



Church Culture

Pathway to Spiritual Maturity

Cultures Are Built Through a Pathway to Spiritual Maturity

Who's your favorite artist? musician? actor or actress? Do your tastes trend to modern art, family films, or classical music? We all have a favorite artist or musician. We're attracted to the distinctive way that this person or group sounds or performs. In fact, the way of this individual was probably what drew our interest in the first place. If we're really fans, we can pick out the artist's work or the sound of his or her music from a distance. There's a distinctive way about them that we can't forget.

We may not be artists or musicians, but we all have a unique way about who we are. This way reflects the influences of family, life circumstances, personality, and a host of other factors. As Christians, we are people of the "way," the way of Jesus (John 14:6). In fact, the early church was called the "Way" (Acts 9:2), marking people who followed the counter-cultural way of Christ. The Apostle Peter describes us as a "peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9, KJV), people who are called by God to be different from the surrounding culture. On-going transformation to Christ-likeness should be the distinctive way of Jesus' disciple.

The change that Jesus wants to work in our lives is more than new information, adopting a new vocabulary, or practicing certain prescribed behaviors. In the New Testament, the word "transform" comes from the Greek word *metamorphoo*, from which we get our word "morph" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The picture in nature is a caterpillar changing (morphing) into a butterfly. Another New Testament word is "formed," meaning a change of life where we are being conformed or shaped to be like Christ (Galatians 4:19). The New Testament pictures a process of the Lord shaping our lives into something different than what they once were. This is all a part of our becoming "mature" and "no longer like children" (Ephesians 4:13-14). Building a discipleship pathway practically moves people to maturity. When we build disciplemaking cultures, we create pathways for disciples to grow.

Building a pathway toward maturity is different from "arriving" at some type of spiritual perfection. The Lord places us in an interesting paradox. On the one hand, we're called to be mature, but like the Apostle Paul, we know that we "have not already obtained this or am already perfect" (Philippians 3:12). Maturity can be compared to the growth of a tree. We can recognize a "mature" tree, but even mature trees keep growing. New layers of bark, branches, and roots are added each year. Maturity does not mean perfection or the cessation of growth.

In this Bible study, you will explore what this journey of transformation looks like. As you understand God's plan for maturity, it will shape the spiritual pathway of your church—that practical, simple, and intentional plan to move new believers to mature disciples. **Pause and pray.** Ask God to give you fresh insights into His pathway for growth. Ask Him to look into your life and heart to examine and reveal new areas of growth for you.

Part One: The Goal of Transformation

From the following passages, make some observations about God's goal of transformation.

Passage	God's goals for transformation
<p>Romans 12:1-2 – ¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.</p> <p>Galatians 4:19 –¹⁹ . . . my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.</p> <p>2 Corinthians 3:18 – ¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.</p> <p>Ephesians 2:10 – ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.</p> <p>Philippians 3:21 – ²¹ . . .who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 1:1-2, 6-10 – ¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, . . . ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.</p>	

1. What observations have you made about God's goal of transformation?

2. What are some biblical signs that one's life is being transformed?

3. What "religious" activities can we sometimes substitute for life transformation?

4. How would you describe your commitment to allowing God to transform your life?

Part Two: The Process of Transformation: spiritual child to parent analogy

Spiritual truth is often rooted in practical analogies. From the following verses, describe how the Lord pictures the growth process.

Passage	Picturing the growth process
<p>1 Corinthians 3:1-4 –¹But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?</p> <p>1 Corinthians 4:15-16 – ¹⁵ For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ¹⁶ I urge you, then, be imitators of me.</p> <p>1 Corinthians 14:20 –²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.</p>	

Passage	Picturing the growth process
<p>Ephesians 4:13-14 –¹³ . . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.</p> <p>Hebrews 5:11-14 –¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.</p> <p>1 Peter 2:2-3 – ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.</p>	

1. What patterns emerge about the process of spiritual growth?

2. Consider these three stages of physical and emotional growth. Add some additional characteristics to the examples given.

Child	Young adult	Parent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>dependent on others</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>establishing his or her career</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>committed to care for others</i>

3. Now think of this in terms of spiritual maturity. What are some characteristics of a child in Christ, a young adult, and a spiritual parent?

Child	Young adult	Parent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>needs personal help</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>able to feed self spiritually</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>helping others grow</i>

4. Where would you place yourself on the continuum from spiritual child to mature adult or spiritual parent?

5. What is needed to move to the next level of growth?

Part Three: The Essential Conditions for Spiritual Growth

Creating a culture for spiritual growth is like predicting the weather. For rain or snow to happen, certain conditions must be present. There's a greater probability for snow or rain when certain conditions are met, but there isn't a 100% guarantee. So it is with spiritual growth. The Bible describes that certain conditions should be present for growth, but they are not guarantees. What are those conditions? The following verses provide some of the answers.

Passage	Conditions
<p>Proverbs 27:17 – ¹⁷ Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.</p> <p>John 14:21 – ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."</p> <p>John 17:17 – ⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.</p>	

Passage	Conditions
<p>2 Corinthians 12:9-10 – ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.</p> <p>Galatians 5:16 – ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.</p> <p>Ephesians 4:15-16 – ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 – ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.</p> <p>2 Timothy 3:16-17 – ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.</p> <p>James 1:12 – ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.</p>	

1. Summarize the key conditions for growth you discovered from these verses.

2. Underline the two-three that have been most helpful in your life.

3. Identify at least six key conditions for growth. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, rate the quality of this condition in your church.

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Rating: _____

Rating: _____

Rating: _____

Rating: _____

Rating: _____

Rating: _____

4. What strengths are present in your church?

5. Which conditions need to be strengthened?

6. How can an understanding of God's process of growth help you on your path to maturity?

7. How can an understanding of God's process of growth help your Church develop a discipleship pathway?

The Navigator Church Ministries offers a practical workshop on how to design and implement a spiritual pathway within a church. Contact navigatorchurchministries.org for additional information.