

Daily Devotionals: Dear Church | July 24, 2022

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 | Maturity

Day 1

Over the coming week, we're diving into 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 to see what the Holy Spirit might want to reveal to us through Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. While they were dealing with some distinct disagreements, their struggles weren't unique to them. They wrestled with the same sin we do today.

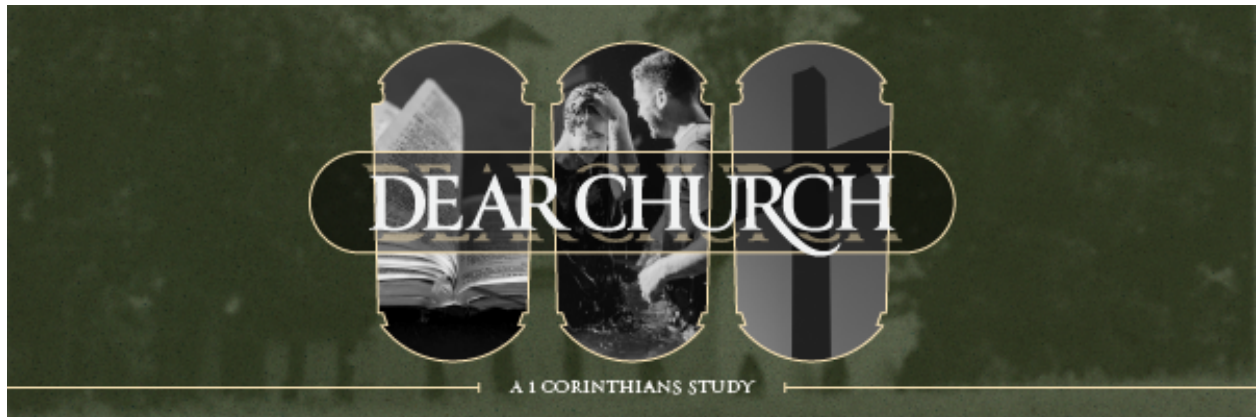
As we dig into this week's text, we're going to spend some time dwelling in the Scripture as a whole. One of the ways we can hear from God in His Word is by becoming curious about our observations. Pay attention to the smaller inferences. Notice words that bring meaning. For example, be inquisitive about why there is an "and" instead of a "but" or why certain words would have been used instead of others. Ask yourself questions as you read along like "What does this mean?," "Why would that be there?," and "What was going on here?" You may not be able to answer all of the questions you have, but noticing you have them is an important part of studying the Scriptures. Pay close, prayerful attention to the nuances in the passage.

Before you read the text today, take a deep breath and ask God to guide you through the verses we'll read today.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9.

¹ Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their



own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

What are your initial reactions to the text?

Read through the verses once more, noticing what stands out to you.

What do you sense is the overall theme of this passage?

What words are repeated, if any?

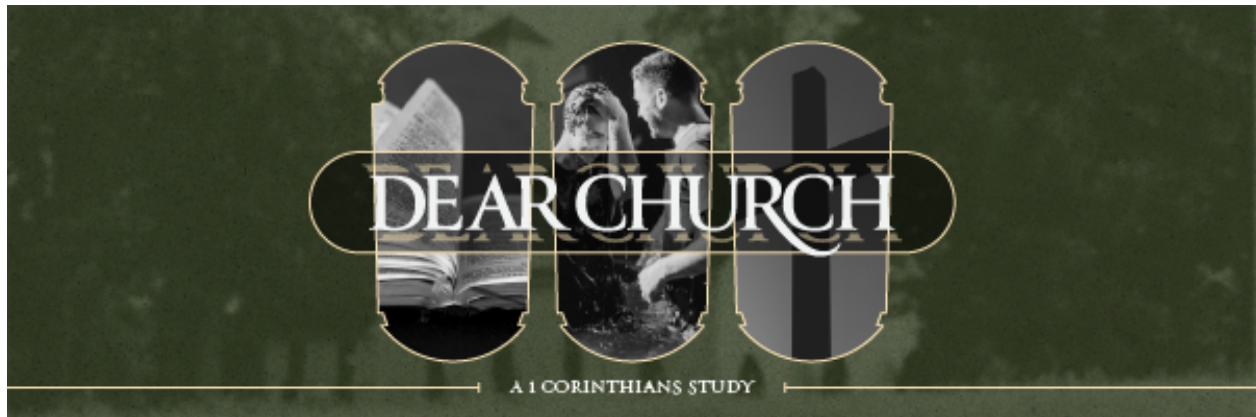
What stands out to you? Why do you think that is?

What questions do you have?

What is confusing?

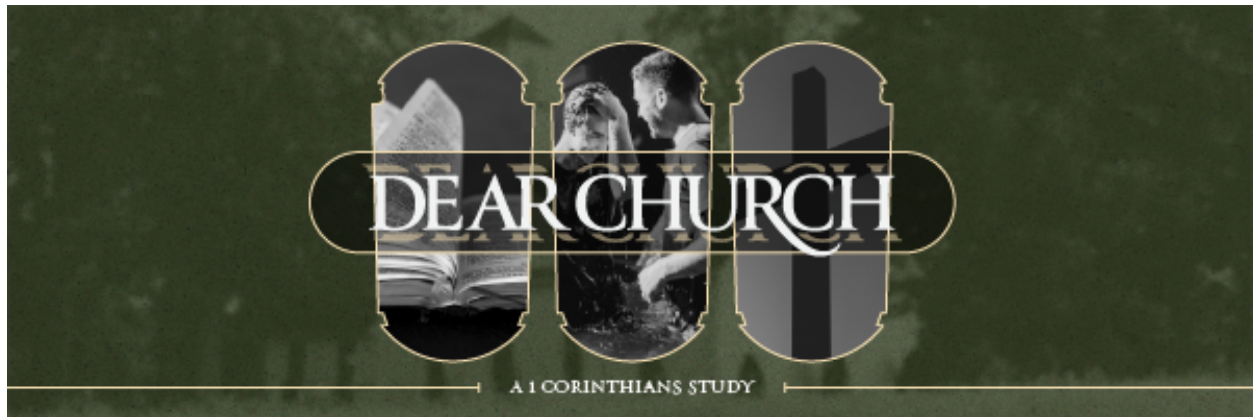
What is convicting?

What is encouraging?



RESPONSE: What is one takeaway from your time with this passage today?

PRAYER: Write a prayer based on your reading and study today.



Day 2

As we continue to dig deeper into **1 Corinthians 3:1-9**, we'll spend our time today examining verses 1-3. We're looking at the context of the passage to see what God might have to say to us in the nuances of Paul's words.

As we begin today, read verses 1-2 in **1 Corinthians 3**: *¹ Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.*

Paul states he was unable to address the Corinthians as “people who live by the Spirit,” because they were still worldly. He calls them “mere infants in Christ.” The Greek word for “infants” here is *nēpios*, meaning “an infant; simple-minded; immature person.” Paul illustrates the immaturity of the people of Corinth by sharing how he gave them milk and not solid food. He goes on to specifically say why they are still immature.

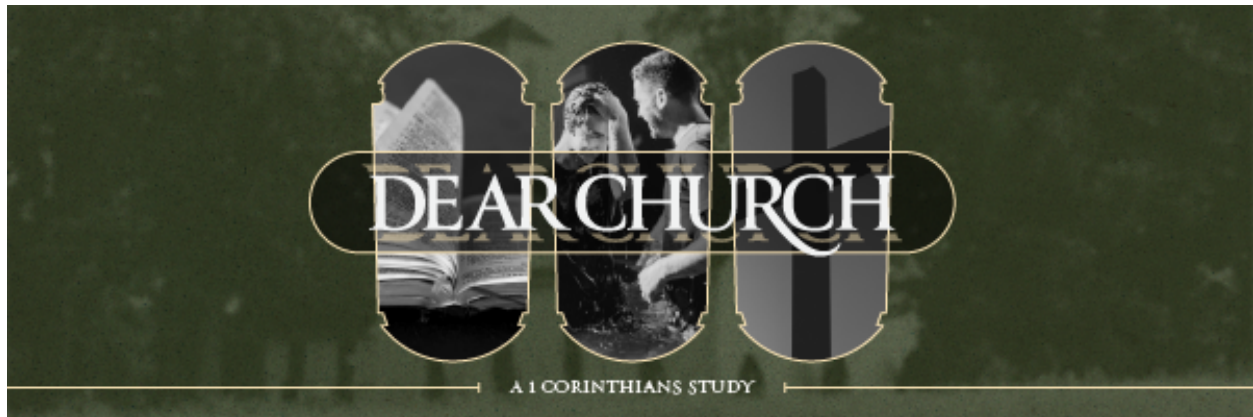
Read 1 Corinthians 3:3: *³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?*

What reason does Paul give to the Corinthians for their spiritual immaturity?

What evidence does he cite that points to this reality?

It's important to flip back a chapter to see the context of what Paul is addressing with the church in Corinth.

Look at these verses from **1 Corinthians 2**: *¹ And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but*



with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written:

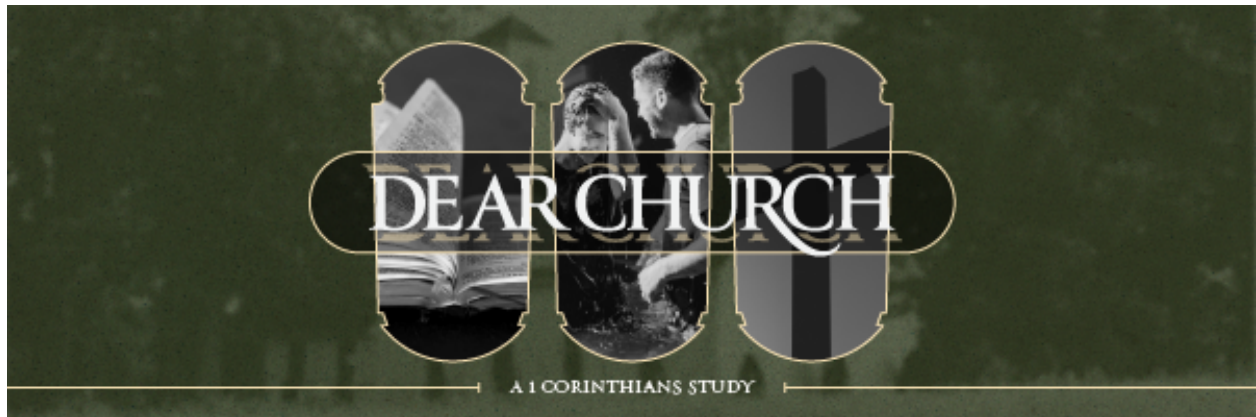
*"What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived"—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—*

¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. ¹⁵ The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶ for,

*"Who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?"*

But we have the mind of Christ.

What connections or themes do you see between 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 2:1-16?



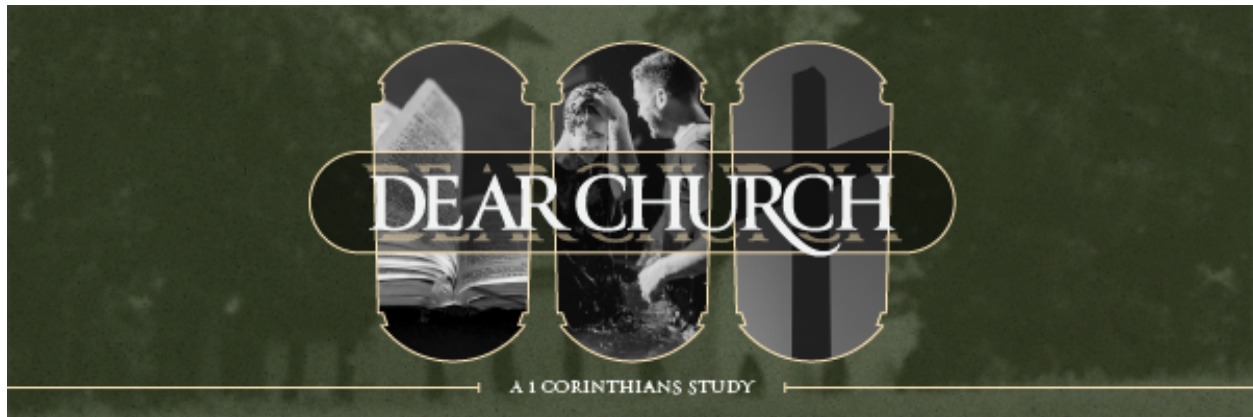
How does Paul speak of the differences between life in the Spirit and living by human or worldly wisdom?

How does Paul explain life in the Spirit versus life in the flesh?

What does it look like in everyday life to have the mind of Christ?

RESPONSE: What is one takeaway from your time with this passage today?

PRAYER: Write a prayer based on your reading and study today.



Day 3

“Forget them all. Come with me where you’ll never, never have to worry about grown-up things again.” Peter Pan

As we begin today, take a moment to consider those words from Peter Pan. What do you think of when you think of “grown-up things?” Do bills, laundry, appointments and schedules, meetings, responsibilities come to mind? Do you think of the things that cause worry in your heart and mind? Do you wish to fly off with Peter Pan to a place where you don’t ever have to worry about those things again?

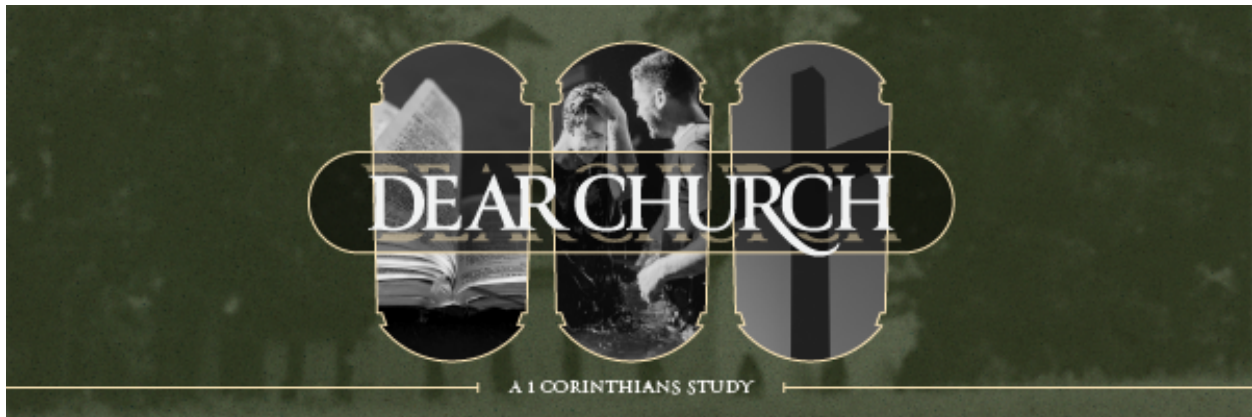
So many times, when we think about maturity or read about spiritual infancy, the nature of our adult lives and everything tied to them comes front and center. We think about maturity as leaning into hard tasks that leave us feeling overwhelmed or dutiful. We can, at times, glamorize the child-like nature of infancy, longing for simpler things.

As we dig into the text today, it’s important for us to recognize the differences between the sometimes-dreadful adult responsibilities and the kind of spiritual maturity God brings. With this invitation in mind, read our text for today:

1 Corinthians 3:1-4: *¹ Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?*

What do you notice about the connection between spiritual infancy (living in the world) and spiritual maturity (living by the Spirit)?

What specific behaviors does Paul depict as evidence of the Corinthians’ worldliness or spiritual infancy?



As we dig into the meaning of the words for “worldly” in this text, it’s important to note this information from commentator Craig Blomberg: “worldly” in verse 1 is a slightly different Greek word than in verse 3, but both are pejorative. The KJV translates both as “carnal,” that is, “fleshly” or dominated by one’s sinful nature, in this context manifested by jealousy and quarreling. “Spiritual” must therefore mean not merely having the Spirit but having the Spirit *in charge*.

Immaturity (or spiritual infancy) can be described as “the result of insufficient growth, or a failure to develop to one’s full potential.” Spiritual maturity is defined as “the development of Christlike character and behavior in the Christian through a renewed mind and tested faith.” This development and transformation cannot happen apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

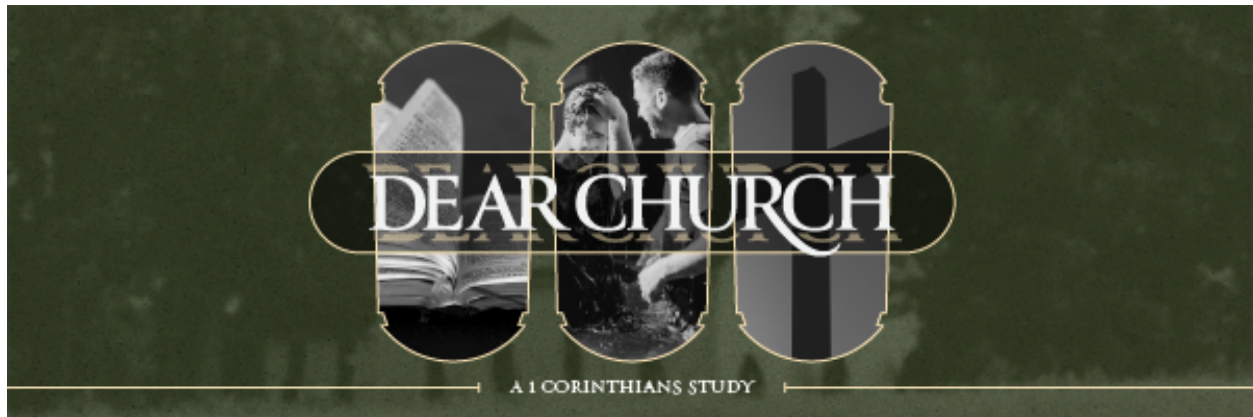
In Ephesians 4, Paul paints another picture of the juxtaposition of those who have been built up to spiritual maturity and those who are living as spiritual infants.

Read Ephesians 4:11-15.

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

How does Paul depict spiritual maturity and spiritual infancy in the Ephesians passage? Does this support or align with what is written in 1 Corinthians 3? How so?

God invites us into the process of spiritual maturity, but it’s up to us what type of spiritual food we will eat. Will we be content to live on milk as infants or will we, through the Holy Spirit, grow to maturity and Christlikeness? Blomberg says, “Believers do not automatically have Christ in charge of every area of their lives. Christians are free to take back a certain measure of



control and in essence do so every time they consciously sin.” Surrender is a key part of our growth in spiritual maturity.

Is it possible to be a Christian without experiencing transformation or growing in maturity?

What keeps us from maturing? Do you desire spiritual maturity or do you think of it as drudgery?

Where have you taken back a certain measure of control in your life? What needs to be surrendered today?

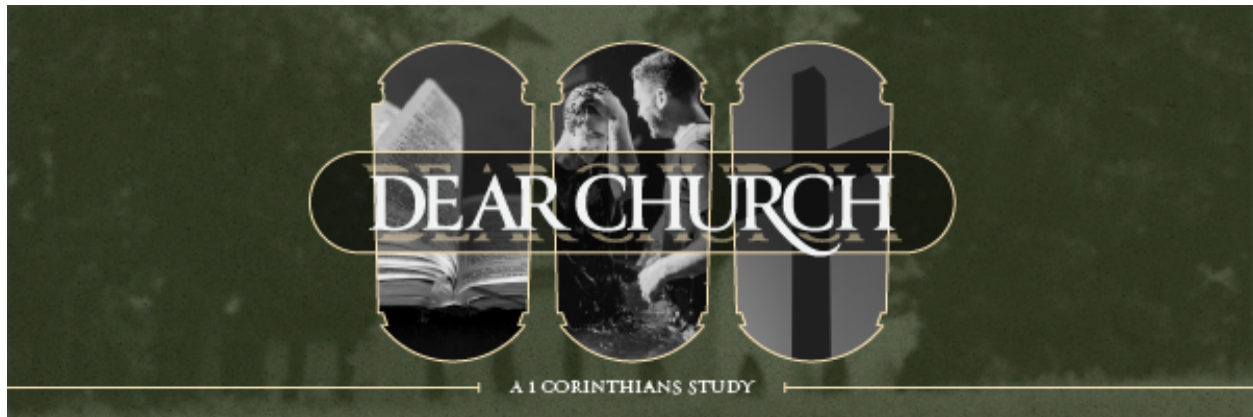
Let’s close out today with words from the writer of Hebrews who gives a message similar to the words we’ve already read from Paul.

Read Hebrews 5:12-6:1:

¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God...

RESPONSE: What is one takeaway from your time with this passage today?

PRAYER: Write a prayer out based on your reading and study today.



Day 4

“Find something that you can grow and tend to.”

It seemed like the strangest thing to have a mentor say. In the middle of the quarantine lockdown, those were her words. Find something that you can grow and tend to. So, the first of many plants made its way into my living room.

The discipline of watering and pruning is slow work. You can't see the growth that's happening each day as the sun warms the leaves or as a new stem emerges. Then, suddenly, months and months later, you can finally see it. Growth needs time. Growth needs effort. Growth needs God.

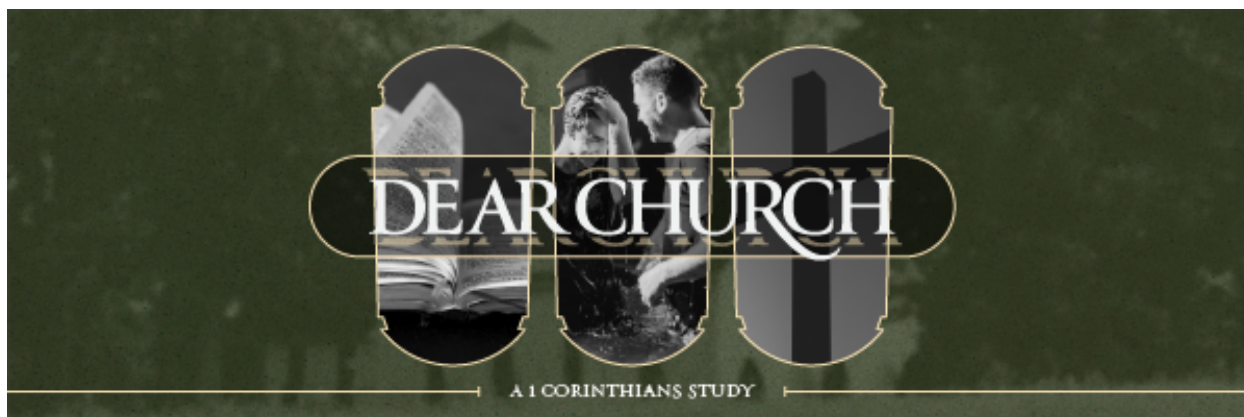
Spiritual maturity is a slow work as well. It's not an outcome or one-time event. It's not something that can be manufactured. It's certainly not linear and you can't predict it perfectly.

Today, let's look at 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. As you read, notice what stands out to you. Which words or phrases jump off the page? What imagery does God give?

1 Corinthians 3:5-9: ⁵ *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.* ⁶ *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.* ⁷ *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.* ⁸ *The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.* ⁹ *For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*

What do you notice about the *process* of spiritual maturity from these verses? According to Paul, who is responsible for growth?

What does that look like in your own life?



**Where are you relying on yourself or others rather than God for the growth in your life?
What do you want to ask God to grow in you?**

Read the following quote from the *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* on the goal of maturity:

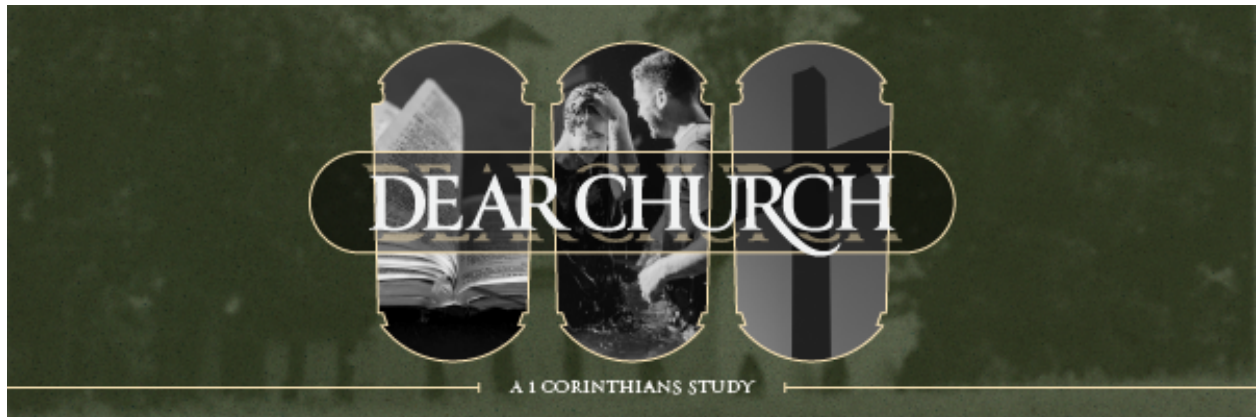
“Progress, not perfection, should be the goal of maturity. It is learning to keep the flow of progress alive and maintain the achievement of growth. Maturity is the ability to transform schooling into learning, knowledge into wisdom, incidents into insights, and casual encounters into rich experiences. It is the virtue of learning from one’s own mistakes and failures, having the courage to apologize and ask for forgiveness, and remaining human and humble in the midst of successes and great accomplishments.”

How does this line of thinking connect with the texts we’ve read this week? How do you see this to be true in your own life and in the lives of others?

Read these words from 2 Peter 1 that illustrate the progress of spiritual maturity:

2 Peter 1:3-9: ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

What specific things does Peter list in verses 5-7 that are emblematic of Christlike maturity?



What do you notice in this passage about God’s effort and our effort toward maturity?

How does this passage complement 1 Corinthians 3:5-9?

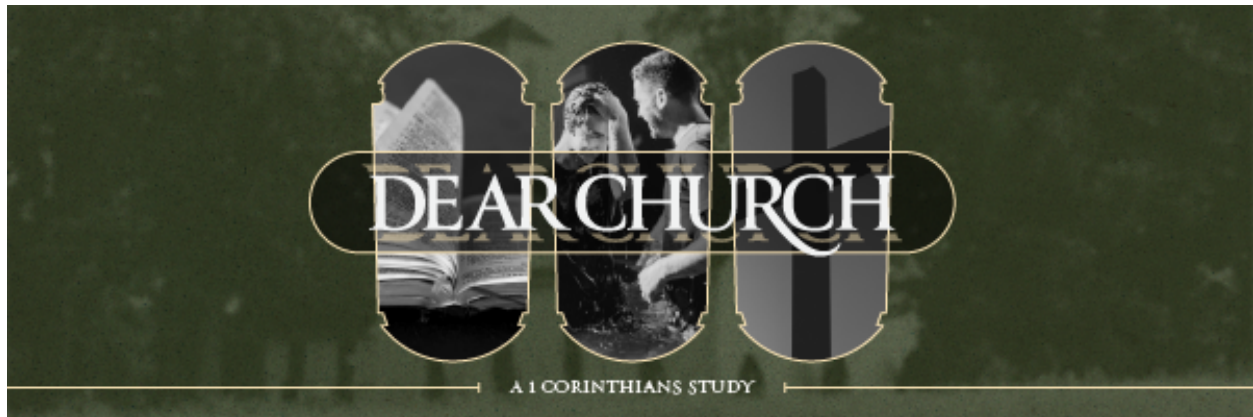
Dallas Willard writes, “Christlikeness of the inner being is not a human attainment. It is, finally, a gift of grace. Though we must act, the resources for spiritual formation extend far beyond the human. They come from the interactive presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who place their confidence in Christ.”

Knowing Christlikeness requires both our effort and the presence of the Holy Spirit, what needs to shift in your thinking and your habits?

Remember that God finishes the work He begins. Paul writes in Philippians that we can be confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

RESPONSE: What is one takeaway from your time with this passage today?

PRAYER: Write a prayer out based on your reading and study today.



Day 5

As we wrap up this week in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, let's take a moment to re-read the passage, inviting God to both remind us of what we've learned and to show us anything else He would like to reveal today. Let's look at *The Voice* translation today:

My brothers and sisters, I cannot address you as people who walk by the Spirit; I have to speak to you as people who tend to think in merely human terms, as spiritual infants in the Anointed One. ² I nursed you with milk, *as a mother would feed her baby*, because you were not, and still are not, developed enough to digest complex spiritual food. ³ *And here's why*: you are still living in the flesh, *not in the Spirit*. *How do I know?* Are you fighting with one another? Are you *comparing yourselves to others* and becoming consumed with jealousy? Then it sounds like you are living in the flesh, no different from the rest *who live by the standards of this rebellious and broken world*. ⁴ If one of you is saying, "I am with Paul," and the other says, "I am with Apollos," aren't you like everybody else? ⁵ So who is Apollos really? Or Paul for that matter? *We are only* servants, agents who led you to faith, and the Lord commissioned each of us to do a particular job.

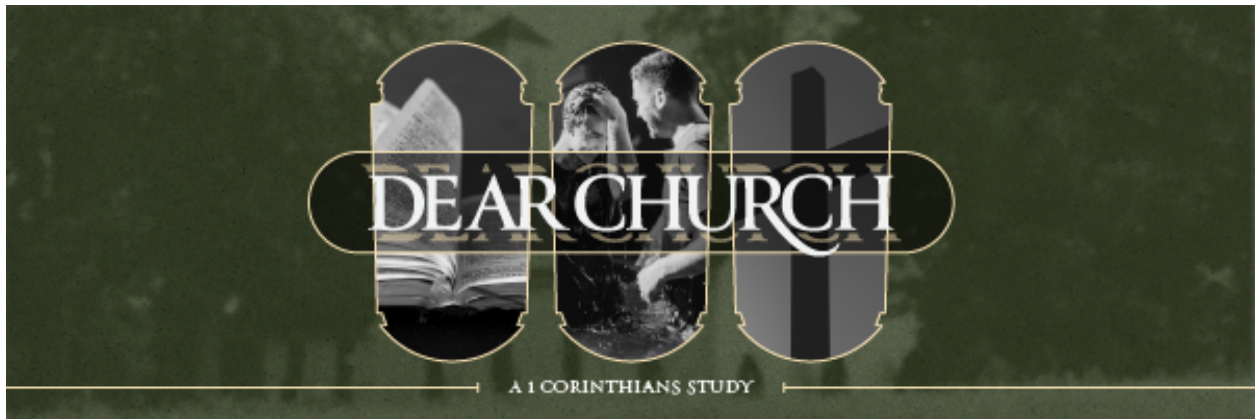
Paul's test for spiritually immaturity: Do you argue? Do you compare yourself to others? Are you jealous? Answer "yes" to any of these, then you are spiritually immature.

He continues...

⁶ My job was to plant *the seed*, and Apollos was called to water it. Any growth comes from God, ⁷ so the ones who water and plant have nothing *to brag about*. God, who causes the growth, is the only One who matters. ⁸ The one who plants is no greater than the one who waters; both will be rewarded based on their work. ⁹ We are *gardeners and field* workers laboring with God. You are *the vineyard*, the garden, the house where God dwells.

What do you notice as you read this translation?

What did you learn this week that challenged you most?



What did you learn this week that encouraged you most?

What did you learn about yourself from this study?

What did you learn about God?

What lingering questions do you have?

PRAYER: Write a prayer out based on your reading and study this week.