

# Bible Studies for Life for August

## 17: A maturing life

August 5, 2008

• Hebrews 5:11-6:12

The hallway of our house is an art gallery. Years of children's finger paintings, pumpkin cut-outs, and cotton ball "snowmen" grace the walls. My favorite is the framed matte with photos of my daughter's school pictures—one for each year from kindergarten to now (she's a high school junior at the time of this writing).

I love it because it shows how she has changed and stayed the same over the years. Her eyes still are blue, her hair still is curly, her nose still is shaped the same in all the pictures. But some things are changed, too. She clearly is becoming a young woman, and the changes that mark the passing of time are obvious.

I am crazy about this picture because it shows how she has matured over time, and I can remember how her actions reflect an ongoing maturing process that goes far beyond the surface level of the photos.

Can we say the same for our own lives? Can we gladly testify to the old preacher's line: "I ain't what I wanna be, and I ain't what I'm gonna be, but thank God, I'm not what I used to be?" Can we look back over our walk as a Christian and see the ways in which we've grown and changed? The ways in which we still are the same?

This week's lesson is about this very idea—the idea that Christians should be growing in spiritual maturity. The good news is that all Christians can reach a higher level of maturity. All Christians can change for the better, and with God's help, can become a stronger person of faith. We're going to

dig into Hebrews 5 and 6 to unearth ways of growing in faith.

### **Discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:11-14)**

The Hebrew Christians were spiritually immature. The writer of Hebrews uses the analogy of a baby that takes milk and never grows to taking food of a substantial nature. The specific food needed for spiritual maturity was an understanding of righteousness.

Take care to note verse 14 with your students. The Bible teaches that the fruit of spiritual maturity is the ability to “distinguish good from evil.” This is called discernment, and it involves making decisions about right and wrong.

The fine art of discernment is necessary in the life of Christians who are faced with issues not explicitly discussed in the Bible or found in Jesus’ teachings. We are called to grow and mature in the faith so we can make hard decisions by using discernment in deciding between right and wrong choices, as well as “good” versus “best” choices.

### **Application ideas**

- Ask your learners to identify areas of their spiritual walk where they’ve become stagnant. Has this lack of growth led to any regrettable decisions? How might they view ongoing spiritual growth as opportunities in light of past mistakes?
- Consider using an illustration from farm life. If a plant stops growing, it is dying. A plant that is unhealthy and failing to grow never will bear its intended fruit.
- Ask your learners to take note of Hebrews 5:14 and emphasize for them how the passage implies a day-to-day effort at working out spiritual growth. Explore with your class what a “daily workout” might look like spiritually.

Should it include regular Bible study? Prayer? Worship? Communion?

### **Be fruitful and blessed by God (Hebrews 6:1-8)**

The writer of Hebrews believed the readers of the letter needed to move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ by making deliberate efforts to grow spiritually. In this passage, we are exhorted to rely on the elementary teachings about Christ so that we will be fruitful in our spiritual growth.

One of the ways to do this is to help your learners identify their level of spiritual maturity by discussing how much the truths of Christianity have affected their lives. Would they agree with the writer that they have “tasted the heavenly gift” and “shared in the Holy Spirit?”

Another way is to help them assess their fruitfulness in the kingdom of God. The seventh and eighth verses of chapter 6 describe how land that is full of thorns and thistles is fruitless and eventually will be burned. Land that produces a useful crop receives the blessing of God.

What then, are fruitful “crops” that God blesses in your church? Ask them to name specifics.

This passage likely will raise some questions about verses 4-6 because it calls into question the doctrine of perpetual or permanent salvation.

Some commentators have various theories about how we might interpret this passage. Here are some possible alternatives for understanding the text:

- (1) The writer is presenting a hypothetical case, based on the Greek grammar.
- (2) The writer was warning against believers renouncing their faith and losing their salvation.
- (3) The threat involves a loss of rewards rather than a loss of salvation.

(4) The readers were true Christians whose lives showed little or no evidence they were true believers.

(5) The readers were not true Christians.

(6) Hebrews was addressed to Christian Jews still worshipping in a Jewish synagogue composed in part of non-Christian Jews. By the author's use of first (vv. 1-3) and second (vv. 4-6) person, he indicates these two groups. Verses 1-3 exhorted Christians to move beyond the Christian truths compatible with Jewish doctrines, while verses 4-6 refer to a decisive rejection of Christ by Jewish unbelievers.

Ultimately your learners must choose their own interpretation of this passage, but it is this writer's personal belief that Christians do not lose their salvation. Work hard to keep your group focused on the learning goals of this lesson—thinking about spiritual maturity—not on this divisive doctrine. You might consider setting aside another day to discuss this with your group.

### **Demonstrate diligence (Hebrews 6:9-12)**

The writer of Hebrews is making note of their works of love and the way they have served God by helping God's people. The writer was encouraging them to continue in this diligence and avoid laziness.

How can your learners do this? One way is to look for good examples of faithful servants of God and then work to emulate what they do right. Each of your learners likely know at least one person who is spiritually mature. Ask them to identify that person to themselves and then describe their traits of maturity to the group.

Ask the whole group to share and make a list on a marker board or flip chart of the things they say. When everyone has shared, ask them if there are other traits of spiritual maturity. Finally, ask them to identify 2-3 traits they need to improve in their own lives. Close with a prayer asking for

strength from God to improve in those areas and to grow spiritually.