* **Series Slide**
* I think my first exposure to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was somewhere around 6th grade. I was definitely excited about the first live action film in 1990… which was pretty objectively awful…until all those kids that saw it grew up…and now remember it nostalgically and love it ironically.
* As a 12 year old 6th grader- identified with their craving for pizza and video games. And of course, loved that they were Ninjas.
* And that’s it. That’s where I stopped thinking about the Turtles.
* Until 2007, when my oldest-Micah- watched and then quoted the new TMNT animated movie incessantly. In fact, to this day, whenever someone says the word “Skylight”- Keva and I both look at each other and say “That’s just what this place needed- a skylight.” (which is a very obscure but direct quote from that film- as Micah had a knack for picking up those kinds of quotes from movies and repeating them ad nauseum).
* Anyway, in my re-exposure to the Turtles in 2007, as 29 year old father- I was able to see something I couldn’t see as a 12 year old. There was some depth- some maturity- in these teenage Mutants. There was something beautiful about these Ninja Turtles. I could see it particularly Leonardo’s burden as a leader- while also trying to remain a brother to the other 3. Its hard to lead others who are also you’re siblings- I can identify, because Its literally my job description as a pastor.
* The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles started as a dark comic book in the 80s. It's the story of a Japanese ninjitsu master, Splinter, who got into some radioactive ooze with 4 turtles and a rat… the turtles took on human characteristics, and the human merged with the rat. Then Splinter, the giant rat raised the 4 human like turtles to adolescence to be Teen Ninjas.
* They all live underground in the sewers and fight crime, typically the evil Foot clan crime ring- led by the Evil Shredder- who has been a nemesis of Splinter from back to his human days. Each of the Turtles is named after a Renaissance artist. Leonardo leads, Donatello does Machines. Raphael is cool, but rude- Michelangelo is a party dude. Cowabunga.

In 2007, I began to see something in the Turtles that was much deeper…much more profound…than just immature pizza eating vigilantes trained by a Rat.

And then about 3 years ago, I got my hands on a wonderful little book that enlightened the whole franchise for me…made me switch my favorite Turtle from Michelangelo to Donatello…and now I have a deep appreciation for the guys who wrote the original comic- and a soft spot in my heart for these mutants.

The book is “Raise Some Shell” by Richard Rosenbaum-in case there are any Turtle fans out there.

Let me share a couple of the more poignant observations that the author makes in his own words.

* + **The Turtles are a single family, at once apart from the world and for it, …. And its this almost paradoxical combination- their total inherent and even irrevocable otherness plus their belief in timeless and objective notions of right and wrong- that makes them so incredibly compelling as characters. The Turtles are heroes not because they want to be, but because they have to be; They can’t NOT be. Without wealth, status, or membership in a large-enough group to create social force, there’s literally nothing else in this world that the four of them could do that’s consistent with their morality.**

This idea is all summed up in an exchange between Donatello and Michelangelo in an episode from the very first season of the original 80’s cartoon.

* + **Don- But us turtles- outcasts of society- why do we have to stand alone against the forces of evil?**
  + **Mikey- Face it, man- it's the only job we’re qualified for.**

**Title Slide- “Turtle Power: How the Mutant Church Matures to Do the Only Job We’re Qualified For”–Hebrews 5 & 6**

The Hebrews that received this letter entitled “Hebrews” in the bible were not unlike the Ninja Turtles. They were Mutants.

They weren’t Greeks, because they didn’t imbibe the Greek culture. And they though they came from Hebrews, they no longer practiced the Judaism, now that they were following this resurrected Messiah.

So they’re faith in Christ didn’t allow them to fit in with the Jews, and they’re commitment to following Jesus’ way didn’t allow them to participate in the immorality of the Greek culture.

Which means they found themselves outcasts of society- standing alone against the forces of evil.

And in Hebrews 5-6- the author is trying to get them to act a little less like TEENAGERS- and a little more like MUTANT NINJAS with a mission. Cowabunga.

**Hebrews 5:11-6:20**

* **11 We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. 12 Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God’s revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. 13 Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature ​— ​for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.**
* **Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God,**
* **2 teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And we will do this if God permits.**
* **4 For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who tasted God’s good word and the powers of the coming age, 6 and who have fallen away. This is because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. 7 For the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and at the end will be burned.**
* **9 Even though we are speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in your case we are confident of things that are better and that pertain to salvation. 10 For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints ​— ​and by continuing to serve them. 11 Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end, 12 so that you won’t become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.**

**13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself: 14 I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply you. 15 And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and for them a confirming oath ends every dispute. 17 Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. 20 Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**

Transition: This little aside in the middle of Hebrews sounds a lot like a lecture parents would give to their teenagers. Or Splinter would give to the Turtles. Because teenagers are in that weird space between being children and adults. And they need a parent- or a Sensei- to give them the push to make the right decisions to mature.

That’s exactly what they get here both in negative form “GROW UP- YOU’RE TOO LAZY” and then positively- “I’m confident that better things are in your future- and God is going to get you to that future!”

So- today, we’re gonna take a look at what it means for a Christian to be mature- according to the author of Hebrews.

**1) Christian maturity is seeing the righteous future- and living it in the unrighteous present.**

* + First lets remember where we are in the book of Hebrews.
  + These Mutant Hebrews, not quite Hebrews because they have left their Jewish faith to worship the resurrected Jesus…and not quite pagan Greeks, because they don’t live according to the gods and immoral practices of that crowd either…they find themselves in the middle. In the sewers. They feel homeless. Not really on anybody’s team.
  + And the temptation they have is to stop following Jesus and go back to their Jewish faith, with all of their old ritualistic practices that adhere to Jewish law.
  + Basically, so they can fit in again. Not be Mutants.
  + The author of Hebrews is using this letter to convince them that in the midst of the suffering, alienation, and persecution they are undergoing- they need to stick with Jesus. They need to keep making choices that honor him, keep persevering and living lives that will be attractive to the surrounding culture.
  + And he is fresh off telling them about this mysterious OT high priest Melchizedek- who we’ll get back to in detail next week- and how Jesus is a lot like him…when he sort of hits this point of frustration. I guess he writing and then thinks- Oh my gosh- they’re never gonna understand what I’m saying because LITERALLY NOBODY over there EVER TAKES LEARNING ABOUT JESUS SERIOUSLY. All they do is eat pizza and play video games!
  + So he breaks- and just lights into them.
  + **5:11-12**
  + He says they are “dull of hearing” or too lazy to understand
  + They aren’t even like teenagers- they’re like INFANT Mutant Ninja Christians who still need a bottle- and can’t even eat meat, much less cut their own steak.
  + He says, by now they should be teachers…instead- he’s having to go over the same old lessons with them. Reviewing the same stuff over and over and over.
  + We’ll get back to that immaturity in a minute.
  + First- I want to talk about what Maturity is- and then that will help us better understand immaturity in our lives- and why it happens.
  + Lets look at the Ninja Turtles first- and I think that could help us understand it in the Bible.
  + Quick philosophy lesson to understand this quote from Richard Rosenbaum.
  + Postmodernism is the philosophy that everything is relative. There are no transcendent or ultimate standards for meaning or morality.
  + Basically- everyone just makes it up as we go along- its all defined inside of individual communities.
  + In other words- there is no GRAND META NARRATIVE- no big overarching story that explains the world, or morality, or ethics, or why human beings (or Turtles) are alive.
  + His thesis is that the Ninja Turtles (who were created during the rise of postmodernity) actually stand against that idea.
  + Ok, now to the quote.
  + **The Turtles morality is what presents the contradiction with all the other aspects of their identity. Teenagers, mutants, and ninjas are all known for their opposition to conventional systems. Animals have no behavioral restrictions. But the TMNT have a deep seated respect for authority when it is earned, and a fundamental piece of their self-image is bound up with following an ancient and objective code of conduct that dictates how they are meant to behave in order to be good. They cleave unapologetically to a Grand Narrative- which basically equates to a ferocious ninja kick to postmodernism’s big stupid face.**
  + Basically, he’s saying that by all accounts, being teenagers- who often rebel against overarching systems…Ninjas- who constantly and quietly subvert authorities- and mutants- who typically rebel against the societal structures that often persecute them- and by being Turtles- who only live by instinct without consciousness to any idea of WHY they exist- by every part of their identity- these Turtles should absolutely not give 2 rips about good and evil, or what the “right thing to do is”. They should absolutely be rebels living for themselves- BUT- they aren’t. Instead they give themselves over to this transcendent code- where they protect the weak- even when those same people persecute them. They watch over the world above them- the world they aren’t even allowed to participate in- with love and care…because they believe in a bigger story.
  + **5:13-14**
  + These 2 verses give us a pretty clear picture of what the author sees as Christian maturity for the church.
  + He says immaturity is to be inexperienced with “righteousness”- and the mature have trained their senses to distinguish between good and evil.
  + I think when most of us hear “righteousness”- and Good and Evil, we think mainly about doing good moral things- vs doing bad and immoral things.
  + And that's not necessarily wrong- but this word righteousness has more to it than that.
  + Its not just about morality- its about the Grand Narrative. The big story that God is telling in the world.
  + Righteousness is often referred to in the OT and NT as Justice.
  + We talked about it last week with Melchizdek being the King of SALEM- or Peace or Righteousness.
  + The idea is that God is going to put the world to Rights. He is going to heal the world. He’s going to make all the wrong things right. He’s going to fix the broken. Bind up the Broken hearted. Make the sad things come untrue.
  + He is going to do away with sin, evil, and death. He is going to restore what was broken by humanity’s rebellion against his loving rule.
  + Evil is everything that resists that WHOLENESS.
  + GOOD is everything that believes, displays, and hopes in that WHOLENESS.
  + **6:5**
  + Its spoken of again here, when he refers to it as the “good word and the powers of the coming age”
  + That Coming Age is the way righteousness wins.
  + Its wholeness- its God making the world complete and completely wonderful again.
  + The good word is the word about wholeness and righteousness coming to the world again.
* **Back to 1)**
  + He’s saying Christian maturity is very simply this.
  + In the midst of everything breaking around you. Disease. Death. Pain. Sin. Wars. Pandemics. Politics. Racial Injustice. Backstabbing Gossip. Failure of Church Leadership. Rebellion of Children. Poverty. Joblessness. Homelessness. Genocide. Persecution.
  + IN the midst of it all seeming to break down around you- Christian maturity is holding on to the Grand Narrative- the big story that Jesus is going to fix the world when he returns- and living as a picture of that…a sign of that in the present-in such a way that it begins to affect the people and the environment around you- THAT IS CHRISTIAN MATURITY.
  + Jesus preached a sermon once called the “Sermon on the mount”. The whole thing is about how to be a proper Ninja Turtle. Rejected by the world, but loving it and living in a way that shows his Kingdom. Here’s what he says near the start of it.
  + **Matthew 5:10-16**
  + **10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,**
  + **for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**
  + **11 “You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. 12 Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**
  + **13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.**
  + **14 “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.**
  + That’s Christian Maturity.

Transition: Now lets talk about what we can do become Ninja Turtles…I mean Mature Christians.

* **2) In hard times- Maturity sacrificially loves, but Immaturity panics with self-preservation.**
  + Ok first things here before we flesh out this idea.
  + Lets talk about how you start as a Christian.
  + Because the author starts chapter 6 with this talk of the ‘elementary’ things of Christ. The basics.
  + **6:1-2**
  + When he says we need to leave the elementary teachings about Christ- he’s not talking about forgetting that Christ died and resurrected and is coming back again.
  + Rather- he is talking about BUILDING on that foundation. Working it out into your daily life.
  + Look at what he puts in this foundational category for them.
  + He says repentance from dead works.
  + That simply means that these Hebrews have realized that, contratry to the way they had been living their Jewish faith, the way to God was not doing enough sacrifices or keeping oneself clean- that doesn't get you to God.
  + Rather, it is only by Jesus death in our place- it is only by his righteous life GIFTED to us- by grace- not our own works- that we are saved- welcomed into his family and kingdom.
  + That’s why he refers to it as FAITH in God.
  + Repentance from Dead works is turning away from doing good, or obeying the law- as the way to get to God and embracing JESUS as the way.
  + He goes on to talk about the Resurrection of the Dead and judgment and ritual washings. This is all in the category of the way Jesus reframed their Jewish faith of WORKING to keep yourself clean morally and ceremonially- and changing to a foundation of Jesus having done that FOR YOU.
  + **6:4-5**
  + He then defines the new experience with God- Receiving the Holy Spirit- the indwelling presence of God for all those that believe and follow Jesus- that helps us to see the big picture- that we are adopted by God and have one job that he has qualified us for- To be a City on Hill, Salt of the Earth, Ministers of Reconciliation, Ambassadors of Christ to the world.
  + So that’s the foundation.
  + **6:6**
  + At this point he says, Listen- if none of that changes your life. If you have heard all of that, and its boring to you. Or its not enough to keep you following Jesus- then there is no other Savior to crucify. There is no other God coming to make himself human and die for your sin.
  + If you go back to the old ways, you will be stuck there and no one is coming to save you.
  + **6:6-7**
  + then he gives this illustration of rain on crops.
  + He says, If you hear the good news that Jesus lived, died, resurrected and is coming again…and you think- Nah- that doesn’t really help me. If you don’t submit your life to that truth, that grand narrative- you are like ground that drinks up the life-giving rain- but produces nothing.
  + Just thorns and thistles which are good for nothing.
* **Back to 2)**
  + Its like the turtles were brought up by Splinter. They were taught Ninjitsu, and taught a moral code- about Good and Evil. They were taught about the way the world would reject them, but still they had a responsibility to live according to something higher…to protect the City against Shredder and the Foot Clan…but instead they just ate pizza and skateboarded.
  + Which they did…but imagine if that's all they did.
  + That is immaturity.
  + And in the middle of persecution and hardship for this church- they are beginning to panic…and forget the foundation.
  + So the warning here is – if you let go of this truth- you won’t find another one to take its place. Everything else is dead.
  + And remember- they aren’t going back to being LESS moral. Actually, they are going back to being even STRICTER adherents of God’s law. But they are doing it out of selfish self preservation, because they have forgotten what they have been taught.
  + **Rev 12:12b (start at “the devil”)**

In the book of Revelation, look at this description of the Devil.

He comes raging- with Great FURY- WHY?

Because he knows the big story. He knows what is coming. So in self-preservation he rages to do all he can to make a big fuss in the moment.

* + City Church- it is Satanic immaturity when we forget the grand narrative of our future. That all things will be made new. That nothing can separate from the love of Christ- and we panic when the going gets tough and we rage and hate and hoard and consume…with social media posts, or toilet paper, or neglecting our neighbors while we grab for money, power, or ieisure. What we are actually doing is running back to saviors that temporarily feel like they offer us more than Jesus.
* **Back to 2)**
  + Lets pause here for some real talk about a pretty serious implication for us.
  + These verses show us that it is POSSIBLE TO BE AROUND the story of Jesus, the people of Jesus, even do some things that look like Jesus- yet when the heat turns up- its revealed that you never really belonged to Jesus.
  + **TALK ABOUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THAT.**
  + **REPENT and BELIEVE.**
* Now- lets contrast that raging and panic that so befits SHREDDER and SATAN- with the cool calm collectiveness and beauty of the church.
  + **6:10**
  + He says when we believe the gospel- even in the worst of times, we will keep Serving the saints.
  + That's the church.
  + What does that mean?
  + **1 Peter 4:7-10**
  + **7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God**
  + I love how Peter is like “THE WORLD IS ENDING”…so show hospitality. That is COOL CALM SACRIFICIAL LOVE right there. Non anxious presence out the wazoo.
  + **6:12**
  + He also says we should be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.
  + In other words, you need some heroes. Some mentors. Some models.
    - Hebrews 11-
    - You need to be in the Scripture reading it to keep going.
    - They help us get the bigger story.
  + **5:12**
  + You need to be teaching- you should be a mentor for someone to imitate.
* **Back to 2)**
  + Difference in the teens who followed shredder- felt like mutants- followed a savior- gave them Shredders lair. All the temporary comforts.
  + **From first film- teenagers felt like mutants fall into the hands of Shredder or Turtles- ACTUAL mutants- fall into the hands of an empatheic (he’s a mutant too) master.**
  + Idols always start by promising you everything, and costing nothing.
  + But end up costing you everything, and keeping none of their promises.
  + Jesus comes up front saying take up my cross, costing everything.
  + IN the end- the cost is small- and the promise is kept…and you get everything.
* **Transition:** and that’s why I love this last part. Because if anybody just heard this and is worried “oh no- I might not really be a Christian. I need to hurry up and do a bunch of stuff to prove I am…the Author coms in at the end and says, slow down
* **3) The Mature Mutant Church can love fearlessly, because God swore on himself and anchored us in his love.** 
  + Listen again to Richard Rosenbaum about the turtles- in yet another way they mirror the church.
  + **The alienation that the Turtles experience is so entrenched**
  + **in society that nothing short of a miracle could change things;**
  + **the Turtles are profoundly affected by that reality, yet they don't let it mess with their morality or cause them to become cynical.**
  + **Even living in the very heart of postmodernity, the Turtles do not succumb to its temptations.**
  + Indeed, church…the alienation we experience sometimes from the wider world, not convinced of the beautiful story of Jesus puts us in positions sometimes ready to leave Jesus and embrace something else to save us. And only a miracle could change that.
  + These last words are about that miracle. The reality that can so profoundly affect us that all the pressures of the world , that we do not succumb to the temptations to panic and rage- but to remain sacrificing and loving others.
  + **6:13-14**
  + He goes to their father Abraham, the patriarch of their faith and says, When God promised to bless Abraham- he didn’t promise based on Abrahams ability and faithfulness. Rather…he swore on his own name.
  + In other words, he didn’t make the future blessing dependent on Abraham’s ability to do the right thing. He put it all on himself.
  + TALK ABOUT GOD CUTTING COVENANT, KNOCKING ABE OUT, AND WALKING THROUGH THE CUT UP LAMB BY HIMSELF.
  + YOU were saying- if I break my promise- may this be done to me.
  + **6:17-18**
  + He did this, because he knew we would be prone to wander…but he is not. He keeps his promises. And he wanted us to have his promise as a refuge. For it to be unshakeable encouragement that he would bless us.
  + **6:19-20a (end at forerunner)**
  + Then comes Jesus.
  + He talks about this anchor, that is Jesus.
  + That goes into the sanctuary, behind the curtain.
  + Holy of Holies. Presence of God. Jesus was the lamb that was slain, cut up for our breaking of the covenant- the way God keeps his promise to a faithless people.
  + Our anchor is not our good works, or proving we are worthy- It is Chrsit, the king of rightesouness- who was ripped apart- to put the world back together.
  + You must attach yourself to an anchor for an anchor to work.
  + That’s what faith does. Will you trust Jesus as your anchor. That connects you to Father…allows you to come close
* **Back to 3)**
  + When you do- you can live in maturity. Not panicking in the face of evil, but living a sacrificial life of love and justice.
  + That doesn’t quit when the going gets tough, but shines like a City on Hill, shows hospitality, protects the weak, the widow, the orphan and loves even our enemies…because we know they need an anchor too.
* Its actually summed up pretty well by the One Hit Wonder- Partners in Kryme- who had the #1 single off the original live action Ninja Turtles soundtrack from 1990. So I’ll leave you with the last lines of the smash hit Turtle Power- to send you out into maturity into the world.. Mutants- yet deeply loved and with an anchor of hope in Christ.
* **Now this is for real, so you fight for justice  
  Your shell is hard so you shout, "They can't dust us off!  
  Like some old coffee table."  
  Since you've been born you've been willing and able  
  To defeat the sneak, protect the weak  
  Fight for rights and your freedom to speak  
  Now the villain is chillin' so you make a stand  
  Back to the wall, put your sword in your hand  
  Remember the words of your teacher, your master:  
  Evil moves fast, but good moves faster  
  Than light, shining for your illumination  
  Good versus evil equals confrontation  
  So when you're in trouble  
  Don't give in and go sour  
  Try to rely on YOUR...Turtle Power!**
* **- *Turtle Power,* Partners in Kryme**