

Maturity In The Faith

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, OE of the post-spring-forward pain. Welcome to City Grace. My name is Elliot.

So good to be with you this morning. So if you're listening here online, it's just a pleasure to be with you. So we're going to continue in our series from Philippians today. And last week, Jesse did just such a great job walking us through this really rich passage that starts out Philippians 3 where we see that the good news about what God has done for us is complete in Jesus.

And that compared to Jesus, everything we've done or could take pride in really looks more like a loss than a win. And as we kind of make the turn into the home stretch of this book, the next section we're going to look at today really centers around this one theme, which is what does it look like to be mature in your faith?

Like how would someone who is considered a mature follower of Jesus think? How would they act? And you know, throughout this series, we've been doing a lot of discussion about growing in discipleship and what that would look like.

And of course, we know that while we're here on earth, you've never really arrived, right? Like you're never going to be perfect. But I think it is a good question to ask, like what would mature look like?

[1 : 20] Like what would a seasoned veteran of the faith look like? You know, for a lot of things in life, that's kind of easy to pick out because there's very physical and visible markers of it, right?

So like if you think about something like a fruit, right? Like you know very quickly there are markers of when it is ripe and ready to eat and when it's not. Like if you approach a banana and it is very, very green, it is not time.

And you will know it as soon as you eat it, right? If you grab an avocado and it is hard as a rock, not time, right? It's not ready to go. There's also things like if you think about like a financial product, like a CD or a bond or something, right?

There's this very clear mathematical and time metric of how long it takes to mature. And if you try to access it before it's mature, you know it because you pay a penalty for it, right?

But with people, it's not so easy. It's not so easy to see externally because there's a lot of markers that could be really deceptive, right?

[2 : 22] So one of the deceptive markers is you're not mature just because you say you are, right? I mean maybe that's self-evident, but it's kind of that thing where like if somebody's like, yeah, I think I'm a pretty incredibly humble person.

I'm really, really humble. I'm the most humble person you will ever, you know. Like just because someone says they're mature in something doesn't mean it's so.

It's possible to be a very loud green banana, right? Another one is age. Like, you know, unfortunately gray hair isn't exactly a proxy for maturity, right?

Like a longer life certainly offers you ample opportunity to grow and mature. And oftentimes that's what happens, which is why the Bible honors age in that way.

But it's not a guarantee. You are not guaranteed to become more mature as you age. It is quite possible to be just a very old green banana, right?

[3 : 20] Some might think, well, okay, then it is, is it like my knowledge of the Bible, right? You know, there's this kind of idea of like I always need to be going deeper and learning more and certainly we should, that's part of the journey.

But just because you know a lot of Bible, just because you know a lot of stuff that goes into it doesn't mean it's been applied. I mean, all throughout scripture, you see this motif of like Pharisees and religious leaders who know more than anyone and miss the most simple things of what God is doing around them.

It is indeed possible to be a very smart, very biblically savvy green banana. Is it your disposition? Well, to some measure, right?

Like you would think there are some outer markers, but sometimes we might think mature just looks like someone who's kind of pleasant to be around, like they're very nice. And of course, I would say as you are maturing, you're not going to be an awful person.

People be around, but just because someone's nice doesn't necessarily mean they've matured. Like there's a way to be nice in which you never conflict, in which you are unable to stand up for anything that is right, in which you run from any conflict and never wade into a hard place.

[4 : 36] It's possible to be a very agreeable green banana. Maybe it's if I just live a disciplined and principled life. Well, again, Paul just told us in the previous section, that ain't it.

He said, I've got all the bona fides you could ever want to have, and that didn't make me mature in the faith. There's this actually a similar story in Mark 10 where this rich young ruler comes to Jesus and there's this discourse about how do I inherit eternal life?

And they kind of go through the things and he's like, I've kept all of these things in the law. Like he has lived a very impressive moral life. And Jesus says to him, okay, so one thing you lack, sell everything you've got, give it to the poor, follow me.

Jesus, one question, strips away the illusion that he's actually mature. It's possible to be a very moral green banana.

So if it's not those things, if we can't tell externally, what is it? And that's really what Paul's going to do today. He's going to tell us. And before we look at it, spoiler alert, the first thing he's going to say is those who are mature will be the ones who have taken to heart what he has just said in the previous passage.

[5 : 55] Like all that stuff last week about Jesus plus nothing is everything. Jesus is better than all my best. I want to seek a righteousness, not of my own, but that comes through faith than Jesus.

That is the first thing. Okay. And then he's going to show us a little bit more too. So let's pick up in Philippians chapter three, verse 14 or 15 crossing into chapter four.

It says, let those of us who are mature think this way, speaking of the passage he's just given. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that to you also.

Only let us hold true to what we have already attained. Brothers, join me in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly. And their glory is in their shame with their mindset on earthly things.

[6 : 58] But our citizenship is in heaven. And from it, we await a savior, the Lord Jesus, 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.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and I long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Yes, I ask you also, true companion, to help these women who have labored by my side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and to the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

This is God's word to us. So Paul wants us to know what the mature think and act like. And one of the clear markers from these verses is maturity looks like both growth and patience in your faith.

Paul is actually bold enough to say, what I have just written to you is what a mature faith looks like. And he is confident in that. Now, at first blush, you might think that's actually pretty arrogant.

[8 : 10] And I would say there is like an arrogant way to apply that. But what's more interesting to me than his confidence in what he said is that he's also confident that if he's right, God will lead you there in his good time.

You know what that means? It means that Paul doesn't feel this anxiousness to try to bully people into getting there. Like Paul concedes that there may be some things that others aren't ready to accept or that they're still working their way through.

And he feels like he can entrust that to God. He doesn't have this high anxiousness that everyone doesn't agree with him right now. It's like he's basically saying, I know that mature believers will have taken hold of this.

But if you aren't there yet, I'm confident that God will be gracious to you in the same way he was gracious to me and he will bring you there as well. I think a very simple application of that for us could be when you're dealing with other people, when you're dealing with your brothers and sisters in the faith, just make sure you give God time to work when you're doing that.

Like we all want to be growing and we all want to be maturing, but be mindful of the pace that God is working at in somebody's life. It's kind of back to our food analogy, right?

[9 : 32] Like there are certain things in food preparation that you simply can't rush, right? Like if you are waiting on this particular thing to bake, or you are waiting on something in the crock pot to become amazing, or like you're waiting on this piece of meat to go low and slow, right?

Like you have to wait. You can't just go, man, this is taking forever. I'm just going to turn the heat up. I'm just going to keep cranking the heat up to get it done a little faster. Like it's not going to get done any faster.

All you're going to do is burn it. You're going to ruin it. And I wager some people in here probably could say that. You could say I've been burnt by somebody else trying to mature me at a pace they thought I should go.

And if we're honest, probably many of us admit we might have burned somebody else by trying to push them along and mature them at our pace instead of God's.

The message here is clear. Growth, patience. Resolving not to be stagnant, to take steps to grow, but also resolving to be patient, to let God work.

[10 : 43] To be kind and gentle and patient while he does. It's a better way. But while we're seeking to grow, he also tells us you need to make sure to tend to the things you've already been given.

And that's because Paul tells us that maturity also looks like stability in your faith. Only let us hold true to what we have already attained.

So Paul says it's okay if you haven't attained everything yet, and it's okay to be growing at whatever pace God has set for you, but don't let go of the things God has already given you.

I mean, it might be self-evident, but probably also worth saying that in a lot of stuff in life, really the sign of maturity is just steadfastness, right? Like when rough seas come, when things don't go to plan, the mature don't get crazy.

You hold on to the things you've learned. You do the things you know are right. That's especially true if you happen to be a leader. Like in so much as God has given me the opportunity to lead in various areas of my life, one thing I learned long ago about being a leader is in a crisis, you really should be the calmest person in the room.

[12 : 05] Like when everything is scrambling around, you shouldn't be thinking about all the what-ifs and what might happen. You should just be calmly leading people towards what they should do, what the next right thing to do is.

So what would that look like in our faith? Well, I think, again, like a very easy application of that would be, let's say something disorienting or terrifying comes into your life.

Something hits you that's unexpected and just kind of shakes your confidence. Something comes along that really makes it hard for you to know what is up and what is down.

The things you thought were solid aren't solid anymore. Something makes you anxious for the future and you really just don't know what to do. You're really uncertain. One of the questions you can always ask is, all right, what has God taught me already?

Maybe the only thing you can remember is that God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. Good. Hang on to that. If that's all you got, hang on to that.

[13 : 12] Maybe you're anxious about tomorrow, like you don't know how you're going to make it next week. You don't see any help coming. But somewhere in the back of your brain, you remember that God said something about, I don't need to be anxious about my life, about what I'm going to eat or drink, because God cares about things like flowers and birds and animals, and I'm so much more valuable than those.

And God said, he's got me. Good. Hold on to that. Hold on to what he's already given you. And again, I would bet many of you have a story like that.

Like if we went around the room, there were some of you who would say, you know, I honestly don't know how I've made it to XX fill-in-the-blank years old. Like there are so many times where like, I didn't know how I was going to make it through it as a parent, and I didn't know how I was going to pay the next bill, and I didn't know how I was going to get through this really hard life situation, yet somehow I'm still here.

Like somehow God got me through that. And the fact that you can say that actually brings up a really good point, which is the next idea in the passage in Philippians.

Like if you're one of the people that can say that, you know God's got you through, and that's something you can hold on to. Your story matters. Because your story might be what someone else needs to move towards maturity.

[14 : 31] And that's because maturity looks to follow good guides. Verse 17, it says, Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Now before we talk about what it means to follow good examples, note one thing that is presumed here is that you are humble enough to seek guidance.

You are willing to learn. A prideful and arrogant spirit will not serve you well in any circumstance. And I know it's probably almost too cliché, particularly if you're any kind of business or professional setting.

I'm sure you've heard about how important mentoring relationships and getting one of those set up, but they really are. Like if you want to be good at your craft, and I don't care if it's carpentry or accounting or particle physics, like you find someone who is good at it, and someone who inspires you in the way they go about it, and you get close to them.

You imitate them. And that theme shows up throughout Scripture as we seek to become more like Christ as well. You know, Philippians is not the only place. Paul says something similar to this.

[15 : 53] To another church in Corinthians, in chapter 11, verse 1, he says, Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Now look, Paul isn't making an idol out of himself or another person.

Jesus, as you can see, is ultimately the one we're following. But what he's simply trying to get across is believers who seek to be mature look at what other mature believers are doing.

It's actually really important to do that because just as following good guides can be helpful and lead you to maturity, following bad guides will lead you to bad places.

He says, For many, of whom I've often told you and now tell you even with tears, they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly.

Their glory is their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things. Now like earlier, much like earlier in this passage, I think Paul might be responding to a very specific threat to the Philippian church.

[17 : 01] So you remember earlier, he warned us about how in this church there were people who would draw you away from Christ into kind of this legalistic obedience to the law that was offensive to the grace that God has given you.

But now we learn, it sounds like there are also those who would erroneously think that faith and freedom in Christ means there's no reason to try to resist your flesh at all. There's no point in even trying to be good.

And this morning, I don't think we have to focus on that particular sort of sect of religion that he was dealing with. But the markers of bad guides are pretty common.

And he kind of gives you some of them here. Bad guides really don't care about you. It says their God is their belly. It's that sort of guide that maybe you can follow and have a good time with, be a good acquaintance, as kind of a fellow party goer.

But when the music stops, what they're really after is their own pleasure. It's just a sense that that guide doesn't care about you at all. That's not what a good guide would be.

[18 : 11] He also tells us bad guides, you know, glory in what is shameful. I don't think this showed up any, the place I probably saw this the most is kind of like late high school and college.

And I get it, like it's in a lot of ways an immature area of life. But if you think about what was celebrated in those times, it was things that you'd probably consider shameful now, right?

Like who could pound the most drink? You know, chug, chug, chug, like that whole kind of thing, right? Like who was sleeping with the most people? Who could do the craziest thing and then film it?

Who could do something really cruel to somebody else and then film it? Things that were shameful that were gloried in. It also says bad guides, keep your mind focused on these early things.

Which just leads to a simple question. Which guides in your life draw you towards Jesus and which ones are drawing you away? And I wish I could kind of be casual about that, but Paul says, this is life and death serious.

[19 : 21] Bad guides are literally called enemies of the cross of Christ. And he says they are destined for destruction. Which is exactly where you will wind up if you follow them and keep following them.

Paul wants the Philippians to follow good guides because he loves them and he wants them to be mature. And he says that over and over and that's why in this last section we read today, Paul's going to give them kind of a hard example of the value of maturity.

He's going to give them a really concrete object lesson and the lesson's simply going to be this. Maturity will show its value in hard situations. Therefore, my brothers, whom I long for and I love, my joy and my crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat Yodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you, true companion, to help these women who have labored side by side with me for the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

Now look, it is easy to focus on in this passage. Wow. He called these two ladies out by name in a letter to the church.

[20 : 43] Like you kind of get stuck on something that's like, oh snap, Yodia sent the key, Paul's done gone there. Get it together, ladies. Now look, I think the general presumption here can be that this conflict is probably already really well known in the church.

Right? Like it's public and it's damaging the church. Because you know, there's a line between transparency and cruelty and I don't think Paul would have taken something that was just a really private affair between two ladies and kind of vomited it out publicly as a power play to get what he wanted.

That wouldn't be maturity. But if this is a public matter that's dividing the church so much so that Paul knows about it from prison, Paul shows us what engaging in maturity would look like.

So Paul doesn't ignore it because that wouldn't be mature. But he also moves into it with compassion. I mean, he is issuing a plea for correction but as he's doing it, he makes sure everyone knows these are two precious women who contended at my side for the gospel.

Their names are written in the book of life. They are not enemies of Jesus and they are not enemies of the church. He makes sure that people know that.

[22 : 10] But he does also plead with them. He says, you have to agree. You have to try to agree in the Lord. And his plea to them is the same as it is to us.

And the same it's been throughout Philippians. He says, believers who are growing in maturity in Christ will be willing to engage in places like this, in places of disagreement.

And he's got the same call for humility as well. Humility to invite someone else in. He actually asked in the verse, a person that we don't know, he says, my true companion, in some translations translations, it calls this person a loyal yoke fellow.

We don't know who this person is. It's just someone who has contended with them. He says, please help them. Which is simultaneously both asking that person, please engage.

And also asking Yodi and Synthaki, please listen. Let's just pause for a moment. Is that anything like what you would expect from a church?

[23 : 12] Maybe even more honest question, would you even be open to that type of correction? Or can you only see that as somebody meddling in your affairs?

I mean, certainly you don't want to entrust that kind of voice in your life to just anyone. You need to be wise in who you're vulnerable with. But is there anyone in your life you would let talk you out of something?

Is there anyone you would follow as a good guide? And unfortunately, I think that's often where the journey to maturity falls apart because a mature life is never one that can live completely unexamined.

It doesn't mean that everyone has to know everything about you, but it does mean someone needs to know something. And that's because maturity is forged in community.

It's no secret here, we say it all the time, community is indispensable. Community is being life-given. You were not meant to do life alone.

[24 : 24] Community brings joy and security. Community is the thing that makes a house or the city you live in or the church you go to a home.

But it's also risky. To be vulnerable is to, by definition, risk being hurt. To be with other people always runs the risk that someday those relationships may have friction points.

Someday those relationships may become strained. community is vital, but it's not the easy way. It is easier to sit at home and stream movies.

It just is. It is easier to only have acquaintances in your life that you just kind of share interest with, but no one who really, really knows you or what you're going through.

It's easier. That's not how maturity gets forged. Mature believers have some scars. But they keep pressing forward.

[25 : 35] They keep pressing in because, frankly, they want to know Christ more. They believe it's worth it. And frankly, they want others to know Christ more.

They keep pressing in even if it gives them some scars along the way because they want others to know Jesus. They know that's worth it too. That's really what it's all about.

And so, I think our prayer today as we kind of wrap here is just, God, would you give us the grace to always being moving towards maturity, to trust you in the good, in the bad, to have a stable and steady hand in rough seas to be forged by community and through it all heal us, save us.

Jesus' name. The band comes up. So, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, always super grateful. If you're here today, I know it can be a weird thing to come to a church if this isn't something you're used to or into, but no matter what you came in with, I just want to say you are seen and you are loved by Jesus.

But I won't lie to you, what He is inviting to you isn't always, like what He's inviting you into isn't always easy. But it is good. It draws us away from the things that destroy us and it draws us towards real community, not fake ones.

[27 : 09] But He meets us at that point of need. He meets us in the places we need to be saved. If you're interested in that at all, we'd love to talk to you. There'll be a prayer on the screen that might express a way you want to ask that of Him or if you just want to say, Jesus, help me.

If you want to come and talk to someone after we'll have someone here, that door is open. If you just want to ask another question, that's okay. You can come to Him at the pace He draws. If you are a follower of Jesus, friends, let's just keep going.

It is totally okay that you haven't arrived. You do not have to have it all together to come to this church. You don't have to have it all together to be a follower of Jesus. Let's hold on to what we've got.

Let's hold on to what He's already given us. And if you've forgotten, like if you can't remember anything, ask God to remind you. That is actually one of the places where the Holy Spirit is really great.

I bet if you ask God to remind you of something, He will pop something into your mind you forgot. Maybe this is just another day to remember don't give up on community.

[28 : 19] Don't live your life in the dark. Be humble enough to seek out a good guide. We just give this moment.

We're going to give it to God. Like whatever He asks you to do, just do it. We're going to take a moment to pray together. And then when you're ready, for those of you who follow Jesus, the communion tables will be open in just a moment to sit with Him.

And again, Jesus, He lived His life in community. and not just any community, like with those He loved. And that's what this table is about.

It's an expression but also a real moment of you sitting at that table with Jesus. He reminding you that just as much as He loved those disciples in the room with Him that day, He loves you the same.

And He'll be with you. And He'll be life. Father, this moment is Yours. God, whatever You ask us to do, help us to do it. Help us to see the life in it.

[29 : 25] Holy Spirit, have Your way. In Jesus' name.