WEEK#4: CHRISTIAN MATURITY
From Receiving Care to Giving Ourselves Away

Big Idea: Maturity moves us from consuming the Kingdom to carrying the Kingdom.

13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.
14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. - **Ephesians 4:13-15 (NLT)**

Ephesians 4:13-15 describes the goal of Christian maturity as "…attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The direction of our growth is toward Jesus—His character, His love, and His willingness to give Himself for others. As we mature, that love reshapes what we want, how we respond, and what we take responsibility for.

The diagram illustrates this growth through five stages *(see page 4)*:

Infant → Child → Adult → Parent → Elder

Other scriptures to consider:

"Every high priest is a man…. And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is subject to the same weaknesses." – **Hebrews 5:1,2 (NLT)**

"You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead you need someone to teach you…. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on mild is still an infant…." – **Hebrews 5:12,13 (NLT)**

"When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up I put away childish things." – **1 Corinthians 13:11 (NLT)**

These are a framework for reflection, not labels for ranking people. We may demonstrate maturity in one area while still needing considerable care and growth in another. At every stage, we remain dependent on God's grace and need one another.

1. Infant — "Take care of me."

We begin by receiving. We need people to nurture our faith, help us understand God's love, and provide security as we learn to trust Him.

Notice how the diagram begins with experience and security or insecurity. What we have experienced can shape how we approach God and others. Learning that we are loved creates room for growth. Receiving care is a necessary beginning. Maturity develops as the love we receive begins shaping the love we offer.

2. Child — "What do I want?"

At this stage, faith often revolves around our preferences: *Am I comfortable? Are my needs being met? Do I like what God is asking of me?*

The diagram connects this part of the journey with our worldview and our encounter with truth. In humility, we allow Jesus to challenge assumptions that have governed our lives.
We begin asking: *Can I trust His goodness when His direction differs from my desires?*

3. Adult — "What am I responsible for?"

The green borderland represents a decisive shift: taking up our cross, following Jesus, and accepting responsibility.

We begin owning our choices, responses, relationships, and participation in our formation. We become willing to confess, make amends, establish healthy patterns, and follow through.

We are not responsible for everything that has happened to us. We can, however, increasingly take responsibility for how we respond—with God's help and the support of others.

Taking responsibility means bringing our lives honestly before Jesus and responding to His leading.

4. Parent — "Who can I help grow?"

As we mature, our attention expands toward the growth of others.
Spiritual parenting means making room for someone else: listening patiently, modeling faithfulness, speaking truth lovingly, and walking beside them as they learn to follow Jesus.

We help others develop their own trust in Christ and take responsibility for their own discipleship.

Our maturity begins producing maturity in others.

5. Elder — "What can I give away?"

Maturity deepens into generosity. Our experience, wisdom, time, resources, and opportunities become gifts we can share.

We make room for others to lead. We celebrate their growth. We invest in work whose fullest results we may never see.

Here, "elder" describes a posture of spiritual maturity rather than simply an age or church position.

Our lives increasingly become an investment in future generations.

The spiral reminds us that formation involves returning to familiar questions at greater depth. Truth reshapes our worldview. Community supports healthy choices. Those choices create opportunities to practice faithfulness. Throughout the journey, surrender opens us to further growth.
The upward movement does not mean a life without suffering or setbacks. It represents an increasing capacity to respond with the character and love of Jesus.

Jesus gives this journey its clearest expression: *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."* - **Mark 10:45**

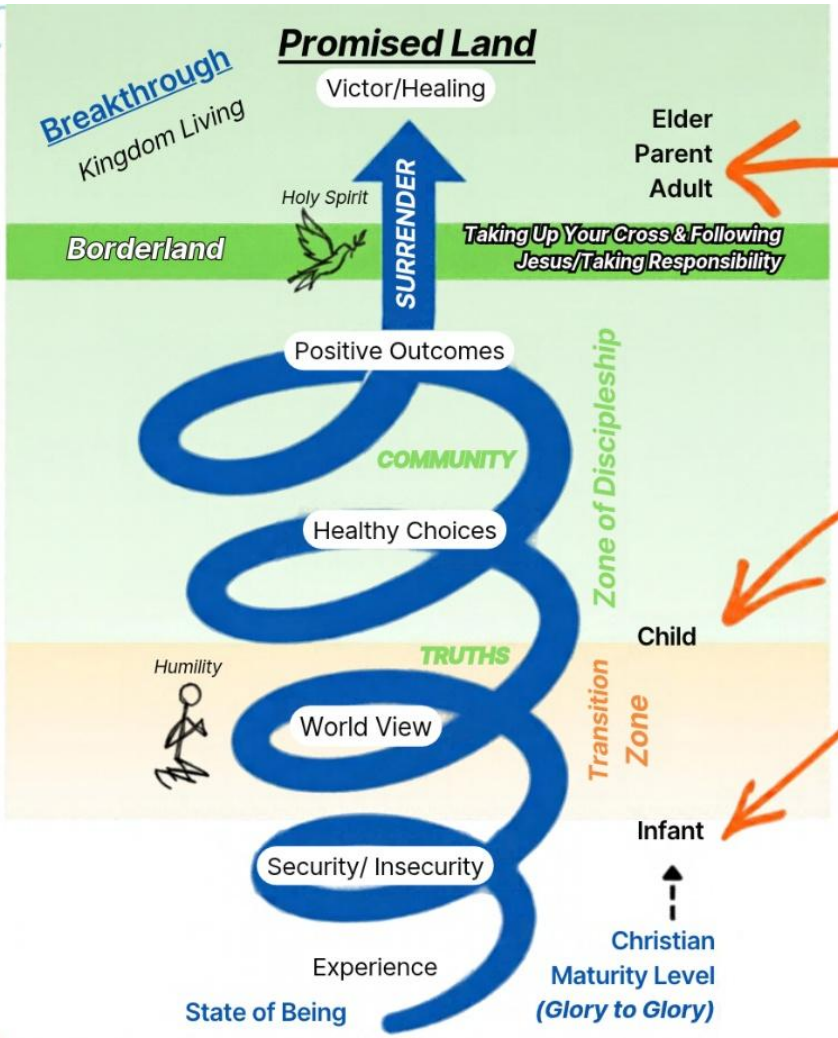
A useful question for examining our maturity is: Am I increasingly taking responsibility for my own life while sacrificially giving myself for others?

Consider your next step:

1. What responsibility is Jesus asking me to own?
2. Who could I intentionally help grow?
3. What have I received that I can now give away?

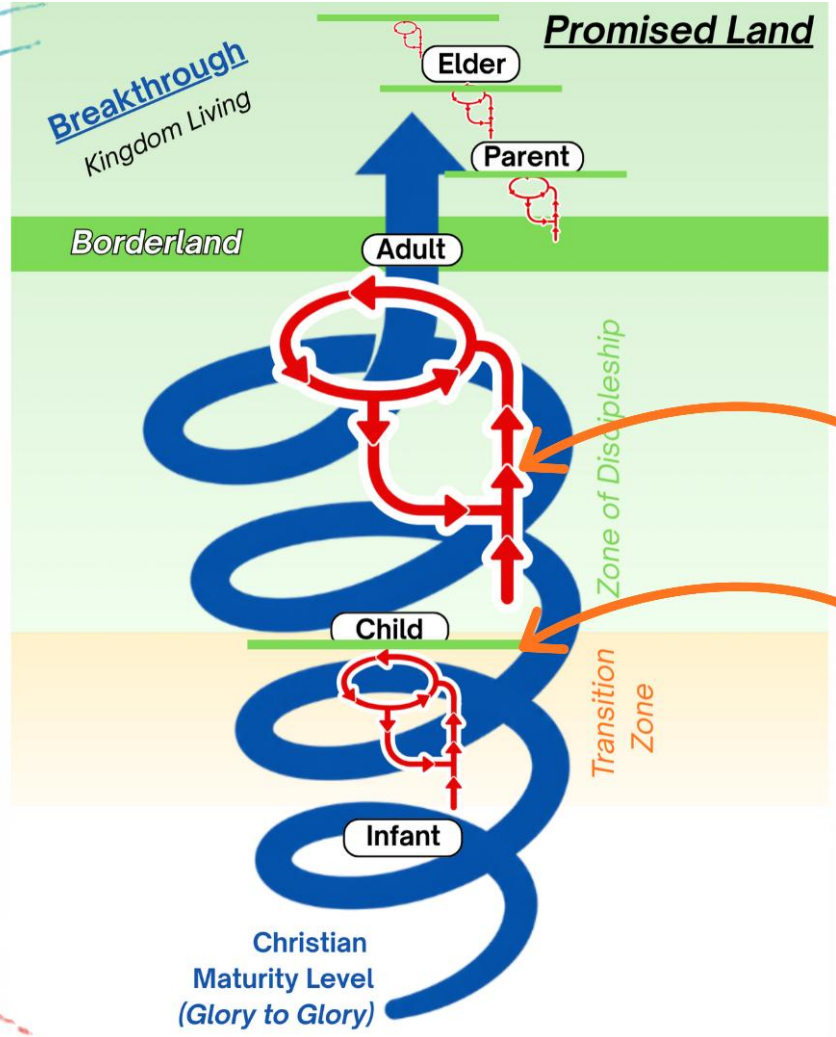
As the love of Christ forms us, the care we receive becomes care we extend—and the Kingdom we experience becomes the Kingdom we carry into the lives of others.

See Pages 7-8 for additional "Developing Maturity - Life Stage Tasks" Information
The Group Discussion Questions from Larry's Teaching are on Page 9



Christian Maturity

The **Life Stages** to developing maturity *(physically , spritually, & mentally)*

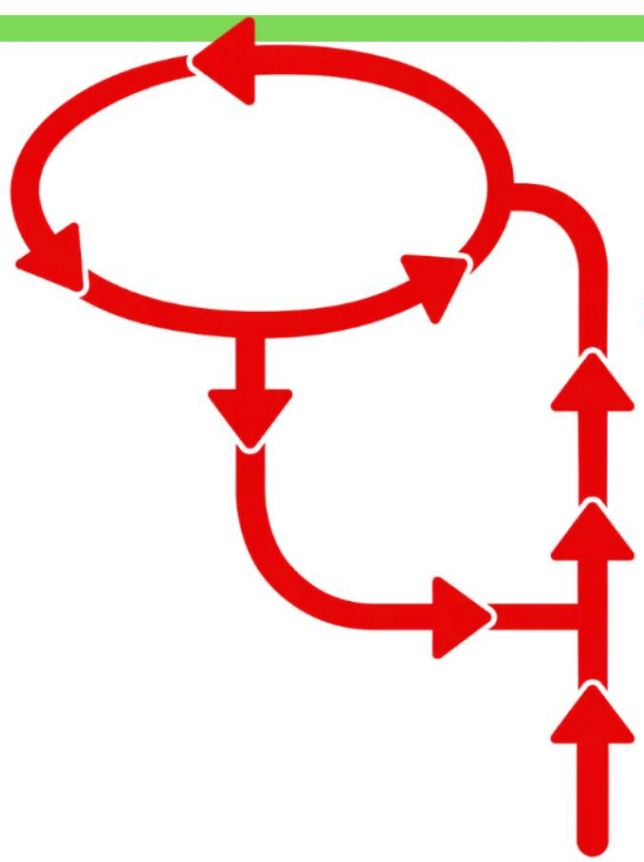


How our ***Life Stages*** meet with the Wasteland & Borderland.

The mini-wasteland

The mini-borderland

Basic Wasteland Diagram



Borderland

(We will be going into the details of this diagram next week)

BORDERLANDS
WHERE JESUS MEETS US FOR BREAKTHROUGH

Developing Maturity

Life Stage Tasks

Source Reference: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You; E. James Wilder

Infancy (-- 3 years):

- Live in joy. Build joy strength.
- Develop trust.
- Learn to recieve.
- Begins to understand "self" as unique person.
- Learns to return to joy from negative emotions.

When infancy tasks fail:

1. Weak identity, fear develops, & coldness in relationships
2. Difficulty bonding, resulting in manipulative, self-centered, isolated, and/or discontented personality
3. Is withdrawn, disengaged, self-stimulating, & unresponsive
4. Inability to regulate emotions
5. Uncontrollable emotional outbursts, worry, depression, avoidance, escaping, stuck in certain emotions

Child (4-12 years):

- Ask for what is needed; can say what she/he thinks or feels
- Learns what brings personal satisfaction
- Develops enough persistence to do hard things
- Cares for self & develops personal resources & talents
- Knows self & takes responsibiliy to make self understandable to others
- Understands how she/he fits into history as well as the "big picture" of what life is about

When child tasks fail:

1. Continual frustration & disappointment because needs are not met; often passive-agressive
2. Obsessed/addicted to food, drugs, sex, money, or power (false satisfaction)
3. Experiences failure, being stuck, undependable; consumed with comfort & fantasy
4. Unproductive activities despite God-given abilities
5. Fails to form sense of true identity; conforms to outside influences
6. Disconnected from history; susceptable to family lies & dysfunction

Adult (13-Birth of first child):

- Cares for self and others simultaneously in mutually satisfying relationships
- Remains stable in difficult situations & knows how to return self & others to joy
- Bonds with peers; develops group identity
- Takes responsibility for how personal actions affect others, including portecting others from self
- Belongs to & contributes to community; articulates "who we are"
- Expresses his/her heart in deepening personal way

When adult tasks fail:

1. Is self-centered; leaves others dissatisfied & frustrated
2. Conforms to peer pressure; negative/destructive group activities
3. Is a loner; isolates; excessive "self-importance"
4. Is controlling, harmful, blaming, unprotective of/to others
5. Not a life-giving contributor to community; self-absorbed, uses others, drains society
6. Is driven to "play roles", prove self to world, get results, and seek approval

Parent (Birth of first child - youngest child becomes adult):

- Protects, serves, & enjoys family
- Devoted to care of children without expecting care in return
- Allows & provides spiritual parenting & "sibling" community for thier children
- Learns how to bring children through difficult times & situations, and to return to joy from negative emotions

When parent tasks fail:

1. Family members are at risk, deprived, & feel worthless or unimportant
2. Children are required to care for parents (but cannot); children often "parentified" blocking rather than facilitating maturing themselves
3. Children vulnerable to peer pressure, cults, misfortune, & are less likely to suceed in life's goals. Parents become overwhelmed w/o extended family support
4. Hopeless, depressed, disintegrating family units develop

Elder (Beginning as youngest child becomes adult):

- Establishes accurate community identity, acts like self in midst of difficulty
- Prizes each community member, and enjoys the true self in each individual
- Parents & matures the community
- Gives lige to those without family - "spiritual adoption"

When elder tasks fail:

1. Meaninglessness, disorder, loss of direction, & disintegration in all social structures
2. Life-giving interactions dimish, along with life-giving interdependence, stunting community growth Fragile, at-risk people fail to heal or survive
3. Unqulaified people attempt to lead, resulting in immature interactions at every level of the community
4. When the "familyless" are not individually taken care of, poverty, violence, crisis, & mental illness increases

Group Discussion Questions:

1. **In what ways do I find myself to still be at 'infant' levels of maturity?** (Examples might include: still demanding to be fed; still unable to dress myself; still unable to tie my shoes; totally self-absorbed; cranky/unable to regulate one's emotions; seeking to have one's way without regard for others' wants or needs…)

2. **In what ways do I find myself to still be at 'child' levels of maturity?** (Examples might include: desiring to be entertained, or the center of attention; selfish in my interactions; seeking my own comfort/preferences; not choosing the 'hard' over the familiar and comfortable…)

3. **In what ways do I find myself at or approaching 'adult' levels of maturity?** (Examples might include: "putting away childish things"; thinking and acting in deference/preference to others' needs and desires; being a living witness to God's faithfulness; showing steady growth in the demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit; knowing when to speak up and when to be silent; taking responsibility for my responses to prior failures, abuses, difficult circumstances; humbly owning and correcting my mistakes/offenses; standing strong in the face of opposition; suffering injustice without lashing out…)

4. **In what ways do I find myself at or approaching 'parent' levels of maturity?** (Examples might include: leading others to relationship with Christ; assisting them to grow in their faith; setting consistent examples of mature Christlikeness [see fruits of the spirit—Galatians 5]; humbly correcting others in genuine selfless love; willingness to nurture others even when it gets messy…)

5. **Can I recognize some ways I, or others, in my community are at or approaching 'elder' levels of spiritual maturity?** *Note: This may be irrespective of or separate from 'called'/assigned position in church leadership.* (Examples might include: parenting the whole community in selfless, life-giving ways; enjoying grandchildren and great grandchildren in the faith; listening intently to the heartbeat of the entire community and differentiating between the genuine and needs and wants of the Body, or individuals in the Body; maintaining a steady course when opposition arises; quickly returning to joyful service following each of the upsetting/strong negative emotions; humbly seeking out input, teaching, direction, correction from other elders…)