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## Hello Summer

### Part 3 – Five Marks of Spiritual Maturity

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The message that we're going to dive into together is called *Five Marks of Spiritual Maturity*. We're going to take an introspective look at and we're going to walk through five marks of spiritual maturity that I've chosen. In each mark, I'm going to ask you a tough question and we're going to do some self-reflection this morning, and we're going to do it with some purpose.

The Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthian Church and he said this in 1 Corinthians 13. ***11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.***

What Paul is saying is that for those of us who have a relationship with Christ on the earth that we walk right now, have a dimly lit understanding of who God is. As we walk in relationship throughout our lifetime, those lights will get brighter and brighter as our understanding and knowledge and our relationship with God grows. But it won't be until the day where we pass on from this broken version of earth and we stand before the throne of the King of Kings that we will fully know God the way that he has always fully known us. This process of spiritual maturation is what will take place from this point forward until the day we die.

Paul wrote to the Philippians and said, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He was establishing urgency to walk in relationship with God. Seek him, know him, grow in that relationship, and as a result, your life will be transformed from the inside out.

We're going to take a really good look at ourselves today and ask God, "Where am I? Where do I need to grow? What's my greatest opportunity or what's my greatest weakness? Where are some places that I need to apply focus in order to grow in?"

To celebrate this, I figured, before we jump into the five marks of maturity, I would share with you some of the marks of my immaturity just for a laugh. I'm going to roast myself; are y'all into that? Okay, here we go. This is painful. I've already done it once today and I'm going to do it again.

#### Four Marks of My Immaturity

**1. The flag pole.** In seventh grade, my parents moved us to Springfield, Illinois. I attended Chatham Middle School. As you know, being the new kid is tough sledding out there. You're lonely. Every

decision, every action you make matters as people are watching. I'm sitting in school, counting down the minutes for that bell to ring. It finally rings, and I go running outside to wait in line to catch the bus. There are kids everywhere. It's a crisp winter afternoon in Illinois. I look to my left and there was a pole right next to me. It had this delicious frost rising up off of it. I don't know what came over me. I just had to lick it. I grabbed hold of that thing and I touched my tongue to it. At first it was refreshing. And then I realized I was stuck. Immediately, I realized I had a real problem.

The crowd began to gather and every second that went by was crucial for me to be released from this pole. I first gave it a good tug and then I realize it was extremely secure. The second thing, in my panic, I think *Okay, how am I going to get my tongue off of this pole?* I tried to self-activate my saliva glands to get slobber to run down my tongue and possibly loosen up the poles grip. Well, that worked against me. It actually made more of my tongue stick to the pole. It was like a 50% increase.

Then I realized I had just dug myself deeper. In that moment, I realized my only shot was to rip the sucker off. I braced that pole and I tore away and my tongue released. I looked at the pole and it wasn't just a few taste buds, no it wasn't. This is not an exaggeration for the sake of a good laugh. I think there was about 10% of my tongue stuck on the pole. Then all of the kids in the school yard came running, pointing at my tongue chunk. I'm just like, *This is horrific.* Significant pain in my mouth; much more pain in my heart. Mark number one.

**2. Fueling up distracted.** Before I met Super Woman, actually Ashley Robbins and fell in love with the love of my life, I was dating a nice young lady. It was long distance, so I was talking on the phone. I was being my normal charming self, witty, whimsical, conversationally engaging. I was just chatting it up. I pulled up to the gas station, fueled up my rig, got back in; just having a great conversation. I put it in drive and started to drive away. The next thing I heard was this clunking sound. I looked back into my mirror and I realized I drove off without pulling the hose out of my tank, ripping it right off of the gas pump. Praise God they had learned from other dumb dumbs and there was some kind of safety valve on that thing, so the gas wasn't spewing everywhere. Needless to say, that conversation ended awkwardly. Mark number two.

**3. The one that got away.** This one is extremely hard to share. I hope you guys are enjoying this. A few years ago, less years than I care to admit, I crawled up in my deer stand in the morning. It was a beautiful fall morning. I was sitting up there enjoying myself. I saw, trotting up to me, a ten-point buck. I was thinking to myself, *Today is the day!* I have a nine-pointer on the wall, but I don't have a ten pointer. This thing walked right up to my stand and I'm like, *This is so easy.*

I got up, pulled back, full draw... *Aim small, miss small, straight, fast, accurate.* I released with full confidence. My arrow went sailing right over the back of the deer. It jumped up and then just stood there. I'm thinking, *Oh my gosh, the Lord is providing me a second chance.* I fumbled around and got my second arrow out. I put it in there, took a deep breath, drew back, *I've got this, fast, accurate, focused.* Then I released. It went right over the back of the deer for the second time. He jumped up, looked around and went back to eating. I'm thinking, *This is the dumbest ten-point buck in the county!*

I went to my quiver to get my last arrow. I only brought three because I was thinking, *All I need is one*. I grab my third arrow and I'm thinking, *Please, Lord Jesus*. I fired and essentially, my arrow bounces off the deer and he trotted off and that was it. Ten points, three chances... failure. That was hard to share, but this last one is even worse.

**4. 25.** At 25 years old, I moved back in with my parents. That's hard to confess. As you know, there are a lot of jokes at the expense of prolonged adolescence around here. And rightfully so. But, today, we're not talking about the prolonged adolescence that we laugh so hardily at. Today, we're talking about prolonged spiritual adolescence. The tone of the message is going to take a serious one because this is really important. It's really important that we understand where we are at in regard to our maturation process of walking in relationship with Jesus.

The tricky think about this is in order for us to grow, we have to be honest with ourselves. Let me show you this little diagram I use. This is what I call the Here /There Path. It's a mental model that you can use in business, administrating, personal goals, whatever it might be. It's just kind of a practical way to think about achieving your goals.

The first thing you want to do is establish your "Here." Where am I at today? What is my current reality? The hard thing about this part is it's so difficult to be honest with ourselves. I've said it often, but reality is an acquired taste. If don't truly know or you're not honest with yourself where you're at, you can never get to your goal because the right path won't reveal itself. So, if you're honest with yourself in your current reality, then you establish your goal and you're really specific. "Here's where I want to go. Here's tangibly what it looks like. Here's the measurables that can affirm them." If you have those two things (here and there) firmly established, then the path itself will present itself. There is a path to get from here to there. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy along the way. You're going to have to stop, recalibrate, refocus, reshift, and find your way, but there is a path to get from here to there.

When we're not honest with ourselves, we establish a false reality and if this is the path to get from here to there and our reality starts here, there's no way that I can get on track to achieving my goals. Here's a practical example. Let's say somebody lives in Branson and they are struggling to make ends meet. Financially, they are just tired of constantly struggling. That could be defined as you're "here."

Perhaps the thought is that it's the ups and downs of the economy or you've had bad bosses, etc. So, you establish your current reality when, in truth, the truth is that this person has had three jobs in the last year. They've quit each one of them because they weren't getting paid enough, they didn't like the hours, they didn't like the boss. If you look in the mirror or perhaps you have some friends who are honest with you, you might discover that truly the problem is actually, rather than the economy or your boss or the specific job, that you have an issue with work ethic or you might have an issue with subjecting yourself to authority. Without being honest with yourself, you can never achieve the goal of being financially secure or making some ground in that area of your life.

We've got to be honest with ourselves, and so it is with our spiritual walk. If you've got spiritual goals, we approach it the exact same way. That's what we're going to do today. Are you ready to jump in?

## Five Marks of Spiritual Maturity

**1. A spiritually Christian is a self-feeder.** I think there are two buckets in which we can fall. Either you are a consumer or you are a self-feeder. Let me walk through the history of God's people within the Bible to help unpack this a little bit. When Adam and Eve sinned and fell out of relationship with God, God used a man named Moses and he established a law. The law showed the people that they had a real issue with a holy God. It revealed to them their sin. The law was 623 dos and don'ts. All these dos and don'ts showed the people that they could not enter into God's presence because they were broken and sinful and he is holy and perfect, and this sin cannot dwell in his presence.

So, God also established a way. As he established a tabernacle or a temple, he took one of the tribes of Israel, the Levites, and he said that they were going to be the priests of his people. The priests would offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, they were intermediaries. The high priests, once a year, would offer a sacrifice. They would enter into the tabernacle and they would enter into the holy place, the Holy of Holies, where the Arc of the Covenant sat. On top of the Arc of the Covenant is the Mercy Seat of Christ. They would take an unblemished lamb and take that blood and splatter it on the top of the Mercy Seat and the sins of the entire nation or all of God's people were forgiven for entire year.

That intermediary was standing in the gap for the people. All of the Old Testament points to the fact that we, as people, need a savior. God had a plan to send the perfect sacrifice because sin cannot be forgiven without the shedding of blood. That set up for the arrival or the manifestation of Jesus Christ. The Son of God comes and hangs on the cross. He was perfect and blameless just like that lamb was. He hangs up on the cross and he dies for the sins of mankind, a perfect sacrifice once and for all. According to Mark, watch what happened when Jesus gave up his spirit to God in heaven.

**Mark 15 - 37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. 38 And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"**

As Jesus hangs up on the cross and as he utters his last breath, "Lord, I commit to you my spirit," the Holy of Holies was surrounded or covered by a very thick curtain. The scripture says that this curtain was ripped from top to bottom. It was torn in half. What that signifies is that Jesus on the cross overcame that broken relationship of man and God and because his sacrifice covers our sin, that separation between us and God was removed. Now you and I, New Testament believers, can enter into that intimacy with God without an intermediary because Jesus was both the perfect sacrifice and the perfect priest for all time, so when we have relationship with him, we have relationship with God. Isn't that awesome?

One of the mistakes we can make is we can fall into old habits. We can place an intermediary, somebody to stand in the gap between us and God, and that's a mistake because we move from being a self-feeder to being a consumer. In other words, my intermediary might be my pastor, it might be my spouse, it might be my parents, it might be a small group leader. What you do is you place them between you and God and you are consuming on the faith of another person. That person is actually working as a crutch between you and your relationship with God when they need to be a support

system. There's a difference. In maturity, we're meant to enter into that relationship personally and with freedom. So, the first mark of a spiritually mature Christian is being a self-feeder. They go to the Lord through a lifestyle of prayer and study of God's Word, investing and serving in Christian community and so on.

Here's our first question. We're going to have a question with each one of these marks. Here's the first question I want you to ask yourself. **Is your relationship with God dependent or independent of others?** Be honest with yourself.

**2. A spiritually mature Christian has a biblical worldview.** How do you form your belief systems? Is it through the news that you consume? Is it through your upbringing? Is it through your friends? Perhaps it's through the way you feel about things. How is it that you form the beliefs in your heart that you act out of?

Ashley and I had an amazing conversation the other day. We've got a dear friend in town who serves our government. He is extremely intelligent and well informed. We were enjoying a meal with them and Ashley asked, "How do I discern what's true and what's not true as I'm reading the news?"

His answer back to us was just so brilliant. He said, "The mistake a lot of people make is they build their belief system or form their opinions based off of news articles, videos, etc. That's backwards. What you need to do first is decide what you believe and once you decide what you believe, then you can process news sources and filter through your belief system."

It's the same with our faith. Too many times, we are building our belief systems based on other sources. A spiritually mature Christian will establish their belief system based on the Word of God. Then, they will take all these outside sources and filter them through scripture to know what is true and what is deception.

Here's an example that came to me just in the last couple of weeks. I had a video put in front of me and it had millions of views. It was a very well-known spiritual leader who claims to be a follower of Jesus. I don't doubt... They may or may not be. This spiritual leader was put in a very difficult situation. They were in a public forum and obviously they were being videotaped. They had kind of an open forum Q&A session.

They brought a little boy up to the microphone. This little boy was in tears and he had a hard time sharing what his question was. They brought him up to this religious leader and the little boy whispered in his ear. Truly... I look at this religious leader and I think it's clear he has a big heart of compassion and kindness and was feeling for this young boy. He has a private conversation with the boy and then he takes the microphone and relays the conversation to the crowd with the boy's permission.

Here's what he said when he relayed what the boy said: "My father died a short time ago. He was an atheist, but he baptized his four children. He was a good man. Is Dad in heaven?"

Now, I don't for one second envy the position this man was in. That is so hard. I'm fortunate and blessed to get to work with lots and lots of little guys and little gals and I've had this conversation in smaller, more intimate settings. This is a tough position.

Here's the way the religious leader responded. "It's nice that a son says that about his father, that he was good. Do you think that God would be able to leave a man like that far from him? Do you think that?"

The audience says, "No."

He responded, "Louder!"

The people shouted "NO!"

He said, "Does God abandon his children when they are good? No. Here, [the boy's name] this is the answer. God surely was proud of your father."

That's a really tough situation, but I don't believe that his answer was biblically sound. Here's what Jesus said in Matthew 7. **13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it."** The hard thing about that situation is that little boy needed hope and the hope that was shared with him was a false hope. Sadly, there are millions of people who sat at the figurative feet of that teacher, sat under that teaching, under the emotional weight of the situation. It's hard. But, there is a hope that stands up under the weight of difficult questions. Jesus said this in John 14: 6, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me."** Romans 6 - **23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

There is good news. The good news is that Jesus places hope in Revelation 21: 4 in that every tear will be wiped away; sadness, mourning, sin, and death will be gone once and for all. That's the truth. 2 Timothy 4 says this... Paul is writing to his spiritual son in the faith, Timothy and he says, **3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.**

Jesus, having a crowd before him right after he shared that narrow is the way to heaven and wide is the way to destruction, speaks to this group of people and he gives them clarity. Those that cling to truth, those that have placed their hope in Jesus, this is what they can expect. Matthew 7 says this: **24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."**

**26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."**

When we decide what we believe, a spiritually mature Christian will take not just one text or something that they've heard from someone they respect or trust, but they'll go to the scripture and they'll take the scriptures as a whole and what they say about that topic and develop a belief system that they live out of.

So, let me ask you this question. **Can you support your belief system on \_\_\_\_\_?** You fill in the blank: salvation, suffering, marriage, sexuality, sin, etc. Can you support your belief system through God's word? Yes or no.

**3. A spiritually mature Christian suffers well.** Paul wrote Timothy also in Chapter 3. ***1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.*** Peter said, "Don't be surprised by the fiery ordeal you find yourself in, but as you walk through hardship, the result will be praise and glory if you walk through it well."

Again, there are kind of two buckets that we can fall in. For those of us who walk with Jesus and suffer full of faith, the scripture gives us promises or fruit in the midst of suffering. You'll find it in James 1, 1 Peter 1, Romans 5. You'll persevere through the midst of hardship. Through that, you'll develop your endurance, and as your endurance builds, you'll have proven character. And out of that proven character, God will give you a testimony. And out of that testimony, you can be a blessing and a ministry to other people walking through similar situations. Then, ultimately, it will result in your growth and your maturity as a believer. You'll find hope knowing that the difficulty of this time is temporary. You'll find peace that surpasses all understanding. It will be a testimony to those around you. You'll be filled with joy, knowing that God will use the hardship you've walked through for his mighty purposes. You'll receive love and comfort and you'll turn around and give love and comfort in the midst of suffering. And, finally, it will result in praise and glory when you stand before Jesus in the throne room. Those are great things, aren't they? That's a good list and it only comes from those who suffer full of faith.

Here's the other bucket. A couple of groups of people fall into this bucket: those who have no relationship with the Lord and those of us who are walking in immaturity or backslide into immaturity. You'll find yourself playing the victim card, blaming others, welling up with anger, focusing on anger and then lashing out on those around you. Running miles in your head of self-justification. You'll find hopelessness because you're standing on sand when the storm is blowing in. Finally, you'll end up seeking comfort at the cost of others because there is no other option to sooth the pain that you walk through. In addition to that, we find ourselves self-medicating through all kinds of unhealthy ways.

Even as a believer who walks with Jesus, we can fall into this. Let me show you how we transition back and forth. When we walk through testing, we can fall out of this category with all of the good fruit that God offers us when we get prideful and we doubt the Lord. James describes a man who doubts as like a wave tossed to and fro in the ocean. There's no solid foundation and they fall back into suffering without faith and they reap this fruit of unrighteousness. On the other hand, if we respond in humility and faith and we walk in maturity, we can walk through suffering in a God-honoring way. And we can be a testimony to those around us. Have you ever been around somebody who suffers well? It is a sight to behold. Only by the grace of God.

So, here's your question for mark number three. **Are you suffering full of faith or apart from faith?**

**4. A spiritually mature Christian is free from the chains of anxiety.** Two weeks ago, Clay Scroggins did an awesome job on this, so I'm just going to scratch the surface. If you missed that message, I highly recommend you go back and watch it online. One of his main points was to allow peace to guard your heart through the practice of prayer and thanksgiving. One of the things that he said that I really have been unable to stop thinking about was "Take your anxiety and drive it into prayer." What an awesome force! How many of us struggle with our prayer life? Take your anxiety and all of the momentum that it's carrying in your life and drive it into your prayer life. What an awesome resource to us.

I'll remind you of this. **You become what you obsess over.** If you obsess over anger with a person, you're going to become an angry person. If you obsess over worry, you're going to become worrisome to all the people around you. Make your obsession Jesus. Make your obsession his grace and deliverance from your sin. When that becomes your obsession, you walk in maturity.

The question for number four: **Is your heart at peace?**

**5. A spiritually mature Christian practices continual repentance.** I love what Paul writes to Timothy. He says, *"I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers, night and day."*

Think about this statement: "I thank my God whom I serve with a clear conscience..." Paul, at a minimum was an accomplice to murder. We know that he held the cloaks of men that stoned innocent Christians to death on the side of the road. And yet, God demonstrates the power of his grace. It is indiscriminating that a man like that, an accomplice to murder of followers of Jesus, would be forgiven and be able to walk with a clear conscience.

You and I have that access as well. We have the opportunity to live with a clear conscience, but we have the personal responsibility to maintain that clear conscience through confession. One of the most important tools in the toolbox of a Christian is a clear conscience. You see, for each one of us who walks with God and who have given our heart to the Lord, the Holy Spirit has given us access to all kinds of power to overcome the challenges of this life.

So long as we have unconfessed sin in our life, that sin will prevent all of the good fruit that is available to us from flourishing in our life. It will reestablish a broken relationship with God. Not one that can take your eternity from you, but one that can take your intimacy. So, as a mature Christian, we practice the continual art of confession. So, let me ask you this. Is there a sin that remains hidden and unconfessed or unreconciled in your life?

It is one thing to confess your sin to God, but often times, the process of confession requires reconciliation of the relationships around us. Don't make the mistake of confessing to God and thinking that it's all good because there is a process that God is going to walk you through and it's a process of reconciliation. In order to repent and make that 180-degree turn and head the other direction, you've got to deal with those relationships in your life that have been where you have lost trust, where you've

been dishonest, that you've hurt someone... and the list goes on and on. Is there a sin that remains hidden and unconfessed or unreconciled in your life?

Let me summarize. Here are the **Five Marks of Spiritual Maturity**. 1) Self-feeder, 2) Biblical Worldview, 3) Suffer well, 4) Free from chains of anxiety, 5) Practice continual repentance.

I realize this is a very "up in your face" message. And you can take it a couple of different ways. Some of you may be encouraged. Some of you may be convicted. Some of you may be discouraged. What I want to challenge you with is this. Don't be discouraged. Be motivated.

Let me bring you back to that mental model that I showed you, the Here/There path. Here's what's cool. If we are willing to look at our weaknesses or our shortcomings and be honest with our current reality, it gives us the opportunity to grow. In fact, your greatest weaknesses represent your greatest opportunities for exponential growth in your relationship with Jesus. That ought to be exciting. So, rather than sweeping them under the rug or hiding from them, we ought to be seeking them out.

That's why Jeremiah says, "Let us examine and probe our ways." I want to dig that up, Lord. Show it to me because I want to grow in my relationship with you. Don't be discouraged; be encouraged because here's the reality: Can you hide your shortcomings from God anyway? No. There all exposed before him. He's just waiting for you to respond, to reach out, in humility, and grab his hand and walk with him in a relationship of growth. What an awesome opportunity we have today as a church.

Here's a challenge I want to put on you. As you guys drive away from church, I want you to talk about where you fall with each one of these marks. Be honest with your spouse. Sit down to lunch with a friend. Call up a parent. Get it out there in the open in humility and identify those amazing opportunities you have to grow. Let's pray for our courage and our humility to do just that together as a church body.

Father, I want to pray that you would cover us with a spirit of encouragement, a spirit of humility, honesty. I want to pray, God, that you would use this message to motivate us. I want to pray that our church body, together and individually, would move towards maturity, that we would work out our salvation with fear and trembling. It's in the mighty name of Jesus I pray. Amen