

Maturing through knowledge

Discussion questions can be found at the end of this document.

[1] 1 Tim 6¹⁷⁻²¹/ Luke 8⁴⁻¹⁰/ Hosea 4⁴⁻⁶

What's the primary vision for Christian development in the NT?
It's that we should all... **grow up!** **[2]**

**² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
(1 Peter 2)**

The New Testament vision of Christians is that they should continually work towards a state of maturity. What does this mean? It means, at base, the ability to reproduce **[3]** – to produce fruit. We saw this last week. How then can we tell if we are maturing? How can we know that we are growing as Christians? I listed 5 things last week which I believe are the best indicators of Christian maturity and they were... **[4]**

Love

Knowledge – discernment - wisdom

Prayer

Good works – service –

Suffering

We looked at love **[5]** as the premier mark of maturity last week. This week I want us to look at knowledge. **[6]** This may be

somewhat surprising to you since we have what appear to be some conflicting opinions in the Bible in regard to knowledge. Knowledge on the one hand seems to be absolutely vital to the growth and development of God's Kingdom so that in the NT we have Jesus saying that our aim should be through the knowledge of God to 'take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.' (2 Cor 10⁵) and in the old we read this morning that because of a lack of knowledge and a rejection of knowledge God's people are being destroyed...**[7]**

**'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me.
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children. (Hos 4)**

On the other hand, however, we find that knowledge is also implicated in the destruction of faith. So Paul's advice to Timothy goes like this...**[8]**

²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, ²¹ which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Tim 6)

And again in 1 Corinthians we read...**[9]**

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to

know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God. (1 Cor 8)

But the difference here is clear. The knowledge Paul is referring to is either false knowledge or, simply, knowledge of a sort that will be unhelpful. In short, there is much that is true and that qualifies as knowledge but it is quite simply unhelpful. There is a much smaller subset of knowledge that is just absolutely vital. And knowledge of this kind is helpful. Indeed, it is knowledge of this kind which produces the kind of transformation that will create maturity in us.

Our education system is based on the premise that knowledge helps human beings fulfil their potential and contribute productively to society and to each person's happiness. And so, we have a model in the world of how important knowledge is. But there is a knowledge which transforms us and takes us to another level because it renews us.

Paul says this...**[10]**

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Roms 12)

How are we transformed? We are transformed by the renewing of our **mind!** And how are our minds renewed? They are renewed by knowledge or, at least, by new knowledge. And what is the nature of that knowledge?

In our reading from Luke we have Jesus referring to that knowledge...**[11]**

¹⁰ He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you,

It is the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God. What does this mean? It means, quite simply, that Jesus enables us to understand scripture and that without Him we cannot. **He is the key to all true knowledge.** As we grow in our knowledge of Him we will find our minds and our hearts renewed.

But how shall we grow in that knowledge? How shall we know Jesus? We shall know Jesus pretty much as we know everything – we know Jesus by getting close to Jesus; **[12]** by studying Him in the way He is able to be studied – by reading the Bible and by getting others who know Him better to explain it to us; by learning from His teaching; by committing ourselves to that teaching. I read and have read 5 chapters of the Bible a day for years – and that’s just a snack. It doesn’t take that long – perhaps 15 minutes but it keeps me thinking about Jesus. I also do various little Bible studies each day using the You Version bible App – that keeps me thinking about Jesus. I spend time in prayer each day – that keeps me thinking about Jesus and I read at least 10 – 15 books a year about the faith – these keep me thinking about Jesus. I speak with Christian friends about issues I’m struggling with in the Bible and they help me to keep thinking about Jesus. In short I do many things to **turn my mind and heart towards Jesus each day.**

I use this app every day [13] – the You Version Bible App. Not only does it have hundreds of different translations of the Bible but it has lots of ways of reading the Bible and literally thousands of Bible Studies.

I use this because I want knowledge – I want knowledge about Jesus and about the faith. I want to have my mind renewed by the knowledge I gain. I want to grow as a Christian and I know that won't happen unless I allow **the knowledge of Christ** to change my thinking. You see every time I need to change my behaviour my thinking needs to change first. [14]

If I'm struggling to change my attitude at work I need to change my thinking first. [15] If I'm struggling with my relationships I need to change my thinking first. [16] If I'm struggling with my general health often it is my thinking that must change first [17] and if I'm struggling to study I will definitely need to change my thinking first. [18]

During the first winter I was on the forest I contracted bronchitis so badly I could hardly breath at times. I slept poorly because of my breathing and I began to lose weight. I finally went to the doctor and he immediately diagnosed my problem and put me on a course of antibiotics which cleared it up immediately but he was interested in how I had contracted it so he asked some questions about my work and I told him what I was doing. He then asked a simple question – are you wearing a hat. I said no because in those days I had a heavy thatch of hair on my head and I seldom felt cold. He responded immediately that this didn't matter. When you work outside it's the rate at

which your head loses head which counts not whether you feel cold or not. Frankly this was a new concept to me. I had learned something new and from that day I wore a hat in all but the warmest of weather and I never contracted bronchitis again.

[19]

If you want to change your actions – change your mind first.

[Repeat] **[20]**

The mature Christian is one who knows that they must keep on learning for life and that every day there is something to learn from and about Jesus. There are three fundamental sources for this learning each of which is vital in our life. **[21]**

1. The Bible and biblical tools.
2. Other Christians and fellowship with those Christians
3. Prayer and the tools of prayer which the Church has created over centuries.

When we are young, at school or at high school – much of our study is facilitated by someone else. It is vital that this becomes secondary to our own self-directed study either by ourselves or with others in a Small Group. (How many here are in a Small Group.) Well you need to be in one and after the service Bronwyn and Fran will take you names and contact with a suggestion about a Small Group you can join in the next month or so.

The sooner we begin to read the Bible for ourselves and design for ourselves a way of allowing Jesus to impact our lives the better. [22]

We don't just come to Church because it is the thing, we most want to do. We come to Church because we know in Church, we will meet other Christians who by the very fact that they are people of faith have something to offer us in terms of the knowledge of Jesus. What does Jesus say? He says, 'Where two or more are gathered in my name... **there I am also!!**' This is one of the key reasons why we must not give up meeting together. [23]

Finally, prayer is a tremendous way to bring knowledge of God into our minds. As we grow in prayer, we begin to enter into a conversation in which we can be completely frank with God and He is frank with us. Prayer opens us up to receive what God has for us and so we need to enter into a growing life of prayer in order to grow our minds. [24]

Next week we have a tremendous interview and talk from one of our former members Jo Krysa. She will be describing for us her journey into Ignatian prayer and how a 3 month retreat at the Ignatian centre in France has completely renewed her faith. Don't miss it!

How can we know we are maturing as Christians? We can know because we are growing in our ability to study, to think and to know Christ and particularly to know Christ's leading in our life.

Maturing 2 Discussion Questions

1. Why is it so important to the writers of the NT that we mature as Christians? (1 Cor 3¹⁻⁴)
2. The word translated 'mature' means 'ripe' or 'fruitful' in Greek. What is the key concept contained in these words?
3. The 5 key indicators of maturity were as follows: Love, Knowledge – discernment – wisdom, Prayer, Good works – service, Suffering. Why is love the premier indicator of maturity?
4. Our thought and life and knowledge are another key indicator of maturity. So important is it that Paul commands us to 'take captive' every thought for Christ. (2 Cor 10⁵) Why do you think our thoughts and our knowledge play such a key role in Christian maturity?
5. Romans 12² is clear about the power of our minds and the role they play in changing us from the inside out. What are some aspects of our thought life that you find a struggle to deal with?
6. Knowledge of Christ is the key to right thinking. Three ways of growing in this knowledge are i) to read the Bible regularly ii) to study the Bible with others and iii.) to deepen our prayer life. Which of these to you find the most difficult and why?
7. Why is it that the Bible encourages us never to give up the practice of meeting together? (Heb 10²⁵)