

Helping Missionaries to Have a Healthy, Whole, and “Mature” Personality

A goal for many church leaders is to strive to send, maintain, and bring back whole, healthy, & “mature” missionaries. This paper is intended to give you some additional insight into the positive potential of human personality/maturity. Both psychologists and the New Testament speak about the concept of maturity. The Bible repeatedly uses the concept to describe the character of Christian experience. The Greek word for mature is “teleios,” which is translated “perfect” in the King James Version and “mature” in most recent versions. Its basic meaning is complete or fully developed, and it refers to the potential of the person or thing to grow, develop, or become complete. “**Maturity**” is defined here as the healthy personality and includes the following five dimensions:

1) **Having a realistic view of oneself and others**

- God views each and every person as sinful and in need of a savior (Rom. 3:23).
- Once a person recognizes & responds to this need he or she becomes a new creature, with a new relationship to God, other men, and the world (2 Cor. 12:14-25).
- Another aspect of a realistic Biblical view of self and others is the recognition of natural traits and abilities as well as one’s spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:14-25) and his or her place in the spiritual body (1 Cor.12:14; Eph. 4:4).
- A realistic perception of the need of others, both believers (Gal. 6:2) and unbelievers (Matt. 25:34-40), is the Biblical expectation as well as a divine view of the social order (Rom. 13:1-3).

2) **Accepting oneself and others**

- Perhaps the clearest statement of this principle is given by Jesus: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39).
- Acceptance means realizing that Christians will still stumble occasionally spiritually after we’re saved (1 Jn. 1:7-9).
- God loves everyone whom He created, which means that everyone is worthwhile as a person. Hence, everyone should be accepted as a person. This does not imply approval of all the person’s behaviors or motives (Jn. 3:16).
- However, the Bible calls the mature believer to a very high level of love for other believers (1 Jn. 3:16), to a deep sensitivity to their weaknesses (Heb. 12:12), and to the whole body as brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

3) **Living in the present but having long-range goals**

- While the Bible describes the future life with God, there is a very heavy emphasis on present actions and attitudes.
- The fact that none of us knows when Christ will return causes us to be ready at any time, and to live for today. In Luke 12:40 after Jesus told the parable of the watchful servants he said, “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”
- “Abide” and “grow up in Christ” are repeatedly used to emphasize the current ongoing focus of the Christian. (Eph 4:15-16).
- However, the Christian life is also described as an ongoing race with a prize (Phil. 3:13-14): “2 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

- Wisdom tells us that it is wise and many times necessary to make plans, dream, and have hopes of doing things some time in advance, keeping in mind the caution of our uncertainty of tomorrow (parable of Rich fool in). We read in Rom 15:23-24 that Paul made plans years in advance to visit the Christians in Rome.

4) Having values

- Joshua in the process of conquering and possessing the land appeals to the Israelites, “Choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:15).
- Paul in Philippians 3:8 describes a complete value rethinking, and accompanying actions are reinterpreted and reversed. However the value reassessment is an ongoing process (Phil 3:13-14).
- The process of reassessment is the commitment of oneself to a set of values that reorganizes the person and gives him an identity. For example, Paul frequently described his identity and union with Christ by the phrase, “in Christ.”

5) Developing one’s abilities and interests and coping with the task of living

- The development and use of one’s talents and gifts (Eph. 4:7) is a necessary part of Christian maturity, since they are given to the church for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).
- Timothy was encouraged to rekindle the gift of God within him (2 Tim. 1:6).
- The encouragement of growth toward Christian maturity seems to be the purpose of the gifts and the goal of the ministry (Eph. 4:15-16).
- Interest in everyday living involves working to support oneself (1 Tim. 5:8).
- Thus, the developing of one’s abilities, talents, and gifts begins to merge with the Christian values and a Biblically appropriate perception of oneself and others. This merger produces congruence in the mature Christian of all that he says and does (James 2:26; 1 Jn. 3:18).
- For example, in the first epistle of John the apostle describes three criteria of mature Christian faith: believing in the truth (Jesus is the Christ), loving the brotherhood, and practicing righteousness. These tend to focus on three different aspects of the human person: cognitive, behavioral or social, and emotional-motivational aspects. These joint criteria thus emphasize the unified or integrated aspect of Christian maturity in the personality.

May God bless you as you strive to live a whole and mature life for our Lord Jesus Christ and to imitate His perfect example!