

Emotional Maturity

by Mr. Peter Eddington

Have you ever seen a little calf born, or maybe a foal? If you have in the past watched Wild Kingdom, well maybe you have the discovery channel now and you see wild life and you do see the young ones being born on these wild life programs. It usually takes place in an open field or a barn. The mother doesn't go to a hospital to have her young delivered by an anesthetist physician, tended by white-capped doctors and nurses. She has no delivery table, no one helps her and a little calf comes into the world by an instinctive process. Almost immediately it struggles to its feet. It finds its legs a little wobbly but in a few minutes it's standing on all four and you've seen this happen. No one teaches it to walk and it doesn't have to wait a year to learn. It happens within minutes usually at birth and then no one teaches it where to go. It knows by instinct. It goes for breakfast. No one tells it or teaches it where the meal is located. The mother cow simply stands stupidly by waiting for the calf to find its food.

Now no newborn human knows that much within minutes of birth. Yet the human infant has something that that calf does not, and that is a little mind. Humans are not born with instinct. Humans however have to grow up and learn and develop over many, many years. It has to be taught and they have to learn. One of the basic things every human needs to learn so vitally is the right use of the human mind and of our emotions. The human mind is something important to do with human emotions and our emotions need to be taught and trained and controlled by our minds. No one is born with it. It must be learned and developed. We need continually to realize that we are born as helpless little babies, knowing nothing at birth. We do not come equipped with instinct like the animals do.

So here today I think we have a very interesting topic that we're going to go through. We have some very thought-provoking points that you may want to take a few notes on as we go through.

Just what do we mean, emotional maturity? Emotional maturity. Few people really understand and grasp the meaning of the term, yet it is one of the secrets of human happiness. What is emotional maturity? How can we know if we're emotionally mature? Does it have a spiritual element? If no one is truly grown up, really mature, until he or she attains not only physical, mental and spiritual adulthood but emotional maturity as well, where will you find it taught? Well today let's take a look at emotional maturity and see where it can be found.

I have six areas for us to cover here during the sermon this afternoon and the first one is: are you growing up or just getting older? A veteran school teacher was certain she would get the upcoming promotion to Vice Principal since she had greater seniority than the other teachers. When the appointment went to a teacher with less experience, she was outraged. "How can you do this to me? I've been teaching at school for twenty years," she lamented to the school board chairman. With gent dom he responded: "dear lady, you haven't been teaching twenty years, you've taught one year twenty times." Does your maturity match your chronological age we can ask? Do you grow a litt er, a little more mature each year of your life or have you just lived the same year over and over again? To find out if you're growing up or just getting older, consider some of these measurements of age that would be in some of the science and physiological textbooks.

First of all we do have chronological age. Chronological age is the measurement of the time a person has lived his age in years. Right? The chronological age.

Physiological age refers to the degree to which systems of the body have developed relevant to chronological age. So you may be forty years old, do you look forty or do you look older or younger? What is your physiological age? Your intellectual age? Intellectual age refers to whether a person's intelligence is below, above or equal to his chronological age. Does you intelligence match how long you've been living on the earth?

Then we have our social age. According to some Psychiatrist, the Sociologist, social age compares social development with chronological age. It asks the question: does this person relate as well socially as he or she should for the age?

Then emotional age. Emotional, like social age compares emotional maturity with chronological age. It asks the question: does this person handle his emotions as well as he should for his age?

Then spiritual maturity or spiritual age. Spiritual compares our maturity with our conversion experience. It asks the question: does this person handle himself in a Godly manner as well as he should for his spiritual age?

So you see these different measurements of age whether it is chronological or physiological or emotional or spiritual. How do we compare in these areas? Now we have no control over our chronological age, as we find out as each year goes by. We have a little bit of control over our intellectual age and our physiological age but we can choose our spiritual, social and emotional age. We can work on that and letting appropriate social skills and developing emotional and spiritual maturity, a choice is offered to every person, pretty much.

Just because someone is grown up by chronological age doesn't necessarily mean they are grown up emotionally. A lot of people give little or no thought to this matter of emotions. We humans start life as little babies like we said but then we have to grow up. Have you ever told somebody (maybe your child) grow up! When things aren't going so well,

they're being immature. But to fulfill life's real purpose and mission, why we were put here on this earth, we must grow up, not only physically but also mentally, spiritually and emotionally. We have to develop and move forward in this regard. Most people generally, primarily think only of attaining physical maturity. You know, you have your twenty-first birthday, reach a milestone of age but how do we measure up when it comes to emotional and spiritual maturity? So, that's point one right now. Are you growing up or just getting older? This leads us into point two.

The second area which is that the Holy Spirit is the key to spiritual development and emotional maturity. When it comes to the plan of God, the Holy Spirit is the key to spiritual development and emotional maturity. This is a good concept for us to consider here today as we begin counting out fifty days towards the Feast of Pentecost, of course which pictures the giving of the Holy Spirit to God's church. Do people ever give serious thought to spiritual growth? No person attains true emotional maturity until he attains spiritual maturity. The two really go hand in hand in our mind. True spiritual maturity is a combination of the spirit in man and God's Holy Spirit. The two spirits working together help us develop spiritual maturity and by extension also true emotional maturity.

One author defines emotional maturity this way. It's an interesting definition. Emotional maturity is development from a state of taking to a state of giving and sharing. Moving from a state of taking to a state of giving and sharing. So you start to see that there's some biblical principles involved here as we move along. There is a spiritual principle involved. Development from natural impulses of self and responses of human nature to the principle of loving ones neighbor as yourself. Looking outside of yourself and few people realize that this is a true recipe for happiness, looking outside of yourself. It's something that must be learned by the mind and it is developed by self-discipline. It is not instinctive. We're not born with it, it doesn't automatically happen.

Human nature really is contrary to this thought of looking out for others, it's loving ones neighbor as ones self. But as you know, God's law is based on the principle of giving and love and concern. God's law is based upon love; God is love. Love is outgoing concern as we've heard many years in the past in the church. But human nature is a magnet, a pull towards self, to getting what we want, what we need. How emotionally mature is that concept? The key indicator of spiritual maturity is one's ability to love in a Godly way, to have a true Godly love emanating from us. To be spiritually mature is to be like God. We have been called to actually imitate Him. Let's notice what Paul wrote to the Ephesians regarding Godly maturity.

Ephesians 5:1 & 2 *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*

So we are to imitate God, be like Jesus Christ and walk in love. That's our goal. Remember that the apostle John wrote:

I John 4:8 *Whoever does not love, does not know God, for God is love.*

God is love, His law is based upon love, a Godly love, an actively concern for others and love for God's law. To know and be like God is to develop a capacity to love like He loves. The Spirit of God influences us in that way and it stands to reason then the more the Holy Spirit guides us and leads us and teaches us, the greater will be our capacity and our inclination to love in a Godly way when we are being led by God. A key scripture and here we see the key:

Romans 5:5 *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God (this is what we're talking about) has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.*

Where does this love come from? Where does the love of God come from? From the Holy Spirit that is being given to us.

Humans are equipped with emotions and this is a most important truth. Now while animals are guided by instinct into the course of life intended by their Creator, man is given powers and opportunities far higher than the animal kingdom.

There is a spirit in man and that spirit imparts to the brain the powers to think and reason, to give intellect and even a spiritual quality and reality to our lives. We know who we are, we know what we are because of that spirit that we have in our mind.

Animals cannot appreciate a fine painting; a Gainsborough, a Rembrandt or a Goya. Animals cannot appreciate a Beethoven sonata or Shuman concerto. You hear a dog howl once in a while when you put it on, they really can't appreciate it, what they're listening to. The literature of great authors, animals can't read. They try to get some of the primates to read but they really can't read. They cannot acquire scientific knowledge. Animals cannot weigh facts and make decisions, render judgments, exert self-discipline or even develop true Godly character. Animals cannot attain access to the Almighty God. They cannot become begotten of Him as His children. That is reserved for the human race. Animals cannot enjoy an actual relationship with their Creator and have their minds opened and enlightened by God's Spirit. Animals cannot come to comprehend spiritual truths and finally become born into God's family. That is reserved for you and I.

Man was put on earth to develop and attain to something infinitely higher than animal destiny. It is more than just instinct for us. Man was intended to develop spiritual, Godly character, to become like God Himself. This all comes through the marvelous human mind and our intellect and our thoughts and our emotions. We come to know the knowledge of God through the mind, not only spiritual development but also emotional maturity is developed through this mind. It comes by right knowledge, creative thinking, right decisions, the use of will power and applying even self-discipline as we're going to read shortly from the Apostle Peter here in just a moment. To rightly direct these actions is man's purpose in life. To learn how to mark his steps and this requires not just a spiritual maturity but an emotional maturity as well. Unfortunately in the secular science

of today's world, most people seem to assume that humans are merely the highest of the animal kind. It's not true, but that's what a lot of people think. They fail to utterly comprehend the magnitude of human potentiality, what God is doing through human beings. So people allow themselves to act thoughtlessly, on impulses, with feelings, moods, emotions being swayed and buffeted with troubles and tragedies and sufferings through irrational actions.

So one is really not mature until emotionally and spiritually grown up and so we asked earlier, how old are you? Are you your chronological age? How does your spiritual age and your emotional age measure up to that? Parents realize that it's the responsibility to teach their children to have control over their tempers and their impulses and feelings, their angers and moods. You try and teach your children to put those things under a certain amount of control, to teach restraint, to teach the opposite of selfishness and vanity. We have to teach that to our children, they're not born with it instinctively. We must learn and teach outgoing concern and love for other people, it's not a natural thing. You learn it, you understand it and so we must teach giving instead of taking. At an earlier definition I read before that emotional maturity is learning to give rather than always taking, which is a biblical principle.

Remember as I mentioned a moment ago, one of the key indicators of spiritual maturity is one's ability to love in a Godly way. We need to empathize again that no person attains true emotional maturity unless he attains that spiritual maturity as well. Now keep in mind that emotional maturity does not mean emotion-less maturity. The truly emotionally mature person controls the emotions but they don't anesthetize them, they don't squash them completely. They do express at the right time and in the proper degree, enthusiasm, happiness, joy, anger, concern, love. Of course many of the attributes of the Holy Spirit itself. They do feel a deep gratitude for blessings. They also deeply feel reverence and adoration for their Creator God and then they sincerely feel compassion toward others. A true feeling of that outgoing concern and they express sympathy and have mercy. Emotional maturity does not crucify emotions; it controls them and guides them with right knowledge and true wisdom. Emotional maturity develops hand in hand with our physical growth, our mental growth and our spiritual growth, all four coming together to make us who we are; a physical growth, a spiritual growth, a mental growth and our emotional growth. The four blending together into what becomes our spiritual destiny and our purpose for life, our character, what people see and what God sees when they look at us. It can bring great and rewarding and lasting happiness. So the key here is the Holy Spirit, something we'll be concentrating on more in the coming weeks. That is one of the elements that have to be included with emotional maturity.

Now the third area I have is some categories of emotions, both immature and mature categories of emotions and there are three categories into which people generally fall. One of the first categories is many people let themselves go to an emotional extreme. They are mere babes emotionally. It never occurs to them to check or control their emotions. Their feelings are always worn on their shirt cuffs, their tempers fly uncontrolled at times, they flatter or gush, and they exaggerate their compliments and

their praise of others. In fact some religious sects even reach out to the more emotional people as part of their religion, the overly emotional.

Then there are those secondly who go to the opposite extreme of stifled emotions and often these are the highly educated and the intellectuals in our society that stifle the emotions and look at things with a squashed or anesthetized emotion. They may have controlled emotions with their minds to the extent that their emotions are being almost put to death. They no longer feel deeply about anything, they're utterly devoid of real sincerity, any depth of true gratitude, any feeling of compassion or real empathy for people. You've got two extremes here; the overly emotional and those who completely squash their emotions.

Then there are those who neither choke off their emotions with mental control nor exert any energy creating them; just listless and indifferent people. They haven't forcibly controlled their emotions or stifled their emotions, they're just listless, indifferent, feeling no real purpose in life, no ambition, no spark, they don't radiate or have any real personality and there isn't enough life in them to generate any noticeably emotional response to anything that goes on. So those are three categories that people may be put into.

But finally there is a fourth category that I've come up with which is really not like any of these three and that is the emotionally mature person who handles his or her emotions properly without going to either extreme yet generates enthusiasm and purpose in life. To truly have that enthusiasm and purpose in your life you have to understand that there's more to life than what we see around us.

I have some symptoms here of emotional immaturity for you. These are by Jerome , PHD and he has some symptoms of emotional immaturity. Number one is volatile emotions. Emotional volatility is indicated by such things as explosive behavior, temper tantrums, low frustration tolerance, responses are of proportion to cause, over-sensitivity, inability to take criticism, unreasonable jealousy, unwillingness to forgive and a capricious fluctuation of moods. That's a volatile emotional person. Then he says there's a system of over-dependence. Over-dependence is indicated by: (a) inappropriate dependence, for example relying on someone when it is preferable to be self-reliant and (b) too great a degree of dependence for too long. Then he says stimulation hunger is a third system. This includes demanding immediate attention or gratification and being unable to wait for anything. Stimulation hungry people are incapable of deferred gratification which means putting off present desires in order to gain a future reward. Their personal loyalty lasts only as long as the usefulness of the relationship. Then egocentricity. Egocentricity he said is self-centeredness. Its major manifestation is selfishness. An egocentric person is pre-occupied with his own feelings and symptoms. He demands constant attention and insists on self-gratifying sympathy, fishes for compliments and makes unreasonable demands.

So that is the emotionally immature person and some of the symptoms that they might have.

Now Doctor William C. Meninger, M.D. comes up with some criteria for emotional maturity. The ability to deal constructively with reality, the capacity to adapt to change, the capacity to find more satisfaction in giving than receiving, the capacity to relate to other people in a consistent manner with mutual satisfaction and helpfulness, the capacity to sublimate, that is to redirect ones instinctive hostile energy into creative and constructive outlets and he says and the capacity to love.

So individuals who are emotional mature generally find that they enjoy those things in life that include other people and emotional mature people are more enjoyable to be around and much less chaotic then people who are emotionally immature. So the more mature person finds it enjoyable to be around other people, to give, to be helpful, to love. Once again, that outgoing concern makes you healthier when it comes to your emotions.

Now here's some characteristics of emotional maturity from Jerome , PhD, and the man I mentioned at first with the initial symptoms of immaturity. Here are some characteristics of emotional maturity and it's interesting as we go through these as you think of some of the scriptures we read already, we have to imitate God and have a Godly love from Ephesians 5. First of all he says, the ability to give and receive love is someone who is emotionally mature. Emotional maturity fosters a sense of security that permits vulnerability. A mature person can show his vulnerability by expressing love and accepting expressions of love from those who love him.

Secondly, the ability to face reality and deal with it. Mature people face reality knowing the quickest way to solve a problem is to deal with it. A person's level of maturity can be directly related to the degree to which they face their problems or avoid their problems. Mature people confront their problems; immature people avoid their problems he says.

Thirdly, just as interested in giving as receiving. A mature persons sense of personal security permits him to consider the needs of others and gives from his personal resources, whether money, time or effort to enhance the quality of life of those he loves. Immaturity is indicated by willing to give but unwilling to receive or willing to receive but unwilling to give.

Fourthly, the capacity to relate positively to life experiences. A mature person views life experiences as learning experiences and when they're positive he enjoys and revels in life, when they're negative he accepts personal responsibility and is confident he can learn from them to improve his life. When things do not go well he looks for an opportunity to succeed. The immature person curses the rain while a mature person sells umbrellas. See it's a different way of looking at exactly the same situation. The ability to learn from experience he says. The ability to face reality and to relate positively to life experiences. He realizes there is a relationship between how he acts and the consequences that occur to him. The ability to accept frustration. The mature person accepts his fate and considers using another approach or going in another direction and moves on with his life. The ability to handle hostility constructively. When frustrated, the immature person looks for someone to blame. The mature person looks for a solution. Immature people attack

people; mature people attack problems. Then his eighth point here, relative freedom from tension system. The mature persons mature approach to live imbues him with a relaxed confidence in his ability to get what he wants from life.

So you start to see how there can be categories somewhat extreme of course to prove a point here of the immature person and the mature person, emotionally. You start to see that a more mature person is able to look beyond himself and able to give.

Let's look at a couple of biblical examples because point four here, area four is finding the right examples of emotional response. Where can we find some right examples of emotional response? We're going to turn to Matthew 23 here and look at Jesus Christ Himself because we can go to God's word to find of course the true way to live, the true way to react, and the proper way to behave. The bible teaches us that our relationship with God must completely dominate our lives until God's way is our way, that's how we have to end up where God's way is our way. It teaches us to feel deeply, although intelligently about things. Jesus Christ is a wonderful example here in Matthew 23 and I'll just read verse 37. Now you can just imagine what extreme deep feelings Jesus experienced when He looked out over the city of Jerusalem and thought upon what He was seeing. It was a city full of deceived, erring, wrong-doing people. But these were people He loved and cared about.

Matthew 23:37 *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"*

So it's kind of with a pained heart that Christ looks out at His creation, what He made, what the Father had Him take care of and He says: you killed anybody I sent to save you with messages from God and He had some emotion expressed here but it was an intelligent expression of feeling. It wasn't unthinking, unguided impulse, the way He looked out over Jerusalem. It was filled with a certain deep meaning and character. What would you or I have done? Would we have just zapped them because they just weren't learning, because mankind had gone so wrong? Would we have called down thunder, lightning from Heaven like some others wanted to do? If it were our creation, how would we react? You notice how Christ reacted in a very intelligent way although He showed some feeling for the people that He loved. Of course Jesus had divine power, He could have gathered the people of Jerusalem to His way of life by force. But had He bought them to Him by force, His whole purpose of building character by free choice would have been defeated. It would have been nothing but automatons or robots. So He willed that mankind, of which Jerusalem is representing here, would make its own decisions. He was grieved that they rejected the truth and the happiness that He was offering them and of course the eternal life that is ultimately being offered to mankind. Mankind has chosen curses and of course ultimately, the way of death. Jesus Christ felt deeply about what He saw and the sins of mankind. He understood there's a greater purpose outside of all this that is being worked out and that is, that mankind has to learn

from his mistakes, develop character, be led by God's Holy Spirit in order to be truly mature when it came to a way of life.

Should we ever feel deeply about things? Should we ever feel emotional? Well yes and Jesus did. Remember when Judas Iscariot led that murdering mob up to Jesus. (We were thinking about that a couple of weeks ago before the Passover). Jesus went off and prayed. In Luke 22, maybe you'll turn over there with me for a moment.

Luke 22: 43 & 44: *Then an angel appeared to Him (This is Jesus Christ) from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

You see its o.k. to feel deeply about things like Christ did. That's a natural emotional response; to hurt, to have feelings.

Now let's look at another example of emotional response, let's look at Paul's vision of maturity here in First Corinthians 13. The apostle Paul was concerned for the spiritual maturity of the Church as under his care and reflecting on his own spiritual development, Paul wrote an interesting letter to the Corinthians. Here in First Corinthians 13, verse 11, of course this is the love chapter.

I 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.*

You see, there's a time to grow up. You don't always want to be a child.

Verse 12: *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

Verse 13: *And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

So the whole chapter He's talking about love, not about any kind of love, but the kind of love we should have if God is living within us. So Paul says, I used to be a kid but hopefully not any more, I've put away the childish things. We grow up and we learn what is truly important in life; which is love, Godly love which is that outgoing concern for others, less of self and more thinking of the concerns and needs of other people. So Paul considers the nature of a child here, the smaller the child, the more self-centered it tends to be. A small baby thinks only of its own needs, comforts and wants. We know that. It's a little black hole of self, sucking everything in it can get when it's very young and quite honestly, a little baby sees the whole universe as revolving around itself, it doesn't yet know what else is out there. But as the child grows, its awareness of things, people and needs outside of itself is heightened. Instead of seeing all toys as its own, it eventually learns that some toys belong to other children, whether they like it or not. Gradually, incrementally, the child's world opens up. As it matures it moves progressively outside of itself into the larger world of other people. So Paul used the same analogy here to the

Corinthians who were not growing up that said, you know, you can't always be a child. So as the child moves into the bigger world of other people, so do we in our spiritual and emotional lives. Paul envisioned moving from childhood to adulthood with a sense of love and maturity which is a very interesting example here of Paul's vision of maturity.

Let's talk about a fifth area, and that is arrested spiritual development. How about arrested spiritual development? Children who freeze their emotional and intellectual progress at a certain level is said to become victims of arrested development. Sometimes it can be from a trauma in their lives, from abuse as a child and they kind of stop where they were. Now we have all even known adult men who woman who appear to be emotionally young, emotionally adolescents. Now when we find Christians who've been baptized for decades behaving as though they were baby Christians, we're probably looking at cases of arrested spiritual development. Right? If we find ourselves fighting the same old problems we fought when we were first converted, we may be suffering from it ourselves. Here's some way of testing for arrested spiritual development and then we're going to look at a spiritual passage in this regard:

Do you still have just big a problem with your temper as when you were first converted?

Do you feel spiritual powerless?

Do you have long dry spells in which nothing seems to be going on between you and God?

Are you unable to generate love, care and concern for others?

Do you live a fundamentally self-centered, self-seeking life?

Do you still seek to manipulate and control others; through tantrums, emotional blackmail and negative stroke seeking?

Is it all about you?

Do anger, hatred and jealousy play an inordinately large role in the way you express your personality?

Do you put others down to make yourself look better?

Does your life reflect more of the works of the flesh than the fruit of the Spirit?

So the answers to some of these questions could be revealing for me and for you as we think about them and they can be helpful in taking stock of where we are in our trajectory towards emotional and spiritual maturity. Now we're going to read something again from Paul here in I Corinthians, chapter 3 because it's clear that Paul was frustrated and disappointed with the Corinthians level of ability to understand spiritual truths. It appears to be an issue of moral irresponsibility. We know this because he rebukes them for it. To

not develop and mature is not correct and I guess we see here in I Corinthians, chapter 3, a case of arrested spiritual development in the Corinthians church.

I Corinthians 3:1 *And I (Paul), brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*

You know you act as you were little children again.

Verse 2 *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;*

Since I last saw you, you guys still haven't grown up, I'm still giving you the milk of the word.

Verse 3 *For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*

So Paul said the brethren, were as adults chronologically who still needed to be fed with a bottle because they wouldn't grow up.

Notice over in Hebrews, a similar passage. Hebrews 5, verses 12 through 14, Paul said to the Hebrews and we assume it was Paul who wrote this mainly because this is almost an identical passage as the one we just read.

Hebrews 5:12 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*

A very similar passage, you should've been able to be teaching people these things now and you can't, you still need to be taught.

Verse 13 *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.*

Verse 14 *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use (like a habit) have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

If you reach a point of maturity, well you can tell when something's not right. These people were in a state of arrested spiritual development because they were relatively ignorant here of God's word. From this we infer that spiritual maturity is partly depended upon an understanding of God's word. Paul here paints a three-fold profile of a spiritually mature person. We can learn from this.

First of all they're able to digest solid food. A spiritually mature person can digest solid food. They're off the bottle now; the milk bottle that is. This means they should be able to

not only to understand and apply to their own lives the simpler milk truths, they should also be able to do this with more advanced spiritual truth.

Secondly, he says that the spiritually mature person is able to teach others. They should at least be able to explain and apply God's truth to other people. Ask ourselves, how well versed are we in the word of God? How well could we explain to somebody else what we believe?

Thirdly, he says they're able to discern good and evil. So you're off the milk bottle, you can teach others and now you can discern good and evil and that's quite a step. This refers to the developed ability to appraise every major area of life from the prospective of God's word and reach a verdict about whether it is true or false, of God or not, spiritually helpful or spiritually harmful.

We notice the similarities between these passages in I Corinthians and Hebrews: babe and adult; milk and solid food; and digestion and discernment.

How do we measure up in our spiritual development? Are we advancing or are we in a state of arrested spiritual development? Then by extension our emotional development can be arrested as well.

Here then is the sixth area, the final area and that's similar to the second one and it's a very important one. The Holy Spirit is the empowering source. The Holy Spirit is the empowering source. A human being is not a complete person until God's Spirit works with his spirit, his or her spirit. Spiritual maturity involves sensitively to and leading by the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that gives us the capacity to love as you read in Romans 5, verse 5. The influence of the Spirit of God in a spiritually immature person may just be a flickering ember. But in the mature person, it's more of a flame, a roaring flame and as he moves deeper in obedience to God, the influence of the Holy Spirit grows greater; it leads us more. The Holy Spirit gives us the very capacity then to obey God, to put away the self in so many more ways than we would be able to do alone.

Let's look at Ephesians, chapter 3 for a moment. Here we see the role of the Holy Spirit as the empowering source in our lives, in our spiritual development.

Ephesians 3: 14, 15 & 16 *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, From whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,*

So God's Spirit goes within you, it's just not acting upon you. When you were baptized and received the Holy Spirit, it now is acting within you.

Verse 17: *That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* This is where the outgoing and Godly love comes from.

Verse 18: *May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height.*

So they can understand spiritual things, begin to comprehend.

Verse 19: *To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

You see the Holy Spirit empowers us, gives us what we need in order to accomplish this. The Holy Spirit imparts the power of God to the people of God. It enables us to transcend our natural human capacities and limitations. The more God's Spirit is active in our life, the quicker we'll attain spiritual maturity. Since the capacity to love in a Godly way is a product of the Holy Spirit, so spiritual maturity then is also its fruit. The empowering source of the Holy Spirit then leads us through stages of spiritual maturity.

As I mentioned earlier, we want to look at something by the Apostle Peter, which we're going to do now because the Holy Spirit then leads us through stages of maturity and we'll see how the Apostle Peter explains it. If anyone knew that spiritual growth and emotional maturity took time, it was the Apostle Peter. Remember his earlier impulsiveness; cutting off people's ears, running around screaming and yelling for Christ to do something? You know, quite an immature response when you compare to how Christ looked over the city of Jerusalem at the sinning population. A very different response than Peters. We see him reach though now a certain emotional and spiritual maturity from the gospel accounts on through now to this epistle. Remember no person attains an emotional maturity unless he also has a true spiritual maturity. II Peter, chapter 1, I'm going to read verses 5 through 11 and then just analyze one thing here.

II Peter 1: 5, 6, 7, & 8 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge (We're going to look at these in a minute)*

To knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness; To godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love; For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, this is the way to do it.

Verse 9: *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.*

You've got to mature; you've got to go on past your initial baptismal point.

Verse 10 & 11 *Therefore, brethren, be ever more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; (a recipe we have to follow)*

For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So here Peter says, and God says, I want you to add to, to develop, to grow in these areas. Notice verse 5 says; add to. Spiritual maturity will always involve unselfish sacrificial living on our part. It is saying no to self and yes to God. It is pleasing God and not pleasing self when the two are in conflict. It's interesting to note from Peter's listing, that they progress and become more mature attributes as we go through them.

In everything there are stages of development. In learning a sport, in learning music (to play the piano), or any skill, there are stages of development and it's the same with emotional and spiritual maturity. There's a beginning stage, you first start playing "Mary had a little lamb," then there's the intermediate stage, the advanced stage and then the expert stage.

So stage one is the beginning stage, the beginner stage. When we look at verse 5 what do we see? We see virtue and knowledge. The concept of the word virtue is making right moral choices. It involves the study of the word of God. You cannot mature spiritually without the knowledge of God first. So start with virtue and knowledge, making right moral choices under the knowledge of God's word.

Then two, the intermediate stage is in verse 6. This is the emotional maturity stage. Emotional maturity must precede spiritual maturity. Self-control is developed first. We learn to say no to what we like to say yes to. Spiritual maturity comes as we learn to discipline ourselves here. Then Peter lists patience or perseverance or endurance; it means to stick it out, it means don't quit what you've started, it means to solve problems and don't shirk problems. So you go from verse 5 to verse 6 from the beginning stage to the intermediate stage. The foundation of God's word then abounds in self-control and perseverance.

Then stage three, the advanced stage. Godliness and brotherly kindness are listed. You see how we've gone to the next level now? Godliness and brotherly kindness. We put off self and we've put on Christ. Brotherly kindness is one of the greatest blessings in life. You start to appreciate and care for others.

Then the fourth stage, the expert stage and what is it? It's the sacrificial service stage, it is giving of yourself without expecting anything in return. It is love. That's where Peter ends up.

So you see the groundwork is laid that you mature and develop, you end up being an expert and being like God and living in the life of love and concern for others. How do we get like this? It doesn't come naturally. We're not born with it. It must come supernaturally. It's not instinctive. It's not going to come quickly either. But, there is a way to get there as verse 5 says; we must give all diligence. That's the key; we have to be diligent about going through these steps of maturity. We mustn't become dull of hearing

just because we've heard it before. Sometimes I'll tell my sons to clean their rooms but when I check later, their rooms are still a mess. When I ask them why they often say, we didn't hear you. Should I take them to get their hearing checked?

The problem is, they didn't want to hear me because they didn't like what I was asking them to do. If we want to mature spiritually, we must be willing to not only learn what God says in His word but also obey Him when He personally applies these truths to areas in our lives. We have to listen. We have to go through these stages of maturity and progress, not being in a state of arrested spiritual development or emotional development. We have to listen to what God is saying.

The same Holy Spirit which enlightens us to understand God's word also engineers situations and points out steps to take to apply that knowledge that we're learning so that we can continue to grow and become a better person and eventually to become perfect. That's the goal. If we do learn to live by every word of God, by God's instruction book, we will learn to guide our emotions intelligently; to think before we speak but we shall not suppress them, neither let them run rampant and uncontrolled where they shouldn't.

Jesus Christ at age 33-1/2 was a perfectly developed man, probably one of the most perfectly developed man of the kind; physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally who ever lived. He was fully mature, those four areas blending harmoniously into one man. We must study His life, follow His example and live as He lived. To grow more emotionally mature is to search for meaning in life which is bigger than you or I, bigger than you or me. It should give you a prospective of the majestic scope of life, not the narrow and limiting prospective of self-interest. We have to look beyond ourselves. It provides us goals to strive for and in this struggle we build those of character that make us more like God, to give us inner strength and make life more meaningful. The ultimate test of our sense of meaning of life is this: does it enhance and enrich, not only our own life but the lives of others? If it does, you'll find a certain rich satisfaction available only to the emotionally mature person.

Now it sounds like a lot of work and it is, but God has given us some time. Spiritually maturity doesn't come easily and it doesn't come overnight. If you want long-lasting results, it's going to cost you something. You ask, is it worth it? It depends on what you want out of life, what your goal in life is, where you're headed in your life. I believe the benefits more than compensate for the effort expended, as scriptures will tell us.

I want to turn to one final passage in Psalms. Psalms 1 is really a psalm of give versus get, of giving rather than taking, of sharing. It's a psalm of self, versus selflessness.

Psalm 1:1 *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

So this is the righteous man that is blessed.

Verse 2: *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

Meditates day and night in the law of the Lord.

Verse 3: He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.