

Step Into Spiritual Maturity With These 5 Action Steps

I sat in the pastor's office, hurt, angry and feeling like a wild animal backed into the corner. I had been called in for a meeting. It was emotional. I had thought the worst. There was a misunderstanding. It was far from my best moment. *Couldn't he understand how I was feeling? No one asked me for my input.* One hurt and misinformation on top of another seemed to form a mountain. Emotionally charged drama and words I couldn't take back seemed to echo in the room. I realized the parts of my inward self, the parts that I had tried to keep hidden, were suddenly on display in that meeting.

I was embarrassed. My immaturity was standing in the middle of the room as if screaming in a bullhorn. I realized my pastor wasn't the problem, it was me. My pastors loved me enough to see past the words and tears. They saw past my worst, and trusted God for my maturity.

I am happy to say that above scene was about 10 years ago. We all stuck it out, and I would like to tell you I've matured. We didn't leave the church then, and when we did it was because God obviously sent us. We were all in agreement that it was the God timing. I have amazing amounts of love and respect for these people. It's funny how teenagers think they are right. They often say and do some of the wildest and inappropriate of actions. I had been acting like a spiritual teenager.

Jesus instructs us that we will know people by their fruit (Matt. 7:15-20). This means, what are our lives producing? Are we producing love, joy, peace and patience in our lives? Are people's lives being changed for the good when others are around us? Do our lives bear good fruit? This is not being judgmental. This is being wise. This is realizing that we live

in a time where there are a lot of wolves in sheep clothing and false prophets abounding. We need to step back and become fruit checkers in other people's lives and in our own. This means we need to use wisdom and discernment.

Being a person operating in the fivefold gifts is a huge challenge. It's our job to equip the saints (Eph. 4:11). Those saints often come with baggage and challenges. It's a lot like parenting. I have often joked that parenting is a "full contact sport." Sometimes there is a lot to walk through with people. Sometimes those people will want to grow up, and sometimes they will be kicking and screaming on the inside refusing to grow. Sometimes those same people can act like toddlers and teenagers. As a self-proclaimed "ninja mom," there have been times I have done great with this, and there have been times I have utterly fallen flat on my face.

Fruit needs time to mature. Have you ever tried to pick fruit before its time? It's bitter and green. Often it can be easily seen as bad fruit, but truthfully it just needs more time on the vine. Perhaps that person you so easily brush off as having bad fruit isn't really a person with bad fruit. Perhaps the fruit is just green. We have to learn to discern the difference between fruit that is bad and fruit that is just immature.

Here are some points I hope help you do this:

- Be slow to anger but abound in steadfast love (James 1:19). As leaders and as Christians, we need to love our people. This is a genuine love. This is the 1 Corinthians 2:14 kind of love. Where we have to remember that love is patient and kind and it keeps no record of love. Choose love before emotions.
- Be quick to forgive (Col. 3:13)
- Ask the Lord to show you the truth. Discernment is a very valuable tool in the arsenal of a spirit filled believer. I often have said this prayer to God in times

of conflict: *God, if the problem is in me, then change me. If it's in them, then You talk to them.* People don't always need you to tell them when they are wrong. Let God do that. Be humble enough to realize if you are the problem let God show you.

- Often in these conflicts, the problem isn't just the situation, but it is something bigger. Whatever happened opened up another wound in the person. I can tell you in the case that I mentioned, this is exactly what happened. It wasn't just the misunderstandings that brought me to the place of the "emotional renegade teen." It was other wounds that weren't healed as healed as I thought they were. This situation just brought that in front of me. Pray that God would show you what the root of the situation is.
- Stay humble (Prov. 16:18).

The sad news is many times when conflicts like the above happen, people grow hurt or offended and don't grow from it. Sometimes it is because they refuse to grow, and sometimes the leadership just brushes them aside, thinking they don't matter or that all their fruit is bad. Remember, if a person wants to be shepherded, even bad fruit can be used as fertilizer.

Don't discount the spiritual teenagers God has trusted to your care. Some of the most loud and vocal ones are probably called to be world-shakers and nation-changers. You are helping their fruit mature, and they need your tender care. They need you in their lives. Don't be quick to assume fruit is bad when it could just be green. The church as a whole is deficient in spiritual mothers and fathers. Be that in those lives God has given to your care. Just as in parenting a teenager, often those who push you away need you the most. They need to know you want what is best for them.

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