



**BUT I
DON'T WANNA
GROW UP**

WHAT DO YOU MEAN I'VE GOTTA BE MATURE?

WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT BECOMING MATURE?

THE BIBLE DOES

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 17:1

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be **perfect**."*

The Hebrew word which is translated here as 'perfect', means to be – 'whole, complete or come to the full.' In other words completely mature, with the ability to walk uprightly before God.

Proverbs 15:14

*The heart of **him who has understanding** seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.*

Proverbs 29:11

*A fool vents all his feelings, but a **wise man** holds them back.*

The person referred to in these two scriptures as both 'understanding' and 'wise' is one of intelligence, discernment and skill. Again, this is someone who is mature in his thinking and actions.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1 Corinthians 14:20

*Brethren, **do not be children** in understanding; however, in malice be babes, **but in understanding be mature**.*

Matthew 5:48

*Therefore you shall be **perfect**, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

The Greek word translated here as 'perfect' means to be 'complete or full of age' (i.e. Mature)

Ephesians 4:12-15

¹³ *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **perfect** man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should **no longer be children**, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may **grow up** in all things into Him who is the head — Christ —*

2 Peter 3:18

*but **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*

The Greek word translated here 'grow' means to 'increase, enlarge, grow-up' (i.e. to become mature)

2 Thessalonians 1:3

*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith **grows** exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all **abounds** toward each other,*

Philippians 1:9

*And this I pray, that your love may **abound still more and more** in knowledge and all discernment*

1 Corinthians 13:11

*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but **when I became a man**, I put away childish things.*

1 Peter 2:2

*as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, **that you may grow** thereby,*

Hebrews 5:13-6:1

¹³ *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, **for he is a babe**. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of **full age**, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

^{6:1} *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to **perfection**, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*

CHILDREN VERSUS ADULTS

You only need to look at the difference between adults and children to see that there is some sort of growth process involved in being human. When a scrawny, listless, dull-eyed baby is brought to a physician, he soon announces "Failure to thrive". Why? Because we are expected to 'grow' both physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally to be classed as 'normal'. We all do it in different ways and at different rates, but ultimately we all grow to become adults.

The transition from childhood to adulthood entails various stages of growth. While a teenager would be said to be more mature than a toddler (which is debatable); a man in his 30's would be even more mature than the teenager (that is also debatable).

Ok, so despite our questionable analogies of the fleshly growth, we as Christians should be growing 'normally' in the spirit. Although 'normal' in our society is whatever you want it to be; 'normal' in the spiritual sense is not. The Bible is quite clear on the comparisons between the 'infant' and 'mature' Christian; also known as 'carnal' and 'spiritual' respectively.

Some of the traits that I would like to look when comparing the baby to the adult, both physically and spiritually are:

- ✱ FEEDING
- ✱ CLEANLINESS
- ✱ ABILITIES
- ✱ PROTECTION
- ✱ BEHAVIOUR
- ✱ RELATIONSHIPS

The traits we discuss as belonging to babies are not "bad" behaviour – just "normal" for babies. However, what is normal for a baby is NOT normal behaviour for an adult!

We will look into these traits further on in the study.

IMMATURE VERSUS MATURE

MATURITY

- ✱ fully developed and ready to be eaten or used
- ✱ having reached full natural growth or development
- ✱ become due for repayment
- ✱ to gain experience or wisdom with age

IMMATURITY

- ✱ not fully formed or developed, not ripe
- ✱ childish in behavior
- ✱ imperfection - a flaw or blemish, which may be on the outer surface or the interior

I think the best analogy to use here is the one of a ripening fruit: As a piece of fruit grows it changes; colour, shape, size etc. It is no less a piece of fruit as it grows, and it needs to go through the ripening process so that it can be useful for eating (which is its purpose). When it is ripe you will see it, feel it and smell it. Although it's not until you taste it that you really get to see how good the fruit is...looks can be deceiving!

The same applies to a growing Christian. Once they are saved they should be growing as a piece of fruit does. You will (should) see the change as they grow. Eventually they will (hopefully) arrive at a stage of ripening. This doesn't mean 'perfection' because until we meet Christ no one is perfect. But it does mean that the Christian is ready to do the work that they were designed to do. They have matured. But as mentioned with the 'fruit analogy', looks can be deceiving; a truly mature Christian should be determined by their actions, interactions and reactions.

I guess the key point here is that all things grow. You won't ever see a piece of fruit attached to a tree that never grows! Nor will you see a living creature that fails to grow, that doesn't have a defect of some sort. The same should be a natural progression for Christians. If we are nourished, (by either being attached to the branch, or fed with our mothers milk etc) then we should grow in a normal way. If we suffer with a defect in our DNA then we will inevitably be stunted in our normal growth process, and if we are cut off completely from all nourishment then we will die!

There are a couple of points that I liked from the list previous list:

1. Maturity – becoming due for repayment

This made me smile, but it is so true. As adults in society we are at the stage where we are expected to function as productive citizens and support ourselves and others as we were once supported in our youth.

In the spiritual sense, the same rings true. It is essential for the growth and strength of the Church for each Christian to become mature, so that they can function productively in supporting, reproducing, building and strengthen the body of Christ.

2. Immaturity – either hidden on the inside or visible on the outside

Although it is true both, physically and spiritually, that someone's stage of development may not be visible on the outside; someone who is fully mature in all areas would be able to identify when something on the inside isn't quite mature yet.

Take for example, someone who suffers with an underdeveloped area of their brain. They might not realise that they have a deficiency in that area because they don't even know what it's like to have that area fully functioning. The same would be if they had a friend who suffered with a similar deficiency. They both have the same deficiency so they couldn't pick it in each other. But the fully developed person would be able to pick it straight away. They would also know how to interact with someone with such a deficiency because they understand the reasons for why they are the way they are.

The same can be said spiritually. To the immature Christian, another immature Christian may look very spiritual; yet the fully developed Christian will be able to spot the immaturity. So yes, the inner immaturity may or may not be visible on the outside.

CARNAL VERSUS SPIRITUAL

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

*¹And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to **spiritual people** but as to **carnal**, as to babes in Christ. ²I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; ³for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*

CARNAL

- ✳ marked by the appetites and passions of the body
- ✳ of or relating to the body or flesh

SPIRITUAL

- ✳ concerned with or affecting the spirit or soul
- ✳ concerned with sacred matters or religion
- ✳ concern for that which is unseen and intangible, as opposed to physical
- ✳ relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; not tangible or material

The comparison between the spiritual and carnal state adds a bit of a twist to the whole concept of growth as a Christian. We not only have to mature in the way we interpret life and act in our Christian life but we also need to have a change of mindset. This shift involves the deeper aspects of faith that takes our mere 'hope' of the things to come and makes that hope experientially real to us, as humanly possible.

The spiritual Christian has his eyes fixed on what can not be seen. The carnal Christian, although holding the same hope, lives in a world of his own, literally. The spiritual Christian lives in, and for, the body of Christ, concerned very little, if at all, with how his carnal mind perceives things to be. The carnal Christian 'visits' the body once a week, and is concerned more about how the body affects him than he is about how he affects the body.

For me, that sums up the difference, however to understand what makes this true, we need to look deeper into how a Christian grows from being immature (carnal), to mature (spiritual).

HOW MATURE AM I?

In this section we are going to look at some areas that should be different when comparing a child to an adult, both physically and spiritually. As you go through each table I want you to place a mark next to each one that you think applies to you 'most' of the time.

We all have the tendency to fluctuate, especially if we aren't completely mature yet, so pick the answer that is most true of you. Don't be afraid to be honest, because if you're not honest you won't grow.

It is also important to be able to share your answers with at least one other person, so that you have someone who can assist you with your growth...and as you mature you can assist others too.

The areas that we are going to look at are:

- ✦ FEEDING
- ✦ CLEANLINESS
- ✦ ABILITIES
- ✦ PROTECTION
- ✦ BEHAVIOUR
- ✦ RELATIONSHIPS

This is not a test where you gain points for the 'right' or most 'spiritual' answer. This is simply for you to see where you are perhaps where you could grow to in certain areas of your faith.

As you go through, take the time to read the scriptures and discuss them.

A) SPOON-FEEDING IS FOR BABIES

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Spoon-fed.	Feeds himself (by hard labour).	<p>2 Timothy 2:15-16 <i>Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.</i></p>
Food prepared by OTHERS	Will dig for himself, follow up references, make notes, educate himself.	
Others make food choices for him (e.g. bible studies, tapes, books.)	Takes responsibility for his own health and well-being, and nutrition.	
Somebody else does the hard work of food cultivation and preparation. Eats only the MANNA – easily digested but does not keep; is not long-lasting food.	CORN OF THE PROMISED LAND – which needs to be planted, sown, reaped, ground, cooked etc – but which has substance and is long-lasting.	

The key question to ask here is...are you feeding yourself or being fed by others?

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FOOD?

Food is a source of nourishment; it is the vital source which all creatures must draw from to sustain life. No food=no life. As Christians, our food is the Word of God – the Bible.

WHAT IS FEEDING?

I'm sure you've all put a piece of food into your mouth! That's feeding; taking the nourishment and putting into your mouth so that it can sustain you. If you don't put it into your mouth it is useless!

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Do I read the Bible for myself?
- ✳ Do I do my own study to make sure that what I am being taught is correct?
- ✳ Is the Word of God my main source of reading or do I rely on others interpretations (such as books) to gain knowledge and understanding?

B) NO STRONG MEAT

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Has to have soft, bland food Cannot stomach strong meat	Can chew, eats tough foods Goes beyond the basics of belief	<p>John 6:60 <i>Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"</i></p> <p>Hebrews 5:13 <i>For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.</i></p>
<p>1 Corinthians 3:2 <i>I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able</i></p> <p>2 Peter 3:16 <i>as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.</i></p>		

The key question to ask here is...can I handle the whole truth of the Word of God?

MILK OR SOLID FOOD: WHATS THE DIFFERENCE?

Milk we give to babies and solid food we give to adult’s right? The same applies to a Christian. Milk for the babes in Christ and solid food for the mature.

Paul tells us what some of the ‘milk’ is in Hebrews 6:1

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Do I still struggle with my sin and/or living my faith in God?
- ✳ Am I just as convinced that God’s wrath burns against my sin as I am that His love covers it?
- ✳ Do I dig deeply when I read the Word (such as personal in-depth studies)?
- ✳ Do I challenge myself to live the principles given to me in the Word of God?
- ✳ Am I hungry for more?

C) SUGAR-COATED TEACHING

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Will not accept something that is sour or bitter, or evil tasting, even if it's good for them.	Can choose something unpleasant if necessary.	<p>Hebrews 12:7 <i>If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?</i></p>
Medicine has to be made palatable	Will take bitter medicine Can face correction, rebuke or discipline	
Everything sugar-coated - made attractive, exciting. Cannot accept rebuke or discipline.	Can swallow hard things in the Word, without choking.	
<p>2 Timothy 4:3-5 <i>³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.</i></p>		

The key question to ask here is...do I value the authenticity of my faith enough that I am willing to swallow my pride and be corrected?

OOUCH!

Don’t worry; I didn’t like that question either! But it’s a big one.

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Do I skip/ignore the bits in the Bible that are hard-to-swallow?
- ✳ Do I get offended or prideful when challenged with certain areas of my life?
- ✳ Am I open for a Christian brother or sister to bring to my attention things that are of concern in my life? Am I willing to take their advice?
- ✳ Do I blame God or others when I’m faced with challenges? Do I run to God, or away?
- ✳ Do I tune-out when the pastor starts touching on topics that I need to fix?
- ✳ Do I need ‘excitement and change’ to keep my interest at Church or in God?
- ✳ Do I interpret the Bible in a way that least offends me or do I welcome the correction that I need to stay close to God?

D) HARMFUL SUBSTANCES – KEEP THEM AWAY FROM CHILDREN!

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Will put unsuitable things into his mouth or swallow harmful things, if they are attractive and enjoyable.	Will test and try things beforehand; not fooled by the outward appearance	<p>Hebrews 5:14 <i>But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.</i></p> <p>Acts 17:11 <i>These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.</i></p>
Is not trained in discernment; cannot distinguish good and bad, right and wrong.	Has developed discrimination; is wary of things that may harm him.	
Gullible, swallows whatever he's told, does not discriminate.	Exercises discernment; does not trust people over-much.	

The key question to ask here is...am I gullible, how well do I know my stuff?

HARMFUL SUBSTANCES?

If you are given 2 bottles of liquid (without labels) and told that they are both water, would you trust the person that told you; or would you open the lids and smell the liquid before drinking it? Well a kid wouldn't even think to smell it let alone assume that you weren't right! But an adult would do both!

The same principle applies to the Christian that is presented with a teaching from the Bible and doesn't even think to challenge it or check it. Other things that are harmful come in the form of pleasurable activities that don't 'seem' to go against what Jesus would expect from us. Like watching horror movies...the Bible doesn't say that we can't, right? No, but I bet the Holy Spirit would if you ask Him!

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Do I use the fact that the Bible doesn't say 'not to' to excuse my behaviour?
- ✳ Do I believe what I'm told by others, or do I make my own Spirit guided judgements?
- ✳ Do I sense a pulling on the inside when something's not quite right?

E) BEWARE, POISON!

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Cannot survive poisonous food.	Has developed a strong stomach, which will survive indigestion of even bad food.	<p>Psalms 37:23-24 ²³ <i>The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.</i> ²⁴ <i>Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.</i></p> <p>Micah 7:8-9 <i>Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD will be a light to me...</i></p>
No defenses against disease or food poisoning – vulnerable to false teaching. Weak constitution.	Can survive false teaching without being totally overthrown.	
Has not grown in strength – the word of God produces strength to resist evil.	Has developed resistance to evil.	

The key question to ask here is...am I strong enough to get back up?

It is only human to be drawn into things that seem right and good, but soon reveal themselves to be otherwise. Even the best of us have done that at some time in our life, Christian or not!

I guess the problem is that a lot of people never recover from the damage that is done by such false elaborations of the truth. Take for example the movement that hit the Churches where people were falling down when prayed for...nearly everyone wanted some of that 'anointing'! There were some that eventually stood back and realised that the floor in front of the pulpit is not where the anointing of God is. These people recovered and moved on to discover the real anointing of God through an obedient life. Others however are caught in the notion that the anointing of God needs to 'fall' like that for Him to be experienced at all. They live a life of 'waiting' for God to 'manifest' Himself before they can experience Him.

Ask yourself this question:

- ✳ Have I had an experience (good or bad) that has hindered my growth in God because I couldn't 'move-on' from something that may have left a bad taste in my mouth? Was I strong and mature enough to get back up and get back on track?

CLEANLINESS

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Has no control over bodily functions.	Has developed control, and keeps self clean.	<p>Galatians 5:22-24 ²² <i>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,</i> ²³ <i>gentleness, self-control.</i> <i>Against such there is no law.</i> ²⁴ <i>And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.</i></p>
Has no awareness of being unclean.	Does not need to be reminded to take action when dirty.	
No desire for cleanliness	Actively seeks to be clean.	
Needs to be kept clean by others.	Disciplines himself	
<p>. 1 Corinthians 9:27 <i>But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.</i></p> <p>2 Corinthians 7:1 <i>Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God</i></p>		

The key question to ask here is...do I find it hard to let go of my sin? Do I care?

The first thing that came to my mind here is my nephew who *always* has food around his mouth. He has no idea that it's there and even if you tell him, he doesn't care, nor does he do anything about it! He is only 2, so I suppose that normal. However, my other nephew, who is 4, sometimes has the same problem but less often than the younger one. The difference is that he knows how to clean it properly; he may not care too much that it's there but when it's brought to his attention he usually cleans it off fairly well.

We are the same with sin. Some of us know it's there but don't care. Some don't even know it's there; and when it's pointed out to us we can choose to either clean it or not. Some do a good job of cleaning it out of their life but others only do a half-hearted job. As we get older (more mature) we know how to prevent the food (sin) from surrounding our mouth (life), and if it does manage to get there we are straight onto it! I even know some people who say that they're just saving some for later! That sounds immature to me.

ABILITIES

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Totally dependent. Looks for somebody to help him in everything.	Self-motivated.	Galatians 6:4 <i>But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.</i>
Has to be dressed, carried - cannot walk unaided.	Self-reliant.	Galatians 3:25 <i>But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.</i>

The key question to ask here is...could I survive it on my own?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH SUPPORTING EACH OTHER?

There is absolutely nothing wrong with supporting the body of Christ, in fact we're told to do just that! So where does the problem start?

I know some people who won't go to the weekly bible study unless their 'moral support' comes with them, and I know some people who won't read their Bible unless they are held accountable. Although, support and accountability are important, as we mature in Christ we should be able to stand as an independent life before God. I have had similar struggles in the past and the way I used to challenge myself was to ask myself this question; "If Jesus came back now and my 'support person' was to be taken away, would I keep going?" The other thing I challenged myself with was this; "If I'm doing this for them then is it going to be worth it when they are in heaven and I'm left here alone?" You see, I knew that my 'support person' was only concerned with following Jesus, and if they were taken away to heaven, the last thing that they would be thinking about was me. So the root question to be asked here is "Am I wasting my time? Will it all count in the end?" Tough questions, but they are the very challenges that kept and keep my focus in Jesus so that I too will be taken to heaven with my 'support person'.

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Do I do what I do for God or for men?
- ✳ Do I stand alone accountable before God, or is it not so much about God?
- ✳ If I was left to do this alone would I survive, or would I give up?

DEFENSE & PROTECTION

A) BABIES NEED PROTECTION

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Cannot be left alone.	Doesn't need others to watch over him continually.	Matthew 16:2-3 <i>Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.</i>
Cannot protect himself.	Avoids danger and harm by himself.	2 Timothy 4:16-18 <i>¹⁶ At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me...I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.</i>
Doesn't perceive danger. Vulnerable to abuse.	Detects and resists evil.	

The key question to ask here is...am I safe if left to my own devices?

Some will say "I'm never going to be completely alone." That may be true, but could you stand when all else have abandoned you? Is your conviction in Jesus or in men? Are you only convinced because others are? If your pastor caved in, would you too?

We need to be able to resist, and stand, in our own God given strength, not that of others. I remember when I was a teenager and I was asked to do something with my friends, but I didn't want to be involved. I used to ask my mum to say that I wasn't allowed to go because I didn't have the confidence to stand on my own to feet and practice my right of freedom of choice. I needed someone to protect me! I often think where I would have ended up if my mum didn't step in and take charge on my behalf.

When we are young Christians it is common to be a little shaky in the area of peer-pressure. But as we get stronger and more convinced of our Saviour we are more confident and capable of protecting ourselves. You may be able to detect the 'evil' but can you 'resist' it on your own or do you still need someone to step in for you?

B) CHILDREN ARE EASILY ABUSED.

CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i>	SCRIPTURES
Helpless; vulnerable.	Has strengths and resources that protect him.	<p>Proverbs 27:12 <i>A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; The simple pass on and are punished.</i></p> <p>1 Corinthians 10:12 <i>Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.</i></p>
Gullible, easily duped.	Wary. Watches for danger.	
Trusting; too eager to allow others to lead them.	Is not too trustful of others, not easily led.	

The key question to ask here is...do I protect myself with a watchful eye?

Children are innocent and weak and easily fall prey to someone who wants to demonstrate their authority and dominion. They don't know how to protect themselves and they naturally trust those who care for them. When they are young they really aren't sure whether what they are experiencing is ok or not. It's often not until they are old enough and experienced enough that they realise what is right and wrong.

As Christians it is also easy to trust those that we are familiar with, and if we are the weaker of the two then it is normal to take a back seat and let the more dominating one take the lead. If we don't continue to grow in our personal relationship with Jesus through our own study and prayer life, we will never know if the person we are following is right or wrong. Not only does this happen doctrinally but also functionally within the Church body.

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Am I allowing myself to be lead, or dominated by a more 'educated' Christian?
- ✳ Is my faith, my own or someone else's?
- ✳ Do I jump at everyone's suggestions or requests or do I use my discernment to decide which is Spirit led?

BEHAVIOUR

A) SELFISHNESS IS CHILDISH

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Focussed on SELF.	Thinks of others.	<p>Romans 15:1-2</p> <p>¹We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.</p> <p>² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.</p>
Seeking to satisfy his needs and desires.	Can deny himself.	
Does not register the presence or importance of others.	Notifies the needs of others and seeks to supply them.	
Uses people to get what he needs.	Respects others, will not use them.	
<p>Romans 12:10</p> <p><i>Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another</i></p> <p>Philippians 2:3-4</p> <p>³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.</p>		

The key question to ask here is...am I more or less important than others?

It is easy for us as humans to want comfort and support during times of struggles. It is even more normal for us to want others to know when we are struggling. Why is that? I think it's because we want to think that our life is significant to others, and that is justified when others take an interest in the events of our life.

Most people know how to support others and accept support when needed, but some simply don't know how to stop thinking about themselves. I don't mean that offensively, because I believe that some people do have serious issues that haunt them daily that they struggle to get their head out of. That can make it hard to think about others. But I know that a dilemma like that can be overcome, slowly, with practice. I know, personally, that it can be frustrating when you want to help others and be other-focused but you can't seem to clear your head long enough!

B) LOOK AT ME!

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Perception of life is that he's the centre of the universe; others revolve around him.	Self-sustaining.	<p>Galatians 1:10</p> <p><i>For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.</i></p> <p>1 Thessalonians 2:4-6</p> <p>⁴ ...even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness — God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from men...</p>
Expects at all times to be centre of attention.	Does not need approval to function.	
Longs for attention, approval and acceptance; showing off. Sulking when ignored.	Defers to other people. Seeks God's will rather than man's approval. Humble, not self-exalting.	

Luke 16:15

"You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

John 5:44

How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?

Ephesians 6:6-7

⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men

The key question to ask here is...where does my significance lie?

Ask yourself some questions:

- ✳ Am I living my life for man or for God?
- ✳ Do I need approval from those whom I find significant?
- ✳ What do I offer to others? Do I care?

C) FLESH RULES!

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Lives on emotional energy; is emotion-driven Ruled by the flesh.	Ruled by God's will and nature	Romans 8:5 <i>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.</i>
Decides according to what he feels and thinks and needs.	Puts his own needs to one side.	James 4:1 <i>Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?</i>
Cannot endure hardship.	Willing to go without for the sake of God, and for others.	Galatians 5:24 <i>And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.</i>

The key question to ask here is...can I deny myself the very thing it's screaming for?

My sister has a 3 month old baby. What I noticed is that baby cries when he's hungry and when he has a smelly nappy. Once baby has recognised the uncomfortable state of hunger or a wet bottom, he cries. Although it is normal for baby to do that, it is impossible to get baby to pipe-down while the milk heats up, or while he feels a cool breeze on his backside! When my other nephews say "Mum I'm hungry" she tells them that they have to wait until dinner is ready. Doesn't sound fair does it? The fact is that baby doesn't know how to deny his hunger, but the older ones have learnt through parental discipline how that is done...must to their disgust! The older ones know that mummy is busy making dinner and they just have to wait; and they have learnt not to whinge about it or there won't be any desert! What they have learnt is how to discipline themselves to wait, and be considerate of mummy who is slaving away in the kitchen. What would happen if they never learnt to deny themselves the luxury of eating on demand? How would that affect their other desires in life? How does this carry over to our Christian life? How do we discipline ourselves and why do it?

D) DEALING WITH CRITICISM

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Easily offended.	Can be corrected, and even be thankful for it.	<p>Proverbs 9:8 <i>Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.</i></p> <p>1 Corinthians 4:12-13 ¹² <i>...being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; ¹³ being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.</i></p>
Easily harmed by criticism.	Doesn't take every word as a rejection.	
Have to be careful to give praise, build them up.	Can function without praise.	

The key question to ask here is...are you smart enough to know what's good for you?

No one likes correction, even the most humble of us. But the wise ones will learn how to accept it, not only as a part of life, but also as a necessity to growth.

I have an example of how constructive criticism (or help) can be misinterpreted. Let's say you are a female and you are wearing a skirt; but not just any skirt, your favourite skirt, and you wear it because you think your butt looks cute in it! You're on your way to Bible Study where you hope to see the new good looking guy from Church. As you get out of the car your friend (who was driving with you) notices that your skirt is caught up in you underpants. Being the good friend that she is, she tells you. You have two choices right here; 1) pull your skirt down and thank your friend for telling you, 2) think that you friend is just jealous of your favourite skirt and cute butt and just ignore her as you prance inside. Big call...the consequences could be catastrophic!!

It may sound like a silly scenario, but try to think of a time when you have been offered criticism and failed to take the advice only to realise later that you should have. Or perhaps you were the kind friend who offered advice; how did they respond to you?

E) HAVING TO ENDURE

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Has to be kept amused. Needs stimulation and entertainment. Needs innovation – the "new thing".	Works long and hard for no immediate reward.	<p>James 5:10 <i>My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure.</i></p> <p>Luke 8:15 <i>But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.</i></p>
No staying power or endurance.	Patient, long-suffering. Can persevere, endure hardship.	
<p>Revelation 2:2-3 ² "I know your works, your labor, your patience...³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.</p> <p>Hebrews 6:12; Hebrews 12:1; Hebrews 10:36; 2 Timothy 2:3</p>		

The key question here is...do I expect a free lunch?

Dogs love treats! When my dog was a puppy I would bribe her with doggy-treats to teach her how to do tricks. My dog would do tricks all day if I gave her a treat each time. One day as she was getting older started to instruct her to do tricks, without any treats. She started off ok, looking to me for a treat after each performance. But eventually she realised that no treat was being handed out, and she started to get a little dejected. Eventually I pulled out a treat and that kept her going until the next treat presented itself. What if I didn't give her anymore treats? Was she doing the tricks for the treats or just because she loved me and delighted in obeying me? Maybe she liked to see the smile on my face?

How does this apply to our Spiritual lives? Are we enduring hardship without immediate reward? What is our motivation? If we knew our only reward would be in heaven would we persevere?

RELATIONSHIPS

A) BEING AWARE OF OTHERS

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Looks inward, knows only self.	Looks outward; aware of others.	<p>Romans 12:15 <i>Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.</i></p> <p>1 Corinthians 9:22 <i>to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.</i></p> <p>1 Corinthians 12:26 <i>And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.</i></p>
Not aware of others, only in relation to self.	Can connect with others, relate to them.	
No empathy for others.	Good listeners.	
Cannot feel for others or enter into their predicament.	Genuinely aware of others' feelings or sufferings.	
No awareness of the consequences of their actions.	Can foresee the consequences of inappropriate actions and avoids them	

The key question to ask here is...how well do I know the feelings others?

I had a conversation with a lady who I had met for the first time. She is in her 60's and lives alone. As you can imagine she had a lot to say! But that was ok, because for me the purpose of the conversation was to listen and try to relate to this lady. The conversation lasted for about 2½ hours and I think she paused to ask me a question about 3 times, of which I was only given approximately 5 seconds to answer before she stepped back in again. It would be easy to become frustrated feeling like I didn't get a chance to tell her anything about ME! But to my surprise, I felt more content listening to her. I kinda felt like I was being useful. At the end of the conversation I smiled to myself and thought "I made a difference to that lady, and without saying a word to her she made a difference to me."

What would it take for us to listen to others more? How would we feel about that?

B) LET ME CHECK WITH MY ELDER FIRST...

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Exaggerated view of others; sees others as all-knowing, totally able, godlike.	Balanced view of others.	Galatians 6:3 <i>³For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.</i>
Submits to the rule of men.	Knows that others are as fallible as he.	James 3:2 <i>For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.</i>
Hero-worship of leaders. Cannot believe his mentor is fallible or wrong.	Can cope if people fall, make mistakes, do wrong Does not require others to be perfect. Does not put people on pedestal.	Luke 17:3 <i>Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.</i>

The key question to ask here is...who do I worship?

I know what it's like to love and respect someone so much that they become the focus of your affection. Bringing Jesus back into the middle can be a hard task since He isn't tangible.

Here's a scenario to highlight some potential hazards when we give 'men' our worship. Let's say you're a female (again) and you look up to the pastor of your Church to the point that you hang on his every word. He is a strong man of God and you admire that in him. But let's say that he was exposed for entering into an adulterous relationship. Do you esteem this man so much that you would be willing to ignore this moral fall and continue to place him as the role model in your life? Could you possibly allow yourself to think that he could be doing something wrong? It doesn't sound like a nice scenario but because it's raw it shows up the potential for 'hero-worshipping'. It is one of the easiest things to do; especially if the person you admire doesn't assist you to refocus your gaze on Jesus first.

C) MANIPULATION

CHILD (Natural & Spiritual)	ADULT (Natural & Spiritual)	SCRIPTURES
Seeks to control people.	Will walk in his own counsel, and allow others to make their own choices also.	1 Peter 5:2 <i>Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly</i>
Adept at manipulation.	Refuses to bend people to his will.	2 Corinthians 12:17-18 <i>¹⁷Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?</i>
Uses guile, trickery or cunning to force people to do his bidding.	Not afraid of an alternative viewpoint. Will respect people's decision to be wrong or to do the wrong thing.	Jude 16 <i>These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.</i>

The key question to ask here is...am I a control freak?

I can see how it would be easy for a nice Christian person to be taken advantage of, or manipulated, because of their desire to put others first and serve the body. But then there is also the opportunity for an individual who has the favour of another individual to try to falsely manipulate a situation against another brother/sister because of their power to influence.

Some people are so good at subtly maneuvering a person from one stand point to another without them even knowing it. But the mature Christian has a deeper understanding and experience with interpersonal relationships and knows the subtle influences when they present themselves.

HOW DO I GROW?

YOU NEED A DESIRE

WE WILL NEVER GROW UNLESS WE WANT TO

1 Peter 2:2

as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby

FINDING THE DESIRE

Nearly ever kid wants to grow up; they say "When I grow up I want to be just like Daddy/Mummy/Batman..." And I don't know too many teenagers that can't wait till they grow up so that they can drive!

Likewise, in spiritual matters, Christians must WANT to grow.

I was looking at my nephew today as he was crying, and I said to him "Don't worry mate its only going to get worse!" Sounds like a pretty melancholic thing to say, but it's true. How many Christians do we have in our Churches that simply don't want to grow-up? It's all too hard, and the responsibility is too heavy. It's a free ride when you're young; you don't have to teach, rebuke or work!

A lack of desire to grow is a sure sign of a struggling relationship with Jesus. Our aim is to be more Christ-like and we can't do that without growing into His shoes!

If we do not continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus and our brethren then we can not fulfill the purpose for becoming children of God. That would leave a big question over our salvation.

If there is any good reason for growth, securing my relationship with Jesus is enough motivation for me!

YOU NEED FOOD

We feed on the Word in order to grow.

2 Peter 3:18

but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Matthew 4:4

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

To grow into the image of Christ we need to learn what that looks like. Unlike our physical hunger, it may take some discipline to motivate yourself to read His Word. You see, the Bible is more than just words on a page, its alive; but it only comes to life when the Spirit reveals the hidden truths. Thus, it is impossible to foster a desire for the Word of God if it doesn't provide living and fulfilling sustenance.

The Holy Spirit needs to be in the equation. He needs to be invited into the equation. It will take perseverance but when the Spirit sees the sincere desire of your heart He can't help but reveal Himself to you.

YOU NEED HYGIENE

We draw near to God, resist the devil, and develop a hatred of sin; plus we understand the need for self-discipline

There is nothing more repulsive than an unshaven, un-showered, smelly man wearing stale urine stained clothes! But even a clean man with some bad body odour can be bad enough.

It's the same for God. Sin is sin. You might be the unshaven, un-showered man or the clean man with bad body odour; but both present enough poor hygiene to keep people away.

God isn't concerned with your physical hygiene, but He has a bit of OCD when it comes to your Spiritual hygiene. He can't stand sin...not only does He hate it but His very holiness prevents Him from coming anywhere near it!

We have the beautiful gift of Jesus who cleanses us from our sin so that God can come near to us; but should we continue to sin so that His grace may abound? I'll let you answer that.

We need to get clean and stay clean. Develop a bit of OCD toward your sin. Paul has told us that repentance from sin is one of the foundational principles of Christianity. If you can't master that one then you can't move on!

YOU NEED TO LEARN

We stop depending on others, or our own efforts, and lean on the Lord

Breaking your dependence on others is a hard and painful task. We all know that a toddlers' first day a pre-school brings many tears and fears, but we also know that they will only get more confident if we persevere in the activity. The toddler learns that the parents will always come back to get them so they begin to rest and enjoy the time with their new found friends.

Our dependence on other Christians requires us to take a similar action plan. Controlled absence. It is imperative that we become independent even if we start off a little shaky.

BE WILLING TO BE MADE WEAK

2 Corinthians 12:9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

It is only human of us to do our best to avoid any noticeable weakness. The problem that we don't see when we find our strength and confidence in others is that we don't leave any 'need' for the strength of the Holy Spirit. It takes a conscious and stubborn desire for the strength of the Lord to enable a man to release his grip on worldly confidence in the anticipation for the Lord to be his strength. You can't have both.

YOU NEED TO PROTECT YOURSELF

We develop spiritual discernment

Galatians 3:25

But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Not only do we need to stop relying on others to live our spiritual life for us we also need to learn how to do it for ourselves. This can only be achieved through practice and will only prove effective in conjunction with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand that although the Bible is our source of nourishment we have also been given the Holy Spirit who quickens our conscience so that we can discern between right and wrong, good and bad, danger and safety.

The Bible and the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. When you feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit you will know if it is in keeping with the Word of God when you know the Word and understand it.

YOU NEED DISCIPLINE

We deny ourselves (the self-life) and encourage the nature of God within

Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

LEAD BY THE SPIRIT

Probably the hardest thing to adjust to, when first becoming a Christian, is not doing what you used to do. Old habits die hard they say!

It is easy to feel very unspiritual when you are fighting the desire to do something sinful. But we have been assured that through Christ we have (past tense) put the flesh to death! Then why do I still feel it? I call those phantom pains...the limb isn't there anymore but your body feels like it is!

I won't kid you and say that it's easy, but when you can see that your passions and desires are simply old patterns they are easier to detach from than if you were convinced that you still had that old nature alive inside. They don't call it "putting the flesh to death" for nothing. It frigging hurts!!!

YOU NEED TO LEARN SOME MANNERS

We practice putting others first

1 Corinthians 13:11

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Kids aren't naturally born with manners, they have to be taught. The most underlying concept in manners is consideration and awareness of others. Yes, we have to be taught that!

A little less of us and a little more of others, is the key. It's natural for kids not to share, to push past someone else to get somewhere first, to take the last piece of cake without offering to someone else; that's normal for kids. Me, me ,me. But all heads would turn if we were to see an adult behave like that...although I hear the Boxing Day sale at the Myer Centre is a good place to go to witness such behaviour.

Denial of self. Yes it's painful and it does take some concentrated effort, but like all habits, if you do it long enough you will find, in the end that you are doing it without even thinking.

James 4:1-3

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

FORSAKE YOUR OWN WAYS

Allowing God to have His way

MAKING ROOM FOR GROWTH

John 15:1-2

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

This verse makes “pruning” sound so nice, but once you’ve been pruned you have a totally different perspective.

Part of the whole growing process is to make room for continued growing. I liken it to a Bonsai tree; they have to be carefully trimmed to ensure that they grow the desired shape and size. If a Bonsai is not pruned it will not be the attractive and intriguing plant that it is supposed to be.

In the case of a Bonsai, the plant doesn’t have to do anything; all the work is done by the owner. Spiritually it is a little different. Just recently I had to make a deliberate choice to lie something down before Jesus so that He could make me into the person that He wanted me to be. If I hadn’t laid it down at that point, I expect He would have been left no choice but to remove it from me. Eventually, we *will* be pruned, how long and how painful that is, is often up to us. I also believe that the method of pruning can also change according to how willing we are to be pruned.

If I hadn’t laid that thing down when I did, it would have been taken from me, and the outcome would have been very, very messy. But my eventual willingness to let go allow God to minister His grace to me and allow me to keep that thing and learn how to put it in its proper place in my life. Don’t get me wrong, the pruning has only just begun, but every step in the right direction is a smart one!!