Spiritual Maturity: Growing from Milk to Meat

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Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services

877-370-9988 – www.accounseling.org



Principles For Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity



Hebrews 5:12-14

12. *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*
13. *For every one* ***that useth milk*** *is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*
14. ***But strong meat*** *belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

1. *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*
2. ***I have fed you with milk, and not with meat:*** *for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*
3. *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

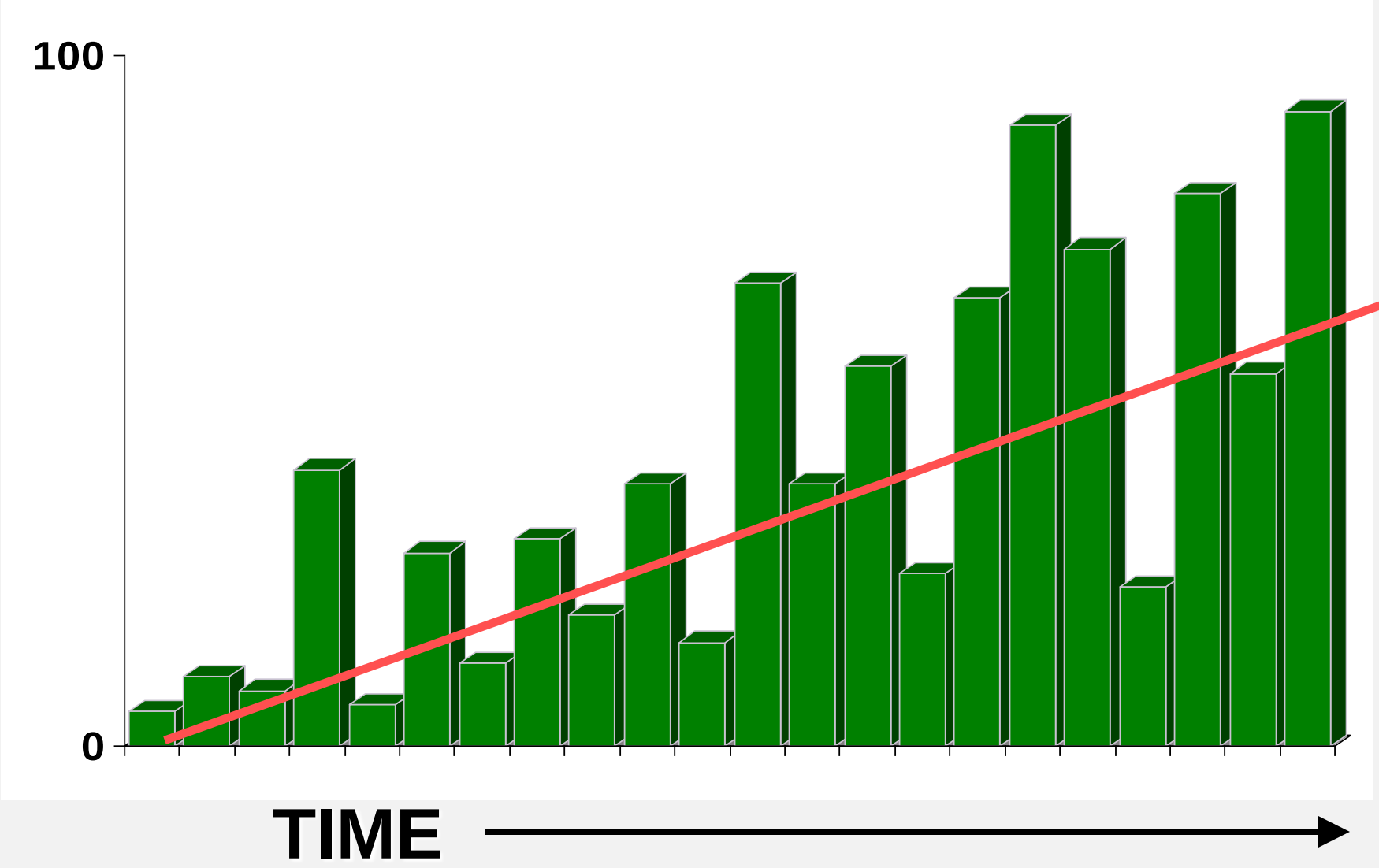
Key Points:
Hebrews 5:12-14 & *I Corinthians 3:1-3*

- Milk is used here to describe spiritual immaturity.
- Meat is used here to describe spiritual maturity.
- In these passages where Paul uses the analogy of milk and meat, *he is correcting people who should be more mature than they are.*
- He is **not** correcting people who are new believers or people who are believers growing adequately over time.
  - Remember, it is essential babies have milk AND it doesn't say anything bad about babies that they need milk.
  - Trying to give a baby meat or solid food before they are ready would be harmful to the baby.

Milk to Meat: The Proper Lens

- Should not be considered an 'Either-Or' scenario but a 'Continuum of Growth'.
  - You will not be mature in all areas all at once…you will be at milk in some areas and meat in others.
  - Sometimes growth will be more dramatic than at other times…
- Steady *growth progression* is the key!

Growth Progression (Process of Sanctification)



The Life You Always Wanted by J. Ortberg

Think through the life of Joseph for a moment…



- Faithful living through the circumstances God allows in our lives leads to continued spiritual growth and maturity…we become more like Christ.
- ***Romans 8:28-29***, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."*

Principles For Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity

Setting Key Priorities





Get Proper Orientation…

The Journey is as important as the destination.

Setting Key Priorities

1) The Goal of Spiritual Growth: Where do you want to go?

- ***Matthew 22:35-40*** *"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him,* ***Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*** *This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it,* ***Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself****. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

Setting Key Priorities

1) The Goal of Spiritual Growth: Where do you want to go?

- To love God and love people like Christ is the pinnacle and priority of spiritual growth.

- Our *Orientation* should be to keep this principle front and center in our lives at <u>all</u> times:
  - Think about what **loving God** means in practical terms in your life right now.
  - Think about what **loving People** means in practical terms in your life right now.

Setting Key Priorities

2) Determine Where You Need to Start

- ***1 Corinthians 13:11*** *"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."*
- Identify the areas you need to grow in and develop a plan to address them (i.e. seek counsel, study the Word).
  - Areas where you lack self-discipline.
  - Areas where Satan and your flesh continue to have mastery.
  - Attitudes which need sanctifying.
  - Relationship issues, forgiveness, connecting with others.
- Don't fall into the trap: "If I just had victory over this one thing, I could start…"
  - A journey starts with putting one foot in front of the other…

Setting Key Priorities

3) Seek Key Relationships: Who's going with you?

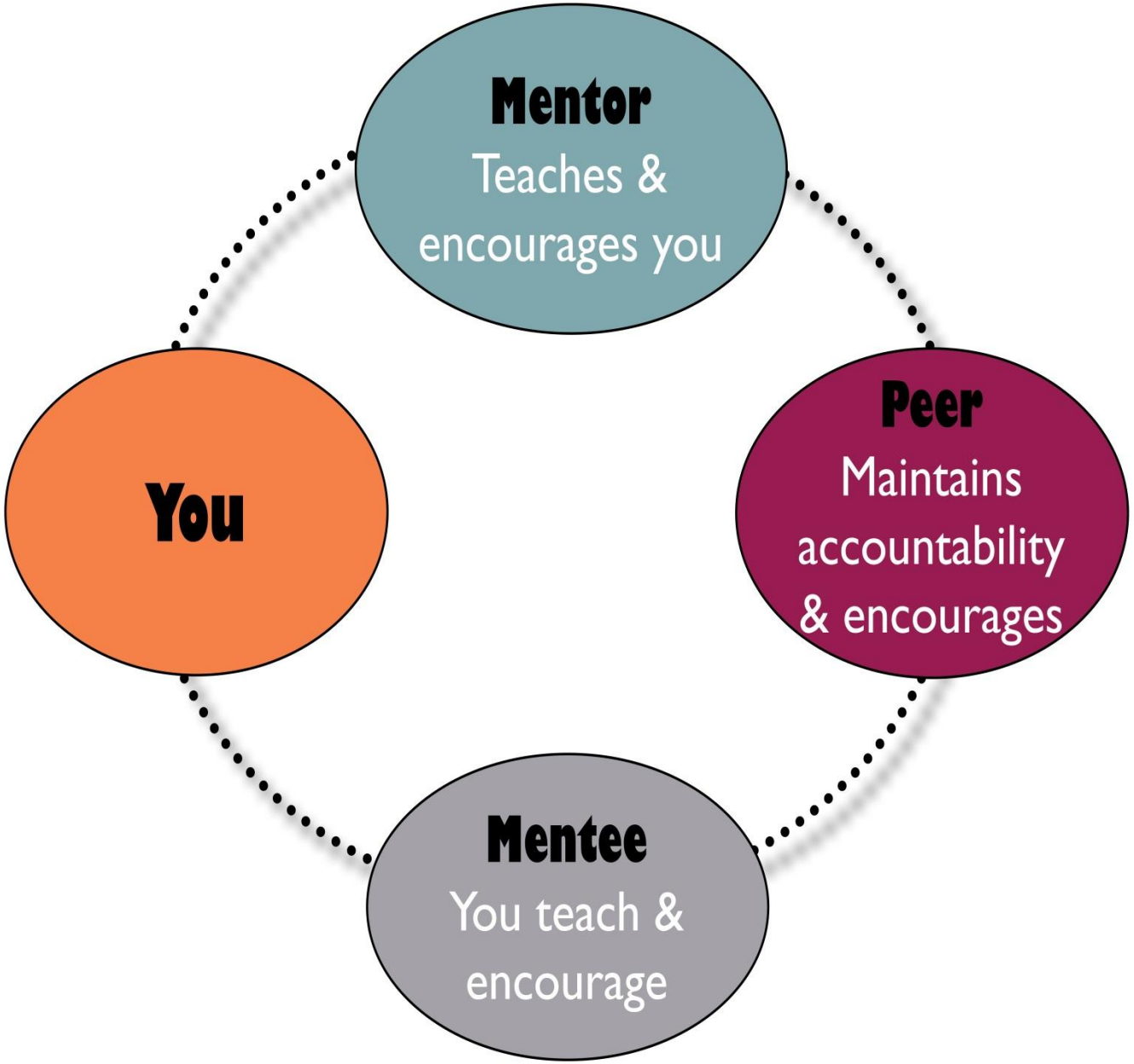
Romans 12:4-5 *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

- Engage people within the entire Body of Christ.
- God isn't surprised by our differences.
- He expects our love for Christ (our Head) to bring us into unity in our diversity.
- Each one of us is a link in an inter-generational chain.

Seek Key Relationships

An intergenerational Body of Believers gives the rare opportunity for the fullness of threefold relationships…

- Humility to learn from mentors.
- Transparency to be accountable to peers.
- Selflessness to spend time teaching and encouraging others.



Seek Key Relationships Cont'd

- Think through your relationship and make sure you have:
  - **Paul (Mentor) –** An older and wiser Christian person who can give you advice, perspective, direction, and corrective feedback.
  - **Barnabas (Accountability Partner) –** A peer who is in the same life-stage as you. Good for support, encouragement, and accountability.
  - **Timothy (Person that you Mentor) –** Someone who is younger than you that you can help learn and grow.

Principles For Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity

Maintaining Key Disciplines



Maintaining Key Disciplines

1) The Principles of Firstfruits

- ***Proverbs 3:9-10*** *"Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfuits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."*

- What about giving God some of the best of our time and mental acuity?
  - Remember a schedule that is too busy for God is "giving place" to the devil.

- *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness…" (Matthew 6:33)* is not meant to be a one-time occurrence.

Maintaining Key Disciplines

2) Saturate Your Mind With the Word

- **1 Peter 2:1-3,** *"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes,* ***desire the sincere milk of the word****, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."*
- ***2 Timothy 2:15****, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*
- Sometimes Bible study flows easily and other times it is an act of the will.
  - Use a combination approach of discipline and spontaneity.
  - Be sure to seek the "whole counsel of the Bible".
  - Get the Word into you!

Maintaining Key Disciplines

3) Intentionality of Sowing & Reaping

- ***Galatians 6:7-9*** *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*
- If you reap what you sow, what are you going to harvest in your spiritual walk based on what you are planting now?
- What do you get if you intentionally vs. haphazardly:
  - Study through Scripture?
  - Memorize Scripture?
  - Share with others what the Lord is teaching to you?
  - Seek out mature believers to mentor and disciple you?

Principles For Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity

Guarding Key Attributes



Guarding Key Attributes

1) Quit Trying to be Someone Else

- ***1 Corinthians 12:18*** *"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him."*
- ***1 Corinthians 15:10*** *"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*
- You are who you are and you are where you are just as God pleases.
  - Think through the story of Esther *(Esther 4:14)*

Guarding Key Attributes

1) Quit Trying to be Someone Else

- It is common for us to hear about what someone else does and then think we need to be like them in order to be acceptable.
- You have a unique learning style, personality, background, level of understanding, spiritual gifting, etc.
- *What role do you play in serving in the Body of Christ today?*



Guarding Key Attributes

2) Knowledge Without Love is NOTHING

- ***1 Corinthians 8:1*** *"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."*
- ***1 Corinthians 13:2*** *"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."*
- God is absolutely not impressed by spiritual "know-it-alls."
- When you believe you already know everything, you are not <u>teachable</u>.
- Knowledge applied in a Godly way equals blessing!

Guarding Key Attributes

2) Knowledge Without Love is NOTHING

- Watch out for "spiritual fads:"
  - Don't accidentally become a zealot for the next fad that is here today and will be replaced tomorrow.
  - Be zealous for the Word and living it out.
- Contention on the fine points of opinion about matters that are unclear in Scripture leads to division.
- God wrote the Bible just how He wanted it. He made some things abundantly clear.
  - Allow the mysteries of Scripture to create a sense of awe and wonder in your heart about God.
- Let God be God…maintain doctrinal humility.

Advice on Dealing with Theological Conundrums

"I feel a strong desire to tell you- and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me- which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs- pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them."

-- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Guarding Key Attributes

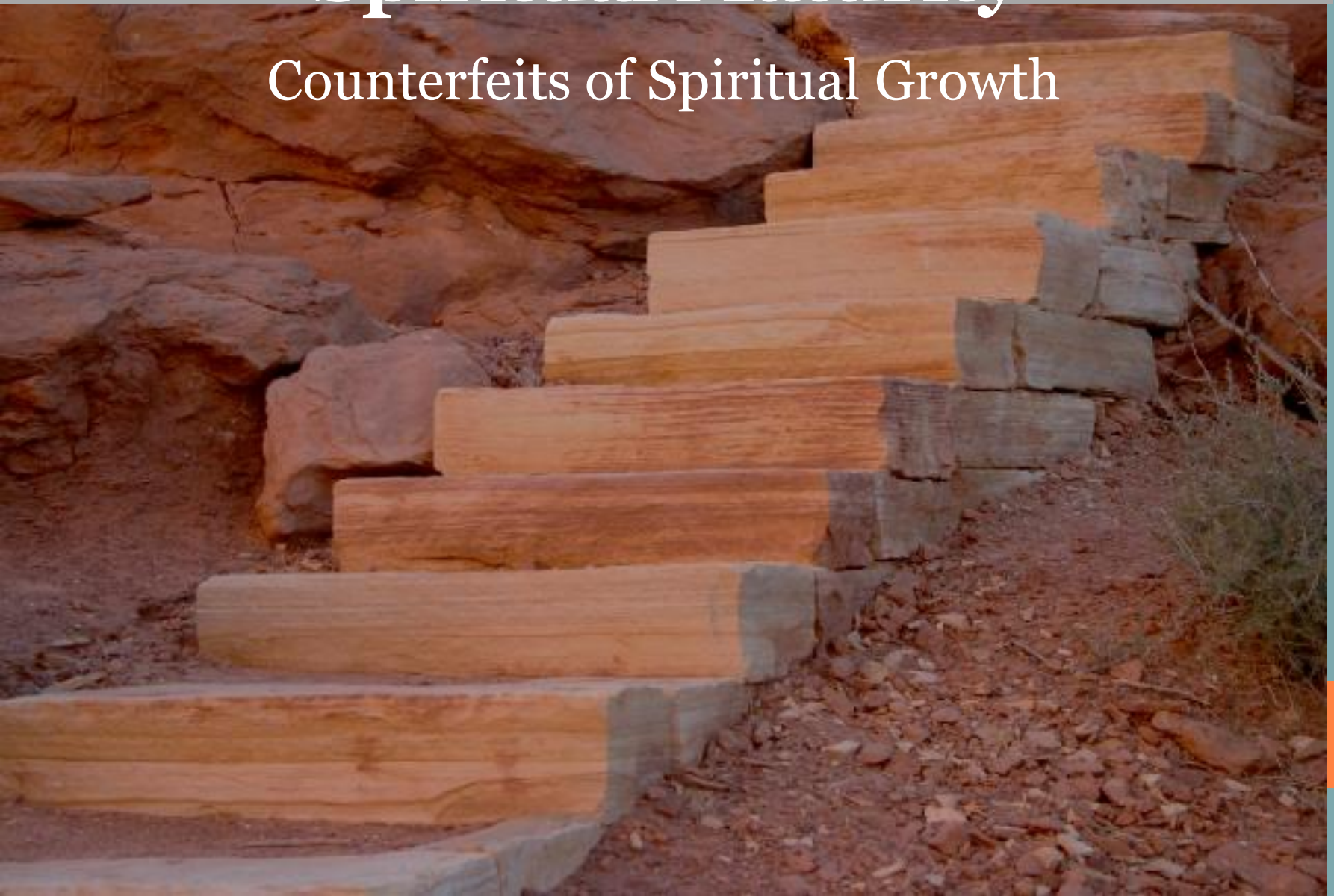
3) Humility as an Attitude and Lifestyle

Philippians 2:3, 5-7 *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:"*

- Humility should be evident in us: willing to be taught, willing to be a servant, willing to put others first, willing to own-it when we're wrong, etc.

Principles For Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity

Counterfeits of Spiritual Growth



Counterfeits of Spiritual Growth

Don't be Hijacked

- Knowledge without application.
- Putting yourself up over your spiritual authorities.
- External conformity with internal rebellion.
- Abusing one's freedom in Christ as "I can do what I want."
- Looking at others as lower than you.
  - Respect of persons.

Counterfeits of Spiritual Growth

Don't be Hijacked

- Believing you can grow spiritually while isolating yourself from the Body of Christ.
- Viewing spiritual growth as a list of boxes you need to check off each day.
- Viewing charisma as the same thing as spiritual growth (don't confuse natural talents with spiritual maturity).
- Being a good "talker" who appears more spiritual than others.
- Confusing emotions with the Holy Spirit (seek the maturity and counsel of others).

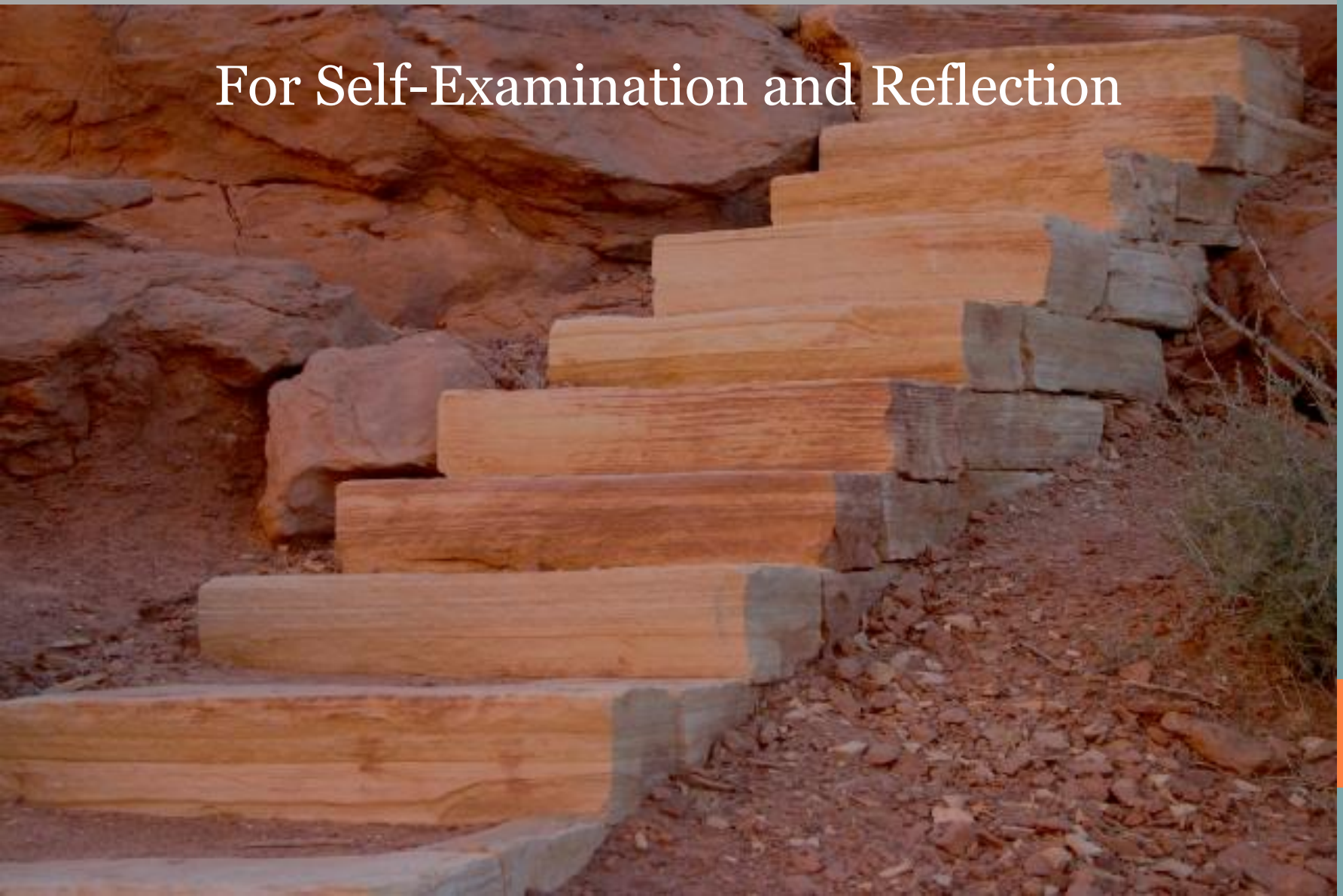
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Mark 4:30-32 –
The Mustard Seed

A Partial List Of Characteristics Of The Spiritually Mature



The Spiritually Mature…

- Know the Word yet continually seek to know it more fully.
- Have life experience in applying the Word.
- Have gone through painful or difficult life experiences and have found God to be faithful.
- Overcome their natural, human inclinations in order to submit to Christ,
- Exhibit wisdom to avoid sinful patterns toward which they are inclined.
- Display genuine authenticity in their relationships no matter who they are around.

The Spiritually Mature…

- Maintain diligence and persistence in prayer through the ups and downs of life.
- Don’t have the focus of their lives on themselves.
- Believe Scripture memory is an essential Christian discipline that is neither optional nor a burden.
- Are quite aware they are imperfect and in need of grace, yet they live exemplary lives.
- Demonstrate an abundance of the Fruit of Spirit in their lives.
- Love people and love focusing on serving others.
- Develop habits and routines that are enviable.

The Spiritually Mature…

- Seek to mentor or build-into the lives of others.
- Are aware of their weaknesses and seek to correct them.
- View being at Church services as important (1) to their personal walk with Christ and (2) to their role as being part of the Body of Christ.
- Are less worried about what they "get out of" church (or any activity for that matter) than what they have to offer to God through worship, Godly-living, and service to others.
- Are active, engaged listeners in church.
- Spend time preparing their hearts to worship.

The Spiritually Mature…

- Look at all people within the congregation as being part of the Body of Christ and not just the people they are similar to or get along with easily.
- Are willing to talk to, sit with, and spend time with people who aren't their close friends.
- Actively seek-out people to encourage, support, or edify.
- See their walk with Christ as a process of ongoing growth with consistent maintenance (instead of seeing their spiritual walk as “set-it-and-forget-it”).
- Know how to rest in the Lord; especially during times of trial.

The Spiritually Mature…

- Let God Be God.
- Take their thoughts captive and bring them to the obedience of Christ.
- Don't tolerate gossip, negativity, and criticism in themselves or others; can separate constructive feedback from unhealthy criticism.
- Are aware their motives are clearly seen by the Lord and seek the Holy Spirit's help to continually purify their hearts.
- Manage their time and priorities and have little tolerance for things that waste time.

The Spiritually Mature…

- Know their spiritual gifts and talents and are actively engaged in using them.
- Are willing to receive correction from others.
- Love others enough to exhort, correct, or admonish others after they have done their own self-examination first.
- Are accountable to authority regardless of position in life.
- Reach out to and engage unbelievers.