

Jesus Calls Us To Maturity, Not Perfection

CHAPTER 4

Faith is Maturity's Tool

One escaped Jewish prisoner to another:

"The war is almost over."

The other replies:

"No, the war is always!"

From a movie THE WAR - THE TRUCE

Just so, our maturing by walking in faith is always in all our ways through all our days.

We have the power to become

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." 2 Peter 3:18

We've heard the fable of the eagle who was hatched among chickens and thought that he was a chicken until he heard the call of eagles and he redefined himself.

You've heard the fable of the swan who was hatched among ducks and thought he was an ugly duckling, until he saw a beautiful swan gliding by. And that swan looked at him and said, "Your not an ugly duckling, your a little swan and pretty soon your going to look

like me.” And he redefined himself.

John wrote--“Jesus came into His own, and His own received Him not, but to as many as received Him, He gave the power to become children of God, even as many as believed on His name.” John 1:11-12

We have the power to become! What we HAVE BEEN, does not determine what we WILL BE in the future!

It’s time to redefine ourself by walking in faith. Myles Munroe has said, “To know the nature of a thing, ask the maker of the thing.” Let the maker of the thing, who knows the nature of the thing, the capacity and the ability of that thing, define that thing. And according to these considerations, no one has the right or the authority to define me, but God Himself for He said

“Oh Lord, You have searched me and know me ...” “for you formed my inward parts and You covered me in my mother’s womb ...” “My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed and in Your books they all were written the days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them.” Psalm 139

God loves us with an everlasting love! Read again what God says about us,

“I am intimately acquainted with your thoughts. I think of you frequently and the thoughts I think for you are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and to give you a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

In other words, God is saying if you will take hold of the future

with the chord of hope and the hands of faith, you can mature into God's likeness. What you desire and long for will come into your life. Accept God's definition of who you are. Too many people see themselves through the eyes of other people and they assume the role that others have assigned to them and they accept the value that others have placed on them. When God assigns a role to you, God gives you the ability to play that role. In Judges 6:12 the angels of the Lord found Gideon threshing wheat, hiding, afraid, inside a wine press. But the angel of the Lord said, "Gideon, Thou mighty man of valor, your role is mighty man of valor." Gideon said, "I can't play that role, I'm afraid, I'm hiding." But when God got through with Gideon, Gideon was a mighty man of valor and he had overcome the enemies of God.

Plain directions how we can walk by faith is spoken by Solomon.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Proverbs 3:5,6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart

HE OFTEN WAITS UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE. We, or God allows us to paint ourselves into a corner so HE can get us out. Bible miracles are most often a result of people being in 'corners' and a miracle delivers them! Remember--

Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana? The 5000 hungry men fed with the small loaves and fishes? Peter walks on water. He starts to sink. Jesus delivers him? The Demoniac boy which Jesus' disciples could not heal? Malchus' ear which Peter cut off with his sword? And the

disciples fished all night and took nothing. Jesus simply says "Cast out on the other side of your boat"?

God taught me to walk by faith when I was twelve years old. The setting for this lesson of life was the cold Winter of 1944. The faith lesson was centered around a desperate need to find a hammer. My brother and I ran a trap line every winter to make spending money. We trapped and hunted with dogs the wild animals common to Mule Creek in the Gyp Hills of Barber County--skunks, opossums, coyotes and muskrats. These we skinned, stretched their hides and in due time shipped them off to Chicago for good money in return. I looked after the trap line while Oren attended High School in Medicine Lodge during the week. On this particular winter day I borrowed my Mother's hammer to drive the stakes in the ground or a nail in a tree that secured the chain to hold the trap. Please understand that there was an unwritten law in our house--**NOBODY EVER TAKES MAMA'S HAMMER**. I wanted this hammer as it had a handle made of hard wood which would not stick to my hands in the sub zero temperature.

When I returned to the house, Mother met me at the door with these words--"Wilbur, my hammer is missing. I am sure you took it". With chattering teeth from the extreme cold I replied, "I don't have it." I had not missed it until that moment and my reply was a true statement for I had lost it out on the trail. Mother admonished, "You go right back out there and get it and don't come home without it."

Back through falling snow and cold wind I tramped across the stubble of the wheat field and down the trail of traps. Results? No hammer. With numb toes, red ears and some tears, I searched the same ground again, more carefully this time. **NO HAMMER!**

In March of that year, I had accepted Jesus during a Revival at

our Union Chapel church. While I had listened to others walk by faith by praying yet, it was something the preacher did at funerals and in the church building. Up to this point my attempt at praying was to repeat The Lord's Prayer and the "Now I lay me down to sleep" prayer.

Now, in a 'corner" and out of a sense of sheer desperation and not religiosity, I knelt down in the high weeds along an old barbed wire fence around the wheat field. My first prayer was terribly simple--
"GOD, PLEASE HELP ME FIND THAT HAMMER!"

So sudden was the answer that came into my mind, that I doubted it. The answer was this thought--***Look on the other side of the creek.*** I started to lean on my own understanding again, which up to this point had produced no hammer and near frozen toes, ears and fingers. I answered the answer by reasoning--There is no use in crossing the creek. We haven't had any traps over there this winter. So, I trudged back down the trail fighting the gnawing inner thought--***Look on the other side of the creek.*** Results? NO HAMMER!

The winter storm was increasing and I had not found the hammer that stood between me and the warm wood stove back at the house. Stubbornly I answered the gnawing thought--***Look on the other side of the creek--***by marching down across the sandy creek bed, climbing the opposite bank and walking a dozen steps. There in the middle of the foot trail was a beautiful sight--**MAMA'S HAMMER!**

How did the hammer get there? Probably some opossum or coon that likes to get their teeth into wood, dragged it across the creek.

In that instant **I PRAYED! GOD ANSWERED, and I WALKED BY FAITH!** Joy so warmed me that I ran all the way home and was warm when I got there.

That incident changed my life and even now sixty years later as I write of it--tears come to my eyes. (Basic story taken from my first book--"Faith Alive in Heart, Home and Church" page 102,103.

Since we learn most about FAITH and PRAYER by acting, let us take that step and keep on walking!

He often waits until it is too late.

"Jesus, Lazarus is sick" ... "he's not sick enough".

"Jesus, Lazarus is dead now" ... "he's not dead enough!"

"Jesus, Lazarus has been dead for four days, it is too late."

Jesus answers, "Yes, I sometimes wait until it is too late."

And then Jesus called Lazarus back to life again. (John 11)

Lean not on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5

God Gives Us Impossible Challenges

God always makes the role bigger than we are. He always places before us something that we cannot handle by ourselves. God always gives us a challenge that is impossible. He said to Gideon, "Can you win with thirty-two thousand?"

Gideon said, "Yes, it is possible."

And so He said, "Can you win with ten thousand?"

And Gideon answered, "Yes, it is possible."

And God said, "Well, can you win with three hundred?"

And Gideon said, "No, that's impossible, there are more than one hundred thousand of the enemy."

Then God says, "Go and do it in My power."

Although it seems impossible, God challenges us to forge ahead with faith. (Judges 6,7)

Lean not on your own understanding Proverbs 3:5-6

Jesus in the wilderness waited until the multitude of five thousand had run out of food. There was not enough and then He multiplied two fish and five loaves and fed them all.

Countless are the times the Lord has allowed to teach me to lean on Him, and not my own understanding.

IMALEE'S STROKE of June, 1991 was one of those times.

A week from the inception of her stroke Teresa, our doctor daughter and I took her to St. Francis Hospital, of Wichita, Kansas.

We met with Dr. Hered, a neurologist--brain surgeon. He told me that he would operate in the morning and vacuum the blood out.

Some QUESTIONS, Doctor before you operate:

1. Will Imalee end up a nursing home patient?

ANS: "I don't know."

2. What is the cost of this surgery? \$15,000. \$25,000.

He would not answer.

3. Doctor Hered will this effect Imalee's I.Q. or personality.

ANS: "Who can tell?"

Three things before you operate doctor:

#1. "I'm not a humanist. I do not worship the medical community."

#2. "I'm a Christian and I must have time to PRAY, THINK and talk to the Elders of the church."

#3. "My opinion at this moment is that we need to wait a little longer and see what God can do."

WE WAITED GOD ACTED! No surgery and now ten plus years later--complete recovery!

God Always Provides the Miracle Margin

God stands before us in our Goliath's, our Fiery furnaces, our Lions' dens, and unbeatable odds ... so we will rely on Him and so that no one can take His glory. And when you know how God operates, you'll stop worrying so much. You'll start walking by faith, you'll start giving glory, and you'll start giving praise to Almighty God.

The Apostle Paul learned the art of going through trouble and adversity ... he learned the art of going through storms and he said, **"I know how to be abased, I know how to abound, I know how to be full and to be hungry, I know how to abound and suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."**
Philippians 4:12-13

Any matter can be an act of faith when we--

1. Willfully commit it to God and
2. lean not on our own understanding to make it happen; but,
3. look to and wait on God for the answer.

"Lean not on your own understanding," Proverbs 3:5

One of life's most difficult tasks is learning TO LEAN NOT ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING after you have spent years learning to do just that. This unlearning for me was born out of many desperate situations.

One of the many crises out of which The Lord taught me to TRUST

ONLY HIM by N-O-T leaning on my own understanding occurred in January of 1979. My schedule called for a Faith Alive Revival to begin at Holly, Colorado on Sunday morning, January 14th.

On Saturday morning a car spinning its wheels awoke me with a start. A snow storm was beginning outside and already there was some four inches on the ground. What I did not know at that moment was that a quarter inch of ice lay beneath the snow. I hastened around and after a family prayer circle headed northwest by 9 o'clock. Ground Blizzard conditions existed between home and Wichita where the snow was hubcap deep. Our daughter, Rebecca, accompanied me as far as Wichita to catch a ride back to Manhattan Christian College. Leaving her with her grandparents, Raymon and Ina Barrick, I headed west down Highway 54. My courage decreased as the howling wind increased and the blowing snow began to produce whiteouts. At the west edge of Kingman, Kansas, I met with a barricade and a Patrolman that advised me the highway was closed, all travel discouraged. My spirit sank within me and I returned downtown to check on motels. Every motel had the same sad sign-- SORRY FOLKS. NO VACANCY. I called preacher, Terry Neidens, and told him "Terry, it will be impossible for me to arrive in Holly to begin the meeting Sunday morning. I am in the middle of a raging blizzard. Possibly I can get there by Sunday evening, but it may be Monday afternoon."

Terry said, "I never did think YOU could make it and now you won't for sure!" I hung up and drank a cup of coffee standing up as the cafe was wall-to-wall people. **The dilemma was clear: I couldn't stay there. I was not inclined to go back. The westward road was the only way.**

My OWN UNDERSTANDING died as I prayed "*Lord, it's your Revival 275 miles to the West. It's your storm and it's your road and I'm yours, too. Take charge!*"

I drove back out to the barricade and said to the Patrol, "Is travel on this road forbidden?" I know not why he said, "Do you have a Kansas driver's license and pay taxes in this State?" I responded, "Yes, Sir, I do."

He shouted through the howling wind and snow, "I can't forbid you to go around this barricade but all travel is discouraged." **I thanked him and drove around not only the barricade but MY OWN understanding** onto an ice-snow packed highway into the face of a ground blizzard. The barricade proved to be a blessing as it had the effect of providing me with a PRIVATE HIGHWAY with no traffic, which was a necessity as most of the highway to Pratt was a one-way path through the snow. The snow plows had left 20 foot high banks on each side and the high wind made drifts out of that. My job was simple: go slow, pray and sing to the Lord. So, I PRAISED the miles away arriving in Dodge City by 6 p.m. I called preacher Terry with a progress report. His only response was, "Y-O-U will not make it." The storm let up some and I drove through Garden City at 8:30 and into Syracuse by 9:30 and the lights of Holly shined dimly through the storm as my vehicle passed the City limit sign at 10:30. I pulled over to the curb for a few moments to give my broken spirit, my shattered OWN UNDERSTANDING, a little sympathy and THE LORD a lot more PRAISE!

Now consider this, in all those 350 miles from home not once did my car slip, spin, skid or slide, for beneath and all around had to be the unseen guiding presence of the Lord's Angels.

Yes, we started the meeting in 16 below 0 temperature and it was a VICTORY MEETING clear through Friday night!

Don't let people, nor circumstances, nor limits, nor handicaps, nor unlimited resources determine your destiny if you are down to nothing. **Remember nothing is where God started.** God came out of nowhere, because there was nowhere for Him to come from. God stepped out on nothing because there was nothing for Him to stand on. God spoke to nothing because there was nothing for Him to speak to, and God said, "Let there be..." and birds started flying, fish started swimming and the solar systems started twirling through

the vast universe that came out of the Word of God.

God, too, can speak to the nothingness, to the pain, to the deprivation of your existence and He can say, "Let there be ..."

"In all your ways acknowledge him." Proverbs 3:6

God Always Provides the Miracle Margin.

Remember Paul, David and the giant, Goliath, the Three Men in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the Lion's den.

Jesus is ready to lift you out of your emotional, social and physical limitations so that you can rise up and walk. In Jesus Christ, there are no lame ducks.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, and all things have become new."

2 Corinthians 5:17

With Jesus Christ in our life we can go out and walk into our destiny. I see us in the future and we look much better than we look right now!

God has been thinking about you and God says, **"I know the thoughts that I think towards you.**

Thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you a future and to give you hope." Amen and Amen!

"And he will direct your paths." Proverbs 3:6

Directing life paths is God's special business! The Bible is replete with such examples--- Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Daniel, David and the Giant, and Paul. This list is barely the 'tip of the iceberg' of those God leads along the Way.

Proverbs 3:5,6 and Philippians 4:19 are promises of God which

Imalee and I have walked in by faith for some thirty years.

Here is a prayer, we face the day, the trip, the challenge with:

"Dear Lord, you know our needs and we are leaving this in Your hands. Be in charge of this day, need, event." He invites every soul to **look up to Him in faith** and **wait for His certain answers**.

My six books are filled with examples of how He answers in varied and beautiful ways. Here is one of the very recent ways:

"the Lord provides for those he loves, while they are asleep." Psalm 127:2b (TEV)

In strange ways the Lord supplies our needs. We may plan, suppose and wonder how will this need be met? More often than not the need is met in a way beyond our imagination.

Winter in the year of 2000 and 2001 made us wonder about paying our utility bills. Folks around us were reporting gas/electric bills increasing from 100 to 300 per cent. One Brother reported he was now paying \$600. and previously \$200. A neighbor next door lives in a house about the size of ours, and now pays \$1,000. per month. ***We waited and prayed.*** Then, came the good news that our electric/gas bill was up only 1% (one percent = \$15.. We thanked the Lord for his gas from the earth to cook our food and warm our house! Then, Imalee added up our yearly expense and we were delighted to learn our gas/electric bills had reduced \$200. from the previous year. WOW!

Saturday, January 20, 2001 was the day to have our Suburban greased and the oil changed in our Suburban. I checked in and ordered a yearly venture of a new air cleaner and wiper blades.

While waiting, I rambled through the "automotive Department of Wal-Mart." In a passing moment I noted a display which appeared to be advertising fire extinguishers. Not finding the tire pressure gauge, I

walked by the "fire extinguisher" display again, and noted the life like tongues of fire seemed to be producing heat. Looking closely I saw the flames were real and a real fire was starting. I summoned a clerk, who in turn called "CODE 3" and stock people appeared from everywhere with extinguishers. The fire was very real and the store Manager said "In just a matter of moments this would have been a bomb as the flames caused high pressure automotive cans to explode. We rejoiced at this unusual provision by the Lord.

Again He provided. We parked our Suburban at the Tulsa, Oklahoma airport while visiting our son, Galen and family in Logan, Ohio. When we returned the right hand bumper was bent back into the fender-well. Allstate Insurance had a firm make an estimate of \$859.00o. We had it repaired at a less expensive firm for \$232.00. An Allstate sent an inspector. Dennis was a fine Christian Brother with whom we shared one of our books--Faith Alive, and received an invitation to speak at their Church Senior Citizen group in Wichita. The inspector was glad we "made some extra money on the repair job!"

Some may say--"Well, these kind of things happen to you all the time." No, first time for a sequence of events like the above but **the bottom line is: HE DOES SUPPLY!**

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

Jesus invites Peter to cast out his net on the other side of the boat. Peter explains that he has been out all night and caught nothing. Under normal circumstances, that would have been the end of the matter. "Too bad," he might have said, and walked away. And you probably would turn to your fishing mates and say, "What a screwball! Who does he think he is?"

Yet Peter had a completely different response. (Was it prompted

by something he heard Jesus say in His sermon?) Peter answered, **"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."** Now there's a sense of adventure for you! There's a willingness to try something different!

You already know what happens next. **The catch of fish is so great that it threatens to sink the boat!** (Luke 5:1-6) More important, it's Simon Peter who gets hooked and becomes a faithful follower of Jesus. **All because he was willing to put out into the deep** as Jesus told had told him to.

If there is anything that is hard for any of us, it is making the extra effort to put out into the deep. **To stretch ourselves.** To be mentally and spiritually adventuresome.

Most of us are content with the mediocre, the ordinary, and the humdrum. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with lives that are busy working, taking care of children, going shopping, or going to school. Life can't always at every moment be a *boat full of fish*. Some days you throw out your line and nothing is biting.

But, it is always worth a try to accept the challenge--*fish* a little longer, *fish* a little deeper, *fish* at Jesus' invitation and see, perhaps if the *big catch* is waiting on just the other side of life's boat.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5,6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

by Chuck Thomas - Tulsa, Oklahoma

Chapter 4 - "FAITH: A GREAT TOOL IN MATURING"

- 1. According to John 1:12-12, what do we have the power do?**
- 2. What plain directions for how we can walk by faith is spoken by Solomon?**
- 3. Where did author Johnson find "Mama's hammer"?**
- 4. God always makes what bigger than we are?**
- 5. How many soldiers did Gideon say were not enough to win the battle?**
- 6. What did God tell Gideon to go in?**
- 7. What three questions did author Johnson ask Dr. Hered?**
- 8. As a Christian, what did author Johnson tell Dr. Hered he must have time to do?**
- 9. In author Johnson's opinion, what did they need to do regarding operating on Imalee?**

- 10. Any matter can be an act of faith when we do what?**
- 11. When caught in a snow storm, what did author Johnson pray regarding the Revival in Holly, CO?**
- 12. What five things should we not allow to determine our destiny, if we are down to nothing?**
- 13. What is Jesus ready to do when we experience emotional, social and physical limitations?**
- 14. What does Proverbs 3:6 promise us?**
- 15. In the winter of 2000 and 2001, how much were the Johnson's electric/gas bill?**
- 16. Where was author Johnson when he discovered flames of a real fire starting?**
- 17. What does Philippians 4:19 promise us?**
- 18. How large was the catch of fish by Peter, when he obeyed Jesus?**
- 19. Any matter can be an act of faith when we do what three things?**
- 20. What does Proverbs 3:5,6 say to do?**