

Day 38
Maturity: The Path to Peace

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family." Matthew 5:9 (MSG)

Following the roadmap that Jesus shows us in His Sermon on the Mount leads to only one definitive result: maturity. Obeying the seventh beatitude can only be done by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit and spiritually mature people who are building their lives according to the pattern that Jesus shows. **Reaching maturity is not a port of arrival, it is not a landing spot for the stagnant, or a bragging point for the proud.** It is very simply a continued journey of faith that we all should hunger and thirst to continue to walk, until either Jesus returns, or we are called home. **Immature people cannot be peacemakers because immaturity is simply a continued self focus.**

My wife (Miranda) and I have four children. They all arrived on this planet as babies. We had to do everything for them. Not a single one of them, once we brought them home from the hospital, told us that we no longer have to worry about doing all the work; they are here to help! Babies are a blessing, but a blessing that requires a lot of hard work and attention. Babies only think about their needs. They don't wake up and check the time to see if it is too early to wake Mom or Dad up; they simply start crying. They have a need; they want it met. They are hungry; you have to feed them. They are dirty; you have to clean them. They do not consider whether you are tired or sick or have a need of your own. **Babies think, "Me first, me second and me third." They never have a thought that says, "What about Mom?!" And we are just so happy to oblige. It gives us great joy to cater to these bundles of cute selfishness.** Why? The answer is obvious: it's a baby! Nobody in their right mind expects a baby to act any differently; that is the way babies act, and we love it...

When does this pure joy of taking care of this little bundle turn into a challenge? When does this dream turn into a nightmare? When the baby happens to be in his teens and twenties, yet, cannot understand that a full trash can needs to be emptied, a bedroom is not a science experiment to grow mold, a shower is not optional, clothes do not magically get off the floor and land in the laundry. I could go on, but you get the point. It is very frustrating for a parent when a grown child does not reach a place where they accept responsibility for themselves, when they only think about themselves instead of others.

I want to say this as forcefully as I can: **You cannot become a peacemaker if you are solely focused on yourself. If you think "me," instead of "we." If you think, "What is in it for me?", instead of "What is required of me?" If you think, "What can I receive?", instead of "What can I give?"** One of the challenges with spiritual immaturity is the fact that the immature cannot eat the food that causes growth. They stay alive through spiritual milk, but fail to thrive because they lack the nourishment of solid spiritual food. Paul gives us some clear indicators of what kind of behavior we find in spiritually immature people. He says, ***"Dear brothers, I have been talking to you as though you were still just babies in the Christian life who are not following the Lord but your own desires; I cannot talk to you as I would to healthy Christians who are filled with the Spirit. 2 I have had to feed you with milk and not with solid food because you couldn't digest anything stronger. And even now you still have to be fed on milk. 3 For you are still only baby Christians, controlled by your own desires, not God's. When you are jealous of one another and divide up into quarreling groups, doesn't that prove you are still babies, wanting your own way? In fact, you are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord at all. 4 There you are, quarreling about whether I am greater than Apollos, and dividing the church. Doesn't this show how little you have grown in the Lord?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 TLB)***

Paul says immature people follow their desires, not the Lord's. They cannot digest truth that is necessary for growth; they dabble only in the superficial; **A feel-good spirituality, that is only about pleasing me.** Immature people are controlled by their own desires and not by what God wants for them. How can we recognize this behavior? This is how! When we are jealous of others and insist on having things our way. If we don't get our way, we split into different groups. **It becomes an us-versus-them, instead of all of us together against the enemy of our faith.** We divide, instead of unite. We choose sides and draw lines of affection that never were God's intention for His Body. "I like this guy more than that guy." **Instead of eating the food for nourishment and growth, we quarrel about the waiters who are simply the servants who deliver the food. Division weakens our testimony, dissolves our effectiveness, limits our potential and stops our progress.**

So, we are relegated to drink milk because we cannot digest what we need to grow strong and vibrant; **all because we are immature and that immaturity is reflected in our divisiveness, comparing and quarreling.** Immature people only want what they want, but if we are mature sons of God, we work towards peace with everything we have. We pray for and work for unity between one another and for one another.

If you sow division, you need to understand that you are not reflecting your Father's nature. You also need to understand that you are spiritually immature and not developed. Which means your heart's motive needs to be re-evaluated, and you are more "nepios" (an immature child) than you are "hyios" (a fully grown son). A child cannot receive his or her full inheritance, so they have to be placed under a caregiver until that child has become a mature son to be able to receive their full inheritance. Positionally, you are a child who belongs to the Lord. But as far as your maturity is concerned, you are not a fully grown son because you cannot be trusted with the responsibility of helping others establish peace, because you are still choosing sides. So, take these words to heart and let them help you develop a robust desire for growth and maturity. Become an encourager, instead of a side picker, pursue peace with all you have, and enjoy your Father's love and continue to experience His peace. *"Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: **Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.**" (2 Corinthians 13:11 NLT)*

Jesus says we do not magically arrive at a place called "spiritual maturity." Spiritual gifting is not an indicator of spiritual maturity, Spiritual maturity is not doing what is best for me, or even preferring myself over others. Spiritual maturity is not a position or title I hold. **What is an indicator of spiritual maturity, according to Jesus? It is going through God's process where I, with humility, mercy and trust, build my life completely on the model that Jesus puts forth in the beatitudes.** It is where I do the hard work of getting along with others myself; taking the least position and being willing to be wronged. So, I practice mercy; as my only pursuit is His righteousness, not my own satisfaction or desire for payback. **Maturity, then, is stepping into turmoil and conflict and making every effort to produce a Godly result.**

Even if I fail to accomplish the peace that is desired, I am still reflecting the nature of my Father and He calls me His son! Because my feet are shod with the gospel of peace, my heart is filled by the Prince of Peace, and my mouth speaks His peace to accomplish His purpose! A mature son, looking like my Father.

Reflection and Prayer:

- **What indicates spiritual immaturity in our lives and what can we do to overcome it?**

- What arena in your life do you need to actively work towards maturity? Do you have a plan of action? If your answer is, “Not yet, “when will you have one?
- The strategy of the devil to divide us seems much more effective than our efforts to be united. Will you take a moment and pray for the unity and oneness of your church?
- Would you agree with the prayer of Jesus for us: *“I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. 21 Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. 22 I have given these people the glory that you gave me so that they can be one, just as you and I are one. 23 I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me.” (John 17:20-23 NCV)*
- Jesus prayed for us to be one so that the world will know that the Father sent Jesus and that we are loved in the same way. Are you willing to be a vessel that God can use to bring others together? How can you become that vessel? When will you start?