

DSBC Spiritual Maturity Class 201

We're going to discuss four key steps to spiritual maturity:

1. Get to Know God Through His Word (the Bible)
2. Talk to God (Prayer) Continually
3. Live in Community with Other Christians (be an active part of a local church)
4. Spread God's Story (the Gospel or Good News)

1. Get to Know God Through His Word (the Bible) - to discover **WHO HE IS, WHAT HE WANTS,** and **HOW HE WORKS.**

God's creation gives us evidence that He exists, but we can't **KNOW** Him and His ways apart from Scripture. Without Scripture, what we know about God comes from our influencers.

If you claim Jesus as Savior, why wouldn't you want to learn **ALL YOU CAN ABOUT HIM?**

When I was single, had I been introduced to some attractive woman who was interested in me, I would've been crazy to spend my time asking **OTHER PEOPLE** questions about her: favorite movies, color, hobbies, sports, etc. I could find out those things from people who knew her, **OR I COULD FIND OUT STRAIGHT FROM HER.** The best way to get to know her would be to **SPEND TIME** with her and to **LISTEN** to her. It wouldn't make much sense to learn about her from some guy who heard some stuff about her back in high school.

The Bible is a big book and getting started reading it is intimidating. Here are four steps to help you get started on this **MONUMENTAL TASK** of knowing God through His Word.

A. Use a modern translation. I primarily use the **NLT**, a **THOUGHT FOR THOUGHT** translation. It reads easily while very accurately giving the authors' intended meaning. The **ESV** is a **WORD FOR WORD** translation. It's loved by the scholarly type, but still pretty easy to read. All modern/contemporary translations get criticized, but all of the major ones (**NLT, ESV, NIV,** etc.) are more accurate than the **KJV** and much easier to read and understand.

B. Use a daily devotional. Get a book like 100 Bible Verses everyone should know by heart by Robert J. Morgan, the one year THROUGH the BIBLE devotional by David R. Veerman, or My Utmost For His Highest by Oswald Chambers. Sign up for a free daily email devotional at www.odp.org. Any of these will give you a short portion of Scripture and a story or illustration to explain it. They take just a few minutes and you can read that day's devotion before you even get out of bed each morning.

C. Use a STUDY BIBLE. I've used the Life Application Study Bible for years. They come in lots of translations (**NLT, NIV, KJV,** etc.) Study Bibles have notes that clarify, explain context, and deal with difficult/debated verses. **Currently, I use the NLT Parallel Study Bible. It has the LASB notes on one side and NLT Study Bible notes (more scholarly) on the other.**

If you discovered a diary in Connecticut, written in English in the 1830's, you probably wouldn't understand everything written in it. You'd see strange words and phrases. To know what the writer was saying, you'd need to learn about the language, culture, politics, clothing, food, important events, etc. of that time and place.

The Bible was written over about 1,600 years, from as far back as 1,500 B.C., through the first century A.D, in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), by 40 human authors, on 3 continents (Africa, Asia, Europe). **Clearly, we need help understanding what was written.**

D. Start with the Gospel of John. John wrote with this purpose:

John 20:31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

When you finish with **John**, read **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**. Those three Gospels follow the same general outline of Jesus' life, so they sound similar and use similar stories. John's Gospel is different. He focused far more on Jesus' teaching and less on stories. John is 90% unique: only 10% of what he wrote is found in the other Gospels. After you make it this far, keep on reading. Ask for help. And don't get lost in all the rules and genealogies.

*****I use a Bible app (YouVersion) and listen when I'm driving by myself.**

2. Talk to God (Prayer) Continually - Prayer is simply talking to God. Prayer isn't a way to get what we want, but a way to draw near to God and get to know Him better. In true prayer, as we draw close to Him, His desires become our desires. People say, *"Prayer changes things,"* but since God never changes, the main thing prayer changes is **US** - how we live and how we respond to the things we face each day.

If we love God, we'll talk to Him **REGULARLY** and **CONSTANTLY**. All day long we'll be in conversation with Him, even if it's just a few words here and there, like you may text your spouse or best friend throughout the day. But we also need a **DEVOTED TIME** to talk to Him **DAILY**, and it needs to be **BALANCED**. Prayer is way more than asking God for things! The **ACTS** model reminds us what to pray. It's easy to remember because Acts is a Bible book.

A – ADORATION

First, start your prayers by focusing on **God**. Tell Him how much you love Him - **WORSHIP** Him. If our words come from the heart, it doesn't matter how many we use. We can tell Him, or sing to Him, or use Scripture:

Psalm 103:1 Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name.

C – CONFESSION

1 John 1:8-9 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

Second, confess your sins to God – **SPECIFICALLY**. **It's easy to ask for BLANKET COVERAGE:** *"Dear God, please forgive all my sins."*

But getting specific makes us think about our actual sins and shows sincerity:

“Father, please forgive me. I’m sorry for how I treated my wife this morning and I need to tell her. Forgive me for going to that Triple X website last night. Please help me to overcome my sexual lust. I’m sorry for being so selfish and self-centered. Help me to see other people’s needs and hurts. Forgive me for yelling at my son today when he wouldn’t eat. I don’t want to teach him to act like that. Please help me control my temper...”

WHICH OF THOSE CONFESSIONS SOUNDS SINCERE? When we confess our sins to God, He **ALWAYS** forgives us. He never says, **“No, I’m going to make you wait for a while.”**

T – THANKSGIVING

Psalm 118:1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

Third, **THANK** God for His blessings (**FAVOR**) - the things He’s already done for us.

How often should we thank God for **FORGIVENESS** and **SALVATION**? How about our most important human relationships (**spouse, children, family, friends, church family**)?

It’s easy to focus on the things we **WANT** and forget about the things we **ALREADY HAVE** - a home, transportation, clothing, more than enough food, education, fun . . . **MILLIONS OF**

PEOPLE DO WITHOUT THESE BASICS EVERY DAY. **Why did God allow you to be born in America instead of some third world country?** Our thanks should **NEVER RUN OUT.**

S – SUPPLICATION

Philippians 4:6 Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Last, pray for yourself and for others. When do you think **MOST PEOPLE** make their **REQUESTS** during prayer? **First! What usually comes first in YOUR prayers?**

Putting our requests **LAST** shows **HUMILITY**. It models what Jesus said about the **first** and the **last**, the **proud** and the **humble**. It also gives us better perspective and sometimes, after **ADORATION, CONFESSION, AND THANKSGIVING**, we realize that some of the requests we **PLANNED** to make aren’t important, necessary, or even **HOLY**.

But it’s **ALWAYS** right to ask God for guidance, wisdom, opportunities to serve, and holy friendships and partnerships. The following quote is from a discipleship study called *The Life*:

Prayer is both the easiest thing and the hardest thing we can do. It is easy in that God constantly invites us to connect with Him through prayer anywhere and anytime. Yet, it is also quite difficult because it requires dependence on God, faith that He loves us, trust that He will show up, and conviction that He will respond and communicate with us. Prayer also requires some hard work on our part - we need to show up regularly and be available, authentic, and vulnerable, so that we can hear whatever God has for us. (The Life: Living The Spiritual Disciplines, p. 27)

3. Live in Community With Other Christians (Be An Active Part of A Local Church)

A. Schedule Your Life/Your Family’s Life Around Your Church

I don't want to exaggerate or sensationalize the past, but in previous generations, this is how a **LOT** more people who claimed to love Jesus actually lived/operated. Christians didn't let so many things compete with their church attendance/involvement.

Not anymore. I know people who claim to be Christians but they're in church a few times a year, maybe once per month. **And they're not missing because of work.** In the South, anyway, I lived through this change in the early 1990's. First, Wednesdays stopped being saved for church. As a kid in the 80's, no rec or school sports played on Wednesdays. That changed in the 90's, and Sunday followed quickly. Suddenly, weekends became about travel ball and all kinds of extracurricular activities for people who **CLAIMED** to be Christians. Church attendance became optional, and you dared not question those people about their love for Jesus!

Today, many so-called Christians think it's **ABSOLUTELY NORMAL** to schedule Jesus into their lives when it doesn't **CONFLICT** with things that **REALLY** matter to them.

If you teach others, especially your family, to love ANYTHING more than Jesus and His Church, you're a terrible leader and you can be assured that God will hold you responsible.

B. Join A Small Group Bible Study

Do you know who meets together regularly with other Christians to study the Bible? **People who love Jesus so much that they want to OBEY Him and KNOW Him more.** Conversely, do you know who **DOESN'T** meet together regularly with other Christians to study the Bible? **People who DON'T love Jesus so much that they want to OBEY and KNOW Him more.**

Whatever we love, we give it time, money, and attention. Right? I love playing golf and it costs me. I love lifting weights, and it costs me. I love Georgia football and it costs me. **What do you love?** It costs you. **How much is it costing you to love Jesus?**

There's a **CUMULATIVE EFFECT** to hearing sermons and attending Bible study for **YEARS** that's **INVALUABLE** and **IRREPLACEABLE.** **Why can you sing at least part of most songs from some period 10, 20, 30 years ago, even though you haven't heard those songs in years?** Because you listened to them **OVER** and **OVER** again. It's the same way with learning Scripture: the more you read, listen, and study God's Word, the more **INGRAINED** it becomes in your mind and the better you understand it and can present/explain it.

If we love Jesus enough, we'll make any sacrifice necessary to **REGULARLY** and **CONTINUALLY** study God's Word with other Christians. In fact, the **COST** you're paying to follow Jesus is **DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL** to how much you love Him. If you're not happy with that tells you about yourself, **START** or **JOIN** a small group Bible study at our church. If you don't believe it, well, some people didn't used to believe that the earth is round, either.

C. Give Tithe and Offerings

Tithe means tenth. Jesus validated the tithe:

Matthew 23:23 *“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. **You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.**”*

But there’s no mention of tithing after the Gospels. It’s not **commanded** or **rescinded**. Christians debate whether tithing is still a starting place for giving to God, but there’s this: **every New Testament example of giving goes far beyond the tithe**. None fall short of it.

Your tithe goes to your **CHURCH**. Your tithe isn’t to be used for anything else. If you want to support other ministries, or special offerings, or some individual, or a building fund, that’s an **OFFERING** and it’s **ABOVE** the tithe. Your tithe goes to your **CHURCH**.

If you don’t think you can afford to tithe, you’re wrong. Anybody with any kind of income can and should tithe. You may have to get rid of some bills, but you can tithe. Then work out your finances so that you can give **MORE**. Use your money to support people and ministries that build God’s Kingdom. Store up **ETERNAL** treasure instead of your own **EARTHLY** treasure. The New Testament calls us to **SACRIFICIAL** giving.

D. Serve Your Church and Serve the World With and Through Your Church

Discover your spiritual gifts and use your talents and resources to **SERVE** your church. **BE A NECESSARY, USEFUL, IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR CHURCH!** Don’t just **SHOW UP**. If you’ve been here for a while, **YOU SHOULD BE SERVING IN SOME WAY**. Every member is a part of the body. There are no useless parts of the body. There are no parts of the body that get a free ride. If your pinkie toe hurts, it affects every step you take, even though it’s not the foot, knee, or thigh.

If every church member served in some way, we wouldn’t even recognize this place.

Give to the missions and ministries our church supports. We’re helping people in other places reach people we’ll never be able to reach. Be a part of it!

When you serve with and through our church, you become a part of a **TEAM**. You see that your contributions, big or small, make a difference. You gain confidence to serve God on your own and to serve in greater ways. **We’ll talk about this in Class 301.**

4. Share What Jesus Has Done For You

Your public baptism is the easiest way to do this. We **START** the Christian life by telling people what Jesus has done for us. We get baptized **ONCE**, surrounded by Christian family and friends, but how do we share Jesus every day after that?

We’ll talk about this in Class 401, but here are the basics:

A. With Your Life

Matthew 7:14-16 *“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*

How we live **MATTERS**: our actions either **VALIDATE** or **INVALIDATE** what we say we believe, so we must **OBEY** Jesus and **REPENT** when we don't. Repentance involves **CHANGE** and it often requires us to apologize to people who have seen us sin.

B. With Your Words

1 Peter 3:15b *And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.*
Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.*

How we live **MATTERS**, but we must always be ready to tell people **WHY** we live how we do. Always be ready to share Jesus with people, especially if they ask. Look for ways to bring Jesus to your conversations. With practice, we can do that with **ANY** topic.

DSBC Spiritual Maturity Class 201 Covenant

1. I WILL GET TO KNOW GOD THROUGH HIS WORD (THE BIBLE) - to discover **WHO HE IS, WHAT HE WANTS,** and **HOW HE WORKS.**

2. I WILL TALK TO GOD (PRAY) CONTINUALLY - Prayer is simply talking to God.

3. I WILL LIVE IN COMMUNITY WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS (I Will Be An Active Part of My Church)

- A. I will schedule my life/my family's life around my church.
- B. I will join a small group Bible study.
- C. I will give a tithe and offerings.
- D. I will serve my church and serve the world with and through my church.

4. I WILL SHARE WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR ME

- A. With My Life
- B. With My Words

Print Name _____

Sign Name _____ Date _____