

Chapter 9 - CHRISTIAN WALK:

TOOLS TO MATURITY

The first step to the Christian life is to accept Christ's forgiveness for our misdeeds by faith in his death on the cross ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#); [Romans 3:23-26](#),

The next important step is to understand that our salvation is permanent – no matter what – and that we should not feel guilty in daily life ([1 Peter 1:4-5](#); [John 10:27-31](#)) See *“Our Secure Salvation”* chapter.

This is a great start, but there's more: our daily service to God and becoming more Christ-like. This can further improve our well-being due to the benefits of Christianity and the Bible.

HOW DO WE LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

There are many aspects to the Christian life. However, a simple biblically based 5-step approach to grow our relationship with God is what I call the **'5 tools to maturity'** and they are taken from [Acts 2:42 and 47](#). They are as follows:

- 1 PRAYER**
- 2 PRAISE**
- 3 FELLOWSHIP**
- 4 RECEIVING BIBLICAL TEACHING**
- 5 REACH OTHERS WITH BIBLICAL TRUTH**

These 5 tools describe the activities in the very first church in Jerusalem and provide a *model* for today to what actions individuals and the church should perform routinely. Importantly, these five activities are confirmed in later verses in the epistles.

WHY ARE THESE TOOLS IMPORTANT?

When implemented consistently, and in balance with each other, these activities grow a godly mindset and righteous actions into our daily lives.

TOOL 1

PRAYER

We do indeed have a great God to whom we are privileged to pray. *How do we pray?*

Here are the basic concepts:

ACCESS

As a forgiven Christian, God views us as sinless which allows us the privilege of direct, unimpeded access to Him so we can pray. We can come before God with courage ([Hebrews 10:20-22](#))! The only limitation is ourselves from lack of obedience, guilt, or fear, that would limit or damage the content of our prayers ([1 Peter 3:7](#)).

ATTITUDE IN PRAYER - The 7 Cs

- *Christlike* – We are to pray in such a way that is consistent with the goals of Christ as established in the Bible ([John 14:13-14](#)).
- *Consistent with the Spirit* – Our prayer should be consistent with God's revealed Word (i.e., scripture, [John 14:13-14](#); [1 John 5:14](#)) which the Holy Spirit uses to provide us power ([Ephesians 6:17](#); [Jude 1:20](#)).

- *Confident* – We can come boldly and unhindered to God (Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 10:20-22) and pray (1 Peter 5:7).
- *Continual* – Our prayers are to be persistent, frequent (Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) and in all places (1 Timothy 2:8).
- *Changeable* – Allow prayer itself to correct our attitudes and requests (1 Timothy 4:5).
- *Consecrated* – Our prayers should be unhindered by sin (1 Peter 3:7).
- *Careful* – We should be sober and watchful in our prayers (1 Peter 4:7)

CONTENT OF PRAYER - Scripture also describes several general themes in our prayers:

- *Thankfulness* – We should express gratitude for what God has done in our and other people's lives (Philemon 1:4).
- *Praise* – We should acknowledge God's holy character and actions.

Note: The first two aspects of the content of our prayer adds to the proper attitude of prayer mentioned above but are also important content.

- *Our requests* – We may petition God with anything that worries us or concerns us. We should remember that we are praying to the great God of the universe in our attitude as mentioned above (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 4:12).
- 1. *Specific requests* – They should be consistent with God’s desires and example prayers (John 14:13-14; Ephesians 1:15-19; Ephesians 3:15-18; Colossians 1:9-14).
- 2. Pray for others – Examples of prayer for other people are frequent in scripture (James 5:16).
- 3. Request prayer from others – Paul often requested prayers from others (Colossians 4:3; Ephesians 6:19), which may have had the following advantages:
 - ✓ Helped Induce God to answer the prayers.
 - ✓ Allows others to share in God’s answers to your prayers by asking them to pray for you so they also might be encouraged when you report to them the answered prayer.
 - ✓ We do not know exactly how God uses prayer requests from other people. In his epistles, Paul often asks for prayer (Colossians 4:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:25) although scripture generally does not mention that believers should ask other people to pray for them. Further, there is no set number scripture provides of people praying for you which God desires to answer Prayer. We do know, however, that God answers prayer according to His will (John 14:13-14; 1 John 5:14).

- *Biblical* – Our prayer requests should be consistent with what glorifies Jesus Christ (John 14:13-14; 15:7). Paul offers 3 model prayers in which he emphasizes what God wishes us and others to attain in our Christian walk, no matter what the situation (Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-17; Colossians 1:9-15) including:
 1. Confidence of our salvation (hope).
 2. Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom of God’s word, especially the epistles.
 3. Know His power.
 4. Know His love.
 5. Demonstrate service, all in patience, joy, and persistence.

What about the confession of our sins?

This is a controversial point. The epistles do not instruct us specifically to confess our sins to God. We are forgiven! In contrast, the common injunction in the epistles in our attitude to sin is simply to obey (Romans 6:12-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 John 3:22). It is the Holy Spirit who helps us obey and defeat our sins (Romans 8:13). Therefore, knowing we are forgiven, our prayers can be more forward-looking, service-oriented and filled with praise and thankfulness.

WHY PRAY?

Medical research indicates that active prayer increases well-being and the more frequent the prayer the better for well-being (1-5). Prayer is good for us and the epistles tell us to do it!

Several potential benefits of prayer are:

GOD CARES

- It provides a release for our emotions to God perhaps relieving tension and frustration.
- It engenders a sense that somebody cares and is listening. We also know that the Holy Spirit and Christ Himself pray on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:26,34).

GOOD REMINDERS

- It causes us to pay attention to scripture, hopefully, as we pray.
- It allows us time to consider and form an answer to, problems (ours or others) as we deliberate mentally our requests to God.
- It reminds us to be thankful for others and for His blessings to us.
- It helps us to praise and remember that we have a great God whose purposes are greater than ours. Thus, it helps keep our own problems in perspective.

GOD ANSWERS

In addition, as Christians, we have the benefit of God's promise to answer prayer so there may be a further benefit through His gracious provisions (John 14:13-14; 1 John 5:13).

Therefore, prayer is a key tool to maturity as a Christian, invoking God's help yet reminding us of scripture, praise and to be thankful, all of which may assist our well-being. Prayer is one of the great benefits of our Christian life. Thanks be to God for such a provision.

PRAISE

DEFINITION

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'praise' as:

- To express a favorable judgment or comment.
- To glorify (a god or saint), especially by the attribution of perfections.

CONTENT OF PRAISE

Therefore, as a Christian what should be the content of biblical praise? The Bible gives some hints:

- Acknowledgement of God's perfect character ([Ephesians 1:6](#))
- Acknowledgement of God's righteous actions ([Psalm 139:14](#); [Psalm 148](#))
- Thankfulness ([Hebrews 13:15](#))

REASON WE PRAISE

Why do we praise God? The reasons are vital to our Christian life and are listed below:

- *The Bible commands us to praise* – It is our duty to praise God. However, God does not give us commands without reason, so several potential explanations follow below ([Psalm 150](#); [Romans 15:11](#); [Hebrews 13:15](#)).
- *He deserves praise* – Our Father in Heaven is the almighty God who has provided for us salvation through his precious Son, Jesus Christ, as a free gift through faith that we could have eternal life. This salvation is a sure hope and anchor for our souls. Surely, He deserves glory, thanks, and praise ([1 Peter 4:11](#); [Hebrews 6:19](#)).
- *It is good for us to praise* – God made us! Therefore, He knows what is good for us. It is good for us to praise at least for the following reasons:
 1. *God's ordained order* – Praise reminds us of the order of the universe. We are not the most important thing in creation. God's goals and priorities are above, and better than, ours.
 2. *Humility* – Realizing that God's plans are more important than ours might limit our complaining and remind us that we are here to serve our great God.
 3. *Attitude* – Praise teaches us thankfulness in realizing God's gifts to us in creation, in Christ and His benefits in this life as our Father. These should promote an attitude of thankfulness and reduce expectations ([Philippians 4:8](#)).

We do indeed have a great God who is worthy of all praise!

FELLOWSHIP

DEFINITION

- The biblical word ‘fellowship’ is most closely expressed in the Greek by the word *koinōnia* (κοινωνία), and its derivatives, which mean basically ‘communion’ as well as the word *metochē* (μετοχή) which means ‘participation.’

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT FELLOWSHIP

The Bible describes fellowship in the most general ways:

- *It occurs only between Christians* – This is because we cannot be encouraged or learn from those who do not have the Spirit or who do not understand the Christian faith (1 John 1:6-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14).
- *Do not neglect* – We are not to avoid fellowship. This is because it is good for us. It is also good for other people to see God working in us. Please see below (Hebrews 10:24-25; Hebrews 13:15).
- *Functional definition* – In reality, the Bible does not give a lot of detail, or a singular text, defining ‘fellowship’. However, functionally any interaction between Christians that is spiritually based, as described in the Bible, might be considered fellowship (Colossians 3:12-17; Ephesians 5:15-20).

WHY DO WE NEED FELLOWSHIP?

The benefits of fellowship are assumed in scripture. As Christians, we need the example, as well as the verbal encouragement and reminders of God's word from others, to help promote our own walk with God ([1 Timothy 4:12-16](#)). Likewise, our actions and speech provide this to other believers.

WHAT BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP IS NOT?

One benefit we derive from church is social fellowship around food, games, sports, weddings, parties, etc. However, these events may or may not include true fellowship which should have a spiritual basis.

HOW DO WE FELLOWSHIP?

True biblical fellowship can occur in many settings. Regardless the setting, biblical fellowship is framed in a lifestyle that is upstanding ([1 Thessalonians 2:10](#)) and speech that helps and encourages others ([Ephesians 4:29](#)). How do we do this? Here are some ideas:

- *Know God's word* - This is important so you are speaking to others correct biblical truth and not church-based jargon such as 'That is not my gift' or 'I do not have peace about that so I will not do it.'

- *Plan ahead* – Consider before meeting with a person how you might encourage them specifically with: gratitude, commendation, thought-provoking questions, sharing God’s word, or recounting what God has done in your own life (Colossians 1:3-7; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7; 1 Timothy 4:16). If you don’t know what to ask them go to their social media accounts and learn about them. If you are attending a gathering, then choose one person to target with whom to fellowship.
- *Listen* – Be sure and listen when conversing so you can learn and discover how you can even better encourage them (James 1:19).
- *Control the environment* – It can be very difficult to discuss godly matters in environments that are controlled by other people such as festive activities or groups of people who are unbelievers or are non-serious Christians. If you’re finding it difficult to have fellowship then create your own environments in which proper fellowship can occur, such as:
 1. Choose a meeting place that is quiet and where you will not have interruptions where Bible-based topics can be discussed.
 2. Choose the person or the people specifically to be there who also seek Christ and with whom excellent fellowship can occur.

TOOL 4

RECEIVING BIBLICAL TEACHING

We need to know the Bible!

Why? Can we just not memorize the most important verses and follow the style of Christianity we learned in our college group, church denomination, or Sunday school and live a good Christian life?

Unfortunately, while these organizations may be primarily based on scripture parts of their doctrine often are derived on a tradition or system rather than the faith and freedom produced from the knowledge of scripture. It is like settling for crackers when you could be enjoying a steak or making your highest sports goal to play little league baseball instead of the major leagues!

Let's examine what the Bible says:

- The Bible is an authoritative source as it comes from God through the Holy Spirit by way of the apostles (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Peter 3:16).
- We are told to know and understand God's word (Ephesians 1:15). There are several reasons for this:
 1. It is a command (Colossians 1:9).
 2. We cannot bear fruit or know what to do to serve God without first knowing and understanding the Bible (Colossians 1:9-10). Accordingly, to function as a Christian, like anything in life, we need to follow the manual.
 3. When we know the manual and its instructions, then the process bears much fruit in our lives. We have better well-being from a confident relationship with God. Teleios research has actually shown that those who have more biblical knowledge have better well-being and less guilt than those who don't! [6]

- It takes a little work and time but the benefits are huge. We can have joy in:
 1. Bearing fruit in our lives such as joy and peace ([Galatians 5:22](#)).
 2. Seeing God work through us in others' lives ([Colossians 1:10](#)).
 3. Proving the truth of His word ([Romans 12:1-2](#)).
 4. Knowing Him better ([Colossians 1:10](#)).
 5. Loving others in a more accurate and useful fashion ([Philippians 1:9](#); [1 John 5:1-3](#)).
 6. Accurate quick assessments of what is good and bad in situations and with people ([Hebrews 5:14](#)), thus keeping us from entering many of life's difficult situations.
 7. Not having to rely on emotions, helps life become more stable and predictable ([Hebrews 5:9-14](#)). The Bible does not state that we have a religion based on emotions and actually warns against it ([Ephesians 4:12-16](#); [James 1:5-8](#)).

- How then do we effectively study scripture? There are plenty of Bible study resources on Amazon.com or on line that might be effective. Make sure they are Bible based. In addition, someone in your church may be able to help you. You can start effective Bible study with these basic steps:

1. Download a web-based Bible study tool such as eSword. It's free and has multiple exciting resources to help understand scripture (www.e-sword.net).
2. Start with a power-packed epistle such as Ephesians or Colossians that will give you essential information about
3. Christ and our Christian life in a concise manner.

Slow down! Take your time and follow these four basic inductive study steps:

- ✓ Observation – Ask questions about the verse.
- ✓ Interpretation – Use resources on eSword to answer your questions.
- ✓ Application – How should the first specifically change your life?
- ✓ Integration – What are other verses that support your interpretation so you can confidently build what you know about the topic discussed in the verse (e.g. salvation, the Spirit, etc.)?

A number of helpful Bible study method books are available such as *The New Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*. These inductive methods are most helpful and will bring amazing insights out of scripture to benefit your life

TOOL 5

REACH OTHERS WITH BIBLICAL TRUTH

Our last tool is our outreach to others to share our faith.

- *Problem* – Unfortunately, teaching others or sharing the gospel appears to rank right below ‘going to the dentist’ among desired activities. Teleios’ research has shown that people generally fear sharing the gospel specifically report being afraid of social rejection, offending the other person, and not knowing what to say, or how to answer others’ questions [7-10].
- *What teaching is not* – Teleios examined people’s habits in mentioning the gospel (a part of our outreach). In a well-taught Evangelical Church, attendees indicated they conveyed the gospel to others most commonly by:
 1. Sharing their lives – 78%.
 2. Praying for others – 71%.
 3. Encouraging others – 70%.
 4. Loving others – 68%.
 5. Explicitly mentioning how to accept Jesus Christ as Savior – 30%.

Although sharing our lives is important, it does not replace actually telling someone the gospel or directly teaching the Bible. People cannot guess what we are thinking! Scripture recognizes that we do not have visual support to our faith until Christ comes again (Hebrews 2:8) so others need to hear what to believe and someone must explicitly tell them (Romans 10:14-17).

- Why do we reach out to others regarding our faith? There are at least several reasons:
 1. It is a command – We are told to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2,15,24-26; 1 Timothy 4:6,16; Hebrews 5:12) which involves instructing others in the Word of God. However, teaching also may include admonishing others to correct action or thinking (Colossians 3:17; Ephesians 5:19).
 2. Benefits to the church of our teaching and spreading the Gospel
 - ✓ Better well-being – Teleios has found that people who teach and share the Gospel enjoy better well-being than those who do not. What initially seems fearful is actually enriching after a person has shared the Gospel or taught God’s Word.
 - ✓ Good judgment – The ability to teach appears to indicate maturity which is associated with accurate and efficient judgment and avoiding nasty pitfalls in life (Hebrews 5:14).

- ✓ Maturity – Being able to teach is associated with maturity, especially the attributes of an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Hebrews 5:12).
- ✓ Uplifting the church – The benefit of teaching others scripture or the gospel is not just for the individual but for the church itself. Teaching the Bible and the gospel is the primary way that we can grow the church and influence our culture generally (Colossians 1:5-10). Without Christians passing down the precious words of our Father to the next generation, the church certainly can suffer from a lack of support as opposed to influencing and benefiting our society.

So, let us get to work! The truth we possess in the Bible is good for our family, friends and acquaintances as well as for our society!

RESULTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

A true believer who accepts Christ in faith will be regenerated and show over time godly changes in their life. They can't help it because they are a new person. What can we expect to see in a maturing believer?

- *First attitudes* – The new believer accepts the basic process of maturity discussed already in these chapters related to salvation by faith, security of salvation, accepting the authority of the Bible, and being imitators of Paul (5 tools to maturity – 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7; Acts 2:42,47).
- *First changes* – the Apostle John describes in 1 John 2-4 perhaps the most basic changes we can expect from a new maturing believer:
 1. They accept the basic doctrine concerning our savior including: that he came as man, he came from God and he is the Christ.
 2. They demonstrate God's love.
 3. They are obedient.

- *Later results* – Over time as believers practice the Christian walk as described above specific results, described in several key passages, will occur:
 1. Galatians 5:22-23 and Ephesians 5:9, The fruit of the Spirit will appear.
 2. Ephesians 5:18-21, which results in speech that mentions the things of God, thankfulness, and submission to others in God's work.
 3. Hebrews 5:13-14, Meat eaters are mature Christians who can teach and very quickly judge between right and wrong.
 4. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Qualities of an Elder – These chapters describe the qualities of an elder and a deacon, which represent signs of a mature character.
 5. 1 Peter 1:3-8, Power through knowledge – this wonderful list consists of qualities which Peter promises that, if they belong to the believer, they will not be un-useful or unfruitful in Christ.

The 5 tools to maturity are paramount in helping us grow in God and become mature in our Christian life. Please continue reading about the Christian Life in the next chapter for more complete overview.

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