

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY EIGHT

Hope Beyond Immaturity: Maturity Checkpoints

1 Peter 3:8–12

Without a doubt, the process of spiritual growth is long and often a very painful one. En route to maturity, we all spill our milk. We say things we shouldn't say. And at times, we do not act our age. It's not a pretty sight, but it's reality. Yet growing up is a stated objective for every member of God's family. Growing old happens, but growing up isn't automatic.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE journey from infancy to adulthood is a journey into maturity. At each waypoint on this voyage, a person has the opportunity to demonstrate his or her developmental progress.

Toddlers slowly figure out how to eat on their own, to walk on their own, to use the potty on their own. As they grow into young children, they learn the art of language, proving to be fluent speakers and skilled readers. Adolescents take the last steps into adulthood when they finally break from full dependence upon their parents.

As a person passes each of these milestones, he or she takes important steps in the process of growing older. Yet there is an important difference between growing *older* and growing *up*. Many who have crossed the threshold into adulthood do not necessarily exhibit behavior that matches their age. Likewise, some have character far beyond their years.



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Jesus said that those who put their trust in Him are “born again” (*John 3:3*). The moment you choose to follow Jesus, you receive the gift of new life, and you return to infancy . . . spiritual infancy. Yet many Christians do not realize or accept they are able to grow spiritually and that they are responsible for their spiritual maturity. So they never take steps to grow!

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will zero in on this topic of Christian maturity. It is possible to know if you are growing or not. The apostle Peter offers a checklist of sorts you can keep handy to help assess how well you are growing spiritually in Christ.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

When we study Scripture, we look at the life of Jesus, whose mature example we seek to follow in everything we do. Take a moment to ask God to conform you to Jesus’ image through the power of the Holy Spirit:

Father, each day, I want to take another step down the path of spiritual maturity. Help me take that step today by showing me through Your Word what the life of a mature Christian looks like. I pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

How do I live out my Christian faith when it feels like the whole world is working against me?

In 1 Peter, the bold apostle provided profound—yet challenging—answers to this important question. In *1 Peter 2:13–3:6*, he addressed specific individuals: those mistreated by the government (*2:13–17*), slaves (*2:18–21*), wives (*3:1–6*), and husbands (*3:7*).

Then in *3:8–12*, Peter turned his attention away from these individuals and looked to “all of you”—to all those who made up the community of faith (*3:8*). The marks of Christlike character Peter discussed in these verses function as maturity checkpoints, both for individual believers and for a local Christian community.



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Observation: The What, How, and Why of Christian Living

As Peter addressed the behavior of the broad body of Christ in *1 Peter 3:8–12*, he answered three questions: *What? How? and Why?* Keep these questions in mind as you observe these verses.¹

According to *3:8*, what kinds of qualities should characterize the Christian community? (Hint: these five characteristics are easiest to observe in a more word-for-word translation like the *New American Standard Bible*.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

In *3:8*, Peter answered the question, “What should I do?” Then, in *3:9a*, he answered the more pragmatic question, “How can I do it?” What can a follower of Jesus practically do to embody all the attributes of *3:8*?

Next, in *3:9b*, Peter answered the question, “Why should I do these things?” What result awaits believers who faithfully demonstrate this kind of behavior?



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According to *1 Peter 3:10–11*, what should you do “if you want to enjoy life / and see many happy days” (*1 Peter 3:10*)?

The main ideas of this passage are nicely reviewed in *3:12*. Summarize this verse in your own words.

The great secret of our collective unity and personal maturity, I have found, is focusing our full attention on the person of Jesus Christ and agreeing on points related to Him, His message, His kingdom, His model. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: Developing Character in Community

The apostle's words in *1 Peter 3:8–12* reveal eternal truth about what kinds of Christlike character traits reflect true maturity. What kinds of qualities underlie the behavior Peter encouraged? List as many qualities as you can! For some help, look at pages 212–214 of Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*. Or for a free online resource, check out *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

How would an individual's cultivation of these qualities result in the strengthening of the Christian community? Similarly, how can the community foster the growth of these qualities within one of its individual members?

Why is it essential for the body of believers to remain unbreakably bonded together? Remember, Peter wrote this letter to Christians who were facing unfair treatment at best, and full-blown persecution at worst.



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As Peter shared these exhortations with his brothers and sisters in Christ, he reflected on the example of one great hero of the faith: King David. Let's see how his example can push us toward true maturity.



Correlation: From David to Peter

In the correlation phase of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, we correlate the themes of our main passage with the themes of other passages it references. Doing so allows us to gain a greater appreciation for the lessons God wants to teach His people.

For many of Peter's original readers, the words of this passage would have reverberated in their minds like a familiar tune. That's because, in *1 Peter 3:10–12*, Peter echoed the words of David in *Psalms 34:12–16*.

Before David took the throne of Israel, he was gaining popularity with the people. Yet, at the same time, he was garnering animosity from King Saul. The king was strong in stature but weak in spirit, and because he was jealous of David's fame, he tried to kill David. Despite Saul's relentless pursuit, God preserved David . . . again and again.

David penned *Psalms 34* as he pondered the events of *1 Samuel 21:10–15*. Based on this passage, what drastic measures did David take in the hostile gentile territory of Gath to escape Saul's wrath?

Now read *Psalms 34*. How does seeing the context of *1 Samuel 21:10–15* and Saul's pursuit of David help you better understand and appreciate the message of this psalm?



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How did David’s circumstances correlate with those of the earliest Christians? How does Peter’s allusion to David’s conflict with Saul help you better understand and appreciate the message of *1 Peter 3:8–12*?

“Taste and see that the LORD is good. / Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!” (*Psalms 34:8*). During one of his greatest trials, David remembered all the times God demonstrated His goodness. Reflecting on God’s faithfulness strengthened David to trust God. And faith is the seed from which all other characteristics of a mature Christian ultimately grow.



Application: Metrics for Maturity

Based on his study of *1 Peter 3:8–12*, Pastor Chuck developed eight checkpoints a Christian can use to gauge his or her own spiritual maturity. Read through the list slowly, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you which of these characteristics you are actively reflecting in your life. Place a check mark next to each of your strengths.

1. Unity
2. Mutual Interest
3. Friendship and Affection
4. Compassion
5. Humility
6. Forgiveness
7. A Controlled Tongue
8. Purity and Peace



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How can you know if you're on the right road to maturity? Go back over that list and do an audit of your life. We all have weak points along the way. In fact, I don't know of one that hasn't been a struggle for me at times in my own life. But that's what I pray about. Ask God for strength in these areas of weakness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Which of these qualities would you like to improve in your own life right now?

These eight checkpoints connect with each other like a web of virtue. As you cultivate one, others grow with it. How can you lean into your strengths to fortify your weaknesses?

As you look back on your Christian journey, at what points were you most progressing in maturity? What kinds of steps were you taking to bring you further down that road? What would it look like for you to keep walking down that same path?



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The apostle Paul once said, “When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things” (*1 Corinthians 13:11*). Growing up is hard . . . at least without the Spirit of God helping you. Yield to His presence today. Put away those childish things. And grow into the mature Christian person God has created you to be.



A FINAL PRAYER

In the space below, write your own prayer asking God to help you move down the path of true maturity.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”

