

# ***The Next Step: Stop 7***

*by Sonny Bowman*

*Slide Notes*

## **On to Maturity**

- **You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong. ... Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding... – Heb 5:12-6:1 (NLT)**

For a baby, it’s all about me! That is normal for that stage of a child’s growth. But as the child grows, his focus in life should shift from me-centered to others-centered. That doesn’t always happen—and even less often in our current culture.

## **Barna’s Maturity Survey**

- **Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus**  
by George Barna
- **“...the journey [to maturity] is divided into a pathway with *ten stops* — temporary resting places at which we are built up in preparation for the continuation of the journey.” (p. xxi)**

The survey results can help us understand something about the Christian maturing process and where people are having difficulties. To that end, we will take a look of some of the survey results. Do not use these to judge others. Rather, use them to evaluate and facilitate your own progress along the journey to maturity in Jesus.

## **First 6 Stops on the Road**

- **Ignorance of concept or existence of sin (1%)**
- **Aware of and indifferent to sin (16%)**
- **Concerned about the implications of personal sin (39%)**
- **Confess sins and ask Jesus to be their Savior (9%)**
- **Commitment to faith activities (24%)**
- **Experience a prolonged period of spiritual discontent (6%)...**

Barna, pp. 17-24. Stops 1-3 – 56% of adults in this survey have not reached Stop 4 — salvation. Stop 5 – ...the most common reaction after embracing Christ is to become more active in both personal spiritual growth and in a community of faith. (Barna, p 19) Stops 1-5 include 89% of the adults surveyed.

## Stops 5 & 6

- About 1/4<sup>th</sup> of adults are stuck at Stop 5 – committed to faith activities
- The prolonged spiritual discontentment experienced at Stop 6 is designed to motivate you to move to Stop 7.

## The Problem with Me

- Stop 6 begins to deal with “Me”
- “We have met the enemy and he is us!” (*Pogo*, by Walt Kelly)
- The love chapter — 1 Cor 13
  - Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. — 1 Co 13:4-7 (NLT)

Or... I have met the enemy and he is “Me”! The devil is not your biggest enemy, neither is your boss, spouse, or any other person— your own self-centered thinking is your biggest enemy! You cannot love with God’s kind of agape love if you are “me” centered.

## More Stops on the Road

- Experiencing personal brokenness (3%)
- Choosing to surrender & submit fully to God: Radical dependence (1%)
- Enjoying a profound intimacy and love for God (0.5 %)
- Experiencing profound compassion and love for humanity (0.5%)

## Stop 7 per Barna

- As believers dive into this new commitment, God meets them head-on with the realization that they are still too self-reliant and have never fully come to grips with the implications of their sin. ... So God takes them through a time of in-your-face confrontation. (p 22)
- Serious believers finally reach a state of brokenness, which prepares them for the glorious healing and reconstruction that God has in mind for them. This takes them beyond merely accepting the offer of salvation to the experience of authentic, shared love and a truly purposeful life. (p 22)

## It’s Too Hard for Many...

- Most believers who get to Stop 6 abandon the investigation once they realize the commitment and cost of moving forward on the journey to wholeness. Instead, they retreat to an earlier stop on the path and simply settle for what the local church and other spiritual entities have to offer. ...rather than pay the price of a deeper relationship with God, they retreat to the shelter of the religious games... (p. 21)

Many revert back to either...

Stop 5 – Commitment to faith activities where they either scale back their faith activities to a more manageable level and live a mediocre life, or they increase their faith activities to distract themselves from God’s call for real inward change.

Stop 4 – Confess sins and ask Jesus to be their Savior. Jesus is their Savior and they are glad to be going to heaven, but pretty much live their lives as they want.

We can’t stand the hurt of the “Me” dying. And often, we recoil and hide from the revelation of our own self-centered ugliness.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? — Je 17:9 (NKJV)

## My Me-Breaking Events

- **I loved God & His Word, but not people...**
  - **If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? — 1 Jn 4:20**
- **Divorce and others struggles**
  - **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. — Ro 8:28**
- **I was thankful, but...**

There’s something wrong with this picture!

Our brokenness is often precipitated by hard life events—events way too big for us to handle alone. Events that break us include: divorce, death of a loved one, serious illness, job loss, bankruptcy, marriage trouble, rebellion of children... Or a vivid revelation of God showing us the ugliness of sin. What is broken? Pride, self-reliance, self-serving, the “Me”

I told God that I was thankful that I had gone through the divorce and other difficulties because they broke my pride and drew me nearer to God. I could almost see God gently smiling as He said to me, “But you didn’t have to learn it that way.”

We have plenty of opportunities in our sin-damaged world to be broken. If our bad choices don’t get us, everyday life will. God’s doesn’t bring bad things on us to break us. But He uses the hard things to work for our good.

## Normal Christianity

- **Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. — Mat 16:24-25**
- **And those *who are* Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. — Gal 5:24**

We are called to be Christ followers, not just Christ admirers! Flesh – the “Me”

## Jesus' Example

- He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*." — Mt 26:39

## Did I Sign Up for This?

- Whoa!
- What did you say?
- Okay, some people have special, self-sacrificial ministry...
- But God doesn't really expect that from me...
- Does He...?

## Dying to Live

- and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. — 2 Cor 5:15
- Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. — Luke 9:23
- By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. — 1 John 3:16 (cf John 3:16)

To truly live, we must die to our own self will and desires, then live for God and for others.

We all know John 3:16. We need to also know and live 1 John 3:16! John 3:16 is God's part, 1 John 3:16 is our part

## Dying is a Command

- This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. — John 15:12-13

## Proper Focus

- Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ... So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you... — Col 3:1-5 (NLT)

## Broken or Crushed?

- ...'The stone which the builders rejected *Has become the chief cornerstone*' ? Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." — Lk 20:17-18

The "stone" is Jesus. The options are broken or crushed. Which do you choose?

## The Same Heat...

- Melts and refines gold
- Hardens clay
- Our response makes the difference

## Life from Death

- But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. — 2 Corinthians 4:7-11

## Off with the Old

- that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.  
— Ephesians 4:22-24

## How Can I Do That?

- And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. — Ro 12:1-2 (NLT)

## Stop 8 per Barna

- God never wants us to remain shattered; His ultimate desire is for us to become one with Him and mature into the human beings He envisioned. But getting there is a difficult journey in and of itself. (p 22)
- It is at this juncture that we understand what total surrender, complete submission, and utter dependence upon God really mean. These are no longer concepts preached about or written about in a vague, arms-length manner; they now become the core of our existence. (p 23)

## Stop 8 Looks Like...

- To develop the maturity and the connection desired, we allow God to remake our life. Our normal pace slows down: mere activity is no longer satisfying or meaningful because we have adopted a different goal. Silence, stillness, and solitude are built into our schedule to protect us from the distractions that have distorted our life and perspectives for so long.
- We begin every day consciously renewing our commitment to God, to trusting and following Him throughout the day. That produces an ever-present God-consciousness that changes our

emotions, thoughts and deeds. We not only agree to give up control, but we actually do so; we do not act or speak until we sense direction from Him.

- We commit to seeing the world through God's eyes — and responding as we believe He would. We humble ourselves before God, but also gratefully accept spiritual guidance from other mature believers who are on the same journey. (p 23)

## Stops 9 & 10?

- Stops 9 and 10 will follow for any of us who are willing to learn to die to self at Stop 8.

## Nowhere Else to Go

- Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? ... From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."  
— Jn 6:60-68

You have been made and equipped for this kind of life, walking hand-in-hand with the One who created and loves you. Real life cannot be found anywhere else.