs for growth in these areas? And then, let's help one another on the road to Christian maturity.

On the road to becoming more like Christ. On the road to being effective ministers of the gospel of Christ. Let's pray.

Father, this morning, we're so thankful for your goodness. We're thankful that you have given us the road map to maturity. You have not only given us the map, but you have promised to come along for the ride.

Through your Holy Spirit, you give us the power, you give us the direction, and you give us the divine enablement, the grace to accomplish your will here on planet earth.

Father, help us to be more Christ-like in our showing grace and love to others as as we build community, as we build fellowship, and as we reach out to those who don't know Jesus Christ.

[42 : 55] I pray, Heavenly Father, that you would help us to become a welcoming family of believers, welcoming others to come and to join our community and to learn more about you together and to grow together.

Father, help us as we seek out new and potentially effective ways of reaching the masses, reaching those who are around us with an invitation to come and experience Jesus.

Lord God, I pray that you'd help us to be a place that would honor you and glorify you, and that you would be able to entrust us with those who want to know more of you, that we might be able to help them grow, find Jesus, help them grow, that we might be able to see lives, souls saved, we might be able to see lives changed, marriages put back together, that we might see addictions overcome, that we might be able to see a growing body of believers, not only growing in number, but growing

in spiritual maturity as well.

Help us to be who you want us to be, and help us to do the work necessary to become who you want us to be, so that we can do what you want us to do. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.