

Jacob Fernandez

Wardle Report

In your own words can you describe what Christian maturity is, what it should look like, and what it should entail? In less than 150 pages Terry Wardle ventures out on this very journey to try and reclaim the definition for Christian maturity. The size of this work is I would say small for this grand topic but what he does seems to be geared toward newer believers or those who have been trapped in a misunderstanding of what Christian maturity should look like. Terry Wardle wrote this book to convict hearts and challenge minds. Right out of the gate he states that “Christians are struggling with a crisis of spiritual immaturity, which is having a devastating effect upon their lives and the ministry of the gospel to a broken world. The heart of the problem rests with the concept of Christian maturity.”

Chapter 1 is titled a Transformed Life and for very good reason. Terry Wardle begins the book by saying that a Christian is indeed one who has been transformed and transformation should not and is not measured by the criteria it has been measured by for years. He says in Chapter 1 that “Many Christians, including local church leaders, think that being a mature Christian is relegated to believing the right things about Jesus and the faith, behaving like Jesus in daily living, and serving as Jesus did within the church and world.” His main thesis is simply stated “Christian maturity is not measured by what a person believes, how he or she behaves, or the level of involvement in ministry.” Terry Wardle boldly challenges this system by saying that the true measure of Christian maturity is to become like Jesus.

For me personally I began dancing for joy when I read Terry Wardle’s words in Chapter 1 and was even more excited that such a book was required reading for this class. I mean come on, to come out swinging as he did was absolutely amazing to see. Challenging the things that

we commend in the faith or gauge growth with is so needed. Me being a 21 year old and a Christian for nearly 5 years I already knocked down that system mentally and agree with Wardle's approach which is getting right to the very core of our being. I grew up in church all my life and put my faith in Christ at 17 years of age, when growing up I served in church since I was the grandson of a Pastor thus proving why Wardle's thesis hit ever more deeply with me that there are people serving in the church today that are not right with God. There are people who think because they read the Confessions and Creeds that they are close to God, that because they do the right things they are good people, and because they serve on Fridays for youth and all day Sunday as an usher they are closer to the throne of grace than others.

Wardle then continues on from his thesis to answer two important questions that he says are: "What does it mean to become like Jesus?" and "How does this maturation occur within the individual Christian life?" To answer the first, Wardle turned to the Gospels and found several foundational characteristics which he believes and I agree that "—must ultimately become increasingly true of every life that responds to the call to become like Jesus." These characteristics are identity, intimacy, community, character, brokenness, ministry, empowerment, and authority. Now to answer the second, Wardle admits it is not enough to simply change the goals on the list for we all would strive after them in the same manner; instead he acknowledges the truth that we are saved by grace and can not continue on as if we no longer need that grace. He states that "No amount of personal effort will change a person into the likeness of Christ." Wardle sums up his idea in the fact that "Christians are to become like Jesus, perfected in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit." The whole scope of his work is to see that one does not mature by his or she's own power but by the very Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Each chapter analyzes one of the characteristics in Jesus' life, looks at Scripture and then

provides practical and essential steps to nourish and nurture these qualities by the working of the Spirit.

If I was to be honest and I will, I agree with much of Terry's work. Although there is one theological issue I have with him in regards to the divinity of Jesus as mentioned on page 140 which may just be his wording. Why do I disagree with his interpretation of Phillipians 2:6-8? Well because Jesus was fully God and fully man while He was on earth and the term for that is the Hypostatic Union. The incarnation was an addition of human nature and to say that Jesus was not fully God or "laid aside His divine glory" while on earth contradicts a decent amount of the faith. I turn simply to John 1:1-3 and 14 to plead my case but I honestly think it may simply be his wording and he may very well agree that Jesus was fully God and fully man.

I can say whole heartedly that my whole work, study, and life has been greatly affirmed and encouraged by Terry's work. I agreed with him from page one and agreed with him all the way through the remainder of his work that "What was true of Him must increasingly become true of every Christian who wants to move toward spiritual maturity and wellbeing." For me to rightly perform or be present at work, in school, and in ministry I needed to be reminded that my value and identity does not come from my performance but Christ's "performance" on my behalf thus bringing me into the family of God. The chapter on intimacy encouraged me to say no to time consuming things such as tv so I could say yes to drawing near to the Father! When it came to the chapter on community I was deeply pressed into praise for the amazing community that God placed in my life and was challenged to be even more real and genuine with them. From reading the chapters titled Character and Brokenness I was reminded that much is beneath the surface, what surface is not always what it seems, and that character is much more than behavior modification. In Chapter 7 I was reminded of the beauty of the upside-down kingdom of God,

and how service is marked by humility and not pride; that absolutely wrecked me. I want all that I do to be marked by humility, whether it be receiving my diploma, walking into work, or serving people on a Sunday in my local church. And lastly, both chapters on Empowerment and Authority reminded me of the Holy Spirit's empowering role and the call Christ has placed on His disciples. We are truly never alone and will never make it alone in our journey to become more like our Savior.

All in all Terry Wardle's work was absolutely a treasure trove to be discovered and the wisdom gleaned has transformed my thinking as one who feels the calling to full-time ministry. And not only for full-time ministry but also for day to day discipleship in my local church. Thank God for this book, for one can only pray it is republished and this truth that "Christian maturity is not measured by what a person believes, how he or she behaves, or the level involvement in ministry." Would be plastered on every church door and building. For truly the goal is to be imitators of God as dearly beloved children (Eph. 5:1).