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## Adulging

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I want to talk to you today about adulging; I want to talk to you about growing up and how we all need to get off of baby food, spiritually, and eventually on adult food. We need to go from Gerber to grownup food.

One of the things that my wife, Meredith, and I have in common with Ted and Amy is that we like good food and we like nice restaurants and we like to find restaurants across the country. We'll text one another from different cities and ask where the other eats in that city. In fact, we have mutual friend who lives in Chicago that almost every city I land in, I'll text Mike and say, "Hey, where should I eat in this place," because I want to find the food.

There's a steak restaurant in Tulsa, Oklahoma called Mahogany. It's fantastic. In fact, I've been all over the world... People take me to eat in great places. I don't pay for all of this stuff usually. People are paying for me. I will eat in these nice restaurants... There are three restaurants that are my favorite in this particular category. They're in my hometown, but Mahogany is one of them. I've never had a steak anywhere that I thought was better than Mahogany. A couple of times they were equal to. The secret is that they leave the bone on the filet, which is awesome – the ribeye has the flavor because the bone is on it – but I don't like dealing with the fat. I'm not into it at all. I like the texture of a filet, but I like the flavor of the ribeye and this way you get both.

They cook it at like a thousand degrees with a stick of butter per filet for a couple of seconds per side. For those of you who overcook it, you just don't need to order beef anymore. Just get the chicken and quick spending all of your money; it's supposed to have blood in it. Remember what Jesus said to Peter? He said, "Rise, kill, and eat." It's supposed to have blood coming out of it in order for it to be biblical food. I love this place.

But imagine that if I have steak... Level 2 here in Branson is a pretty good steak and Longhorn I think maybe is one of the better steaks. You need to travel to Tulsa. I have a Longhorn steak with butter all over it right here. Can you see this? Look at the butter on top the asparagus.

You would never sit down and order this fine cut of meat and then have the waitress or the waiter come out and say, "Yeah, it's going to be a little bit of work for me to do this. Can you just put it in here (Ninja blender)? Those of us who understand what just happened are asking for forgiveness from our Heavenly Father. Go ahead and throw the asparagus in. I don't know what the deal is with asparagus, but it goes straight to the bladder for some reason. It may be some homeopathic thing that solves kidney stones. Put the lid on really tight; I don't want to wear it.

This, by the way... What did you call this thing? A Ninja. Watch this. (turns on blender) Just like that. It makes my Vitamix seem like a sissy. You would never have them take this meal, because it's too much work, pour it into a glass and then take a straw and stick it in it and say, "I'm going to enjoy it." I'm not going to drink it. Ted offered me \$100.00 because he's cheap. This would be thousands of dollars for me to drink this. I would never do it. That's the reason I got out of youth ministry, so I don't have to do this nonsense ever, ever again. I would vomit the rest of the service if I did it. But how ridiculous is this little illustration? You would never sit down at a fine steak restaurant and say, "I can't go to all of the energy to cut it up. And then to chew it one bite at a time? Can you just blend it? I want you to take it and stick it in a blender."

In fact, one of my nephews has this idea... He has pitched this concept to me for several years. It's a restaurant idea called Momma Bird. When you walk into the restaurant called Momma Bird, you meet the hostesses and they're all different. You meet Larry and Larry just reeks of garlic because he's been eating garlic all week long and it's just oozing out of his pores. Stephon is rosemary and Sally is sour cream. You pick your host and you pick your flavor and then they come to the table next to you and they will take it and cut it up and chew it up for you. All you have to do is lean your head back and open up your mouth. Momma Bird will then spit the garlic flavor that came out of Larry's mouth – because he's been eating garlic all week – into your mouth and you eat it. I'm pretty sure his idea is not going to work.

As ridiculous as all that sounds, in the Bible, Paul told the Corinthian Church, "You should be on solid food. You should be eating meat. In fact, you're still drinking milk." And there is this epidemic in the world we live in where we want something, but we don't want to do the work required to get it. We want to lose weight, but we won't get off the Chick-fil-A sauce, which is 20 times worse for you than ketchup and 20 times better than a packet of ketchup.

If you're like me, when I do diet, I expect amazing results, right? I go hungry for one day and I'm shocked that I didn't lose five pounds overnight and I'm struggling with this process. I'll go work out one time and feel really good about myself and the next morning, I'm sore. I think thoughts like, *I should pace myself in this thing*. Beyond that, I have spiritual thoughts like, *I don't want to get up and preach the gospel and people be distracted by my muscles; I want this to be all about the Lord. I know it's a fad today in Christianity, but I want it to be all about the Lord and I want them to pay attention to Word*. I'm self-giving like that. I will carry a little extra weight so that you will pay attention to the Bible when I teach the Bible. The truth is when you think through working out, I want to work out one time and be amazed that I look like Captain America a few days later.

But, there is this epidemic in our culture and I see it over and over again in youth sports. I've coached all my kids in multiple sports over the years. In pee-wee football, these little boys will show up. Day one, they want to make one-handed, back-handed catches in the end zone, right? They're four or five years old and they want to do that from the get-go. As a coach, you want to kind of weed them out and create some stamina so they can actually finish a game, so you start running them. They start dropping like flies. Kids start quitting the team because they want to be a football player; they don't want to become one.

It translates directly into our spiritual growth in that sometimes we end up in this momma bird facet where we're saying we want it blended up for us. Some of you are willing to be disciplined and nurtured by Instagram with clips that are no longer that 59 seconds because you're not willing to grow up. **You want to be a grownup, but you don't want to grow up.**

That reminds us of that old Toys-R-Us song. Remember that one? "I don't wanna grow up; I'm Toy-R-Us kid. There's a million kinds of toys at Toy-R-Us that I can play with, from bikes to trains to video games. It's the biggest toy store there is. Gee Whiz! I don't want to grow up cause maybe if I did, I couldn't be a Toys-R-Us kid." Here's the sad part about it; they didn't grow up. In fact, look at them now. [picture of Geoffrey the giraffe with a suitcase] They're the blockbuster of toy stores because they refuse to grow up.

**For us, spiritually, we will either grow up or we will die.** As you process what we're talking about today about growing up, we want to be grown up, but we don't want to do what it takes to grown up. We call this adulting. It's a cultural word that we use – young people use it today – it's the hard work required to be an adult – adulting. You'll hear somebody in our culture today say, "I just can't adult today." What they mean is "I want to be an adult without doing all the adulting required."

You see this with millennials. I don't want to pile on a soft target. We hire a lot of millennials and some of them are some of the greatest staff members we have, but it's easy to say out of one side of your mouth that so many of the millennials are lazy, but the truth is we have to blame ourselves. We gave them the technology to be that lazy. We weren't technologically advanced enough to be that lazy, right? It took me ten years to watch Friends. If we're not careful, this pattern will play out and we see this pattern playing out with young people all them time. The graduate from college and they want a job as the president of the company. They don't want to put in the years and the energy and the effort required right out of college. They want that kind of a job, which I think is the reason we see so many start up companies in our culture. They want to be at the top right out of the get-go.

In fact, I'm standing around my kitchen island a week ago with some 14-year-old boys, mine being one of them, and I said to one of his buddies whose two older siblings work at Chick-fil-A, "Hey, are you going to work at Chick-fil-A like your siblings. He said, "I hope not." My son said, "I think I'd just like to skip fast food altogether." The other one said, "Me too..." And this is what he said. He's 14 years old. "Me too, unless I can be the CEO." Out of middle school, I'm going to be the CEO of Chick-fil-A or McDonalds. Somehow, I'm just going to move from that.

By the way, you can start your own company. A lady came in the guest reception a few weeks ago and introduced herself to me. She said, "I'm the CEO of such and such company." Something inside of me just wanted to make conversation with her, so I said, "How many employees do you have?" and she said, "One."

I said, "You have one employee: you!"

She said, "Yeah."

I said, "And you're the CEO."

She said, "Yeah."

I said, "But you're also the janitor and the bookkeeper and the receptionist and all of the other things."

You can do that. You can start your own company and be the CEO, but you're not going to have six figures. You might have six bucks, right? But we want this end point with no path in between.

If that's true in our spiritual lives, where we want all of the benefits of being spiritually mature but none of the hard work required and none of the discipline required of becoming spiritually mature, here's what I want you to hear me say today. **It is in the hard work and the discipline where all the benefits reside for those who are walking with Christ.** Sometimes I tell people in our church, "You can't handle anything because you haven't been through anything." Is that not true? There are clubs that you get in... When you go through something, you want to find somebody who has been through that and made it and successfully come out the other side for you to talk to.

I want you to turn in your Bible to 1 John 2. We're going to spend all of our time this morning in Chapter 2. This chapter, maybe more than any other chapter in the whole Bible, details the progress of spiritual growth and spiritual maturity. If you're here today and you feel like you're spinning your wheels or you're here today and you feel like you're stuck or you're here today and you feel like you're not at the level you want to be spiritual, John is going to point out for us growth markers that will show us where we are in our spiritual maturity so that we can figure out how to get to where we want to go.

And you know is the John of the first second and third John. We believe John wrote five books of the Bible. He wrote the Book of Revelation, but he also wrote the Gospel of John and then these three letters. In the first part of the first letter, this epistle, he says, "Hey, I need your attention. I want to tell you some things." It's written late first century, which means all the other disciples and apostles are dead and gone. He's saying, "You need a record of who Jesus is; you need that." And because he's the last surviving person to know Jesus face to face, he's going to write the epistles as an encouragement to them in a record of Jesus so that they will have it. The subject matter is all about their growth. It's all about their spiritual maturity. It's all about them being disciplined and nurtured in the faith.

There are several things that you notice when you read this chapter of scripture. The first is that he categorizes them into three groups of growth. The first one is children and the next one is young people and the next one is parents. The New Living Translation, which is what I read out of, calls the parents "mature in the faith." Some of your translations call them "father and mothers." So, he's talking to three different groups of people at three different points in their faith journey.

The *children* are new to the faith; they've just accepted Jesus. The *young people* are maturing and growing in their faith. The *fathers and mothers* are self-explanatory; they're reproducing themselves. They are bringing people intentionally to Jesus Christ, actively telling other people about Jesus. And he says to them some very specific things about where they are in the growth process.

Think about that for a second. If you were able to speak to the chapter behind you... So, if you are in middle school, you're going to talk to elementary school students. If you're in high school, you're going to talk to middle school students. If you are in college, you're going to talk to high school students. Young professional would talk to college students. Older married couples would talk to younger married couples. So, if we gave you that opportunity and you could do that, what would you say to the people coming up behind you? Whatever it is that you would say would be something for that point on their journey where they are and which you had come through and grew through. That's kind of how this is playing out in this text.

I want to give you three introductory statements that John makes and then we'll cover the growth markers. And I'll just tell you on the front end there are eight. We won't get through eight today because we have three services and so however far we get, we get, and the rest of them you can just grow up and find yourself in 1 John 2, okay? You just learn to be a self-feeder.

**1. Growth is initiated by forgiveness.** Look at Verse 12, *I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus.* Skip down one verse to Verse 14. *I have written to you who are God's children because you know the Father.* Here's the point. You cannot start on a faith journey until you are willing to deal with your sin. You can't get in the journey and even begin the journey if you won't be cleansed and justified and your sin be dealt with, but if that's all there was to it, there wouldn't be much growth required. But forgiveness is how God initiates this growth. In fact, write this sentence down. **Life precedes growth.** Always. Life is always on the front end of growth.

Meredith, my wife, has all these flowers and pots all around our back yard and pool. It's full time job to water all these things. She's just not allowed to go out of town while this is a job to be done because I'm not going to be responsible for killing all these plants. I can't grow plants. I want artificial plants. She doesn't like artificial plants. We have the succulents and I'm like, "A succulent means you water it never." She says, "It's doesn't mean never." Occasionally you have to water these things. But if you took a pot and put it right here and I put a broom in it and I did everything required to get it to grow – water it, put miracle grow food, take it out in the sun, and get it everything that it needs to grow – is the broom ever going to grow. No. Why? Because life precedes growth.

Here's a tough statement that I want some of you to consider. You may have been around Jesus and the church for decades, but there's been zero growth and zero fruit. I want to love you today as your guest pastor and tell you one of the things you ought to consider is that there's no life. When you come to know Jesus Christ, he brings life. Where he goes, he brings life. He was known for bringing the dead to life.

One of the couples in the first service, in their 70s, said, "We may be dead by January 2020 for this Israel trip or we may die there on the trip." I said, "It would be a good place to die. I heard people there raise from the dead." It would be a good place for me to go and I would be good with that. In fact, I heard a story of a man whose wife did die in Israel and he went to the airlines and they were like, "Hey, it costs X number of dollars to get your wife home," and he said, "Yeah, I'll pay the extra money to take her home to America." And the airline said, "Why? We can just bury her here." He said, "Because I heard people raise from the dead here and I don't want her to come back." But life precedes growth.

**2. Growth is sustained by knowing Christ.** Look what he says in Verse 13. *I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning.* He repeats himself almost word for word in the next verse 14. And so, you come to know God through forgiveness, right? We were far from God, we were deep in our sin, and we have been forgiven, which brings us into right relationship with the Heavenly Father. To continue to grow, you grow in your relationship with his Son Jesus Christ.

Paul put it this way in the Book of Philippians. He said, "I took my pedigree, my accomplishments, everything that I could have chalked up to accomplishment and I considered it worthless. But there is this one thing that is deeply valuable, and that one thing is knowing Christ." It is so valuable, and **spiritual growth is not sustained by following a program; it is not sustained by getting a degree; it is not sustained by what you know; it is sustained by *who* you know.**

**3. Growth is demonstrated by victory.** It is initiated by forgiveness, sustained by knowing Christ, but it is demonstrated by victory. Look at Verse 13. *I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one.* Keep going, and look at what he says in the next verse. *I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God's word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one.* Spiritual growth is demonstrated by a consistent victory in this thing called spiritual warfare. If you are constantly getting your tail whipped in the confrontation with the enemy, constantly losing battle after battle after battle with the enemy, then you are not advancing in the growth track available to you as a child of God.

Side note: Temptation is not a sin. Jesus was tempted and never sinned. So, I'm not saying that you should never be tempted; that's not what I'm saying. In fact, the more you grow, I think the bigger the bullseye you get on your back for the enemy to come after you. I'm talking about giving in to that. I'm talking about failing over and over and over again. You are not supposed to let the enemy win. You're supposed to be winning. You're the head and not the tail. You are the child of God and victory comes when you move forward. Hear me. Spiritual growth is never passive. It's never ever passive. It is you cooperating with the work of the Spirit in you and agreeing with the Lord and letting him grow you.

Do you remember when your child was an infant and you went to the pediatrician every like two hours? When we started having these babies... We had four and they are now 18, 16, 14, and 12. So there was a season where it was just unbelievable. In fact, I remember journaling during the third one, "God, you've got to give me another job. I can't be the pastor of this church start and a dad to these three kids." I laugh about it now, but I was dead serious. I couldn't figure it all out. People would say, "Is there anything we can get you?" I was like, "A gift card to the pediatrician's office." We're were there all the time. And they tell you to come back, right? Then you graduate to every two weeks and then every two months and then every couple of years. We're at the point now where it's like every couple of decades, right?

My 18-year-old was going away to college and she needed the physician's signature on a physical. She called the doctor and said, "I need to get this done."

And he said, "Do you realize you haven't been here in ten years?"

To which she said, “Awesome! You did a good job ten years ago.”

He said, “No, it’s a problem. You should come in periodically.”

She said, “I feel good.”

He said, “I’m not signing a thing unless you come in to see me.”

So, she forged it and went to Liberty University and is there with a forged physical exam. She said, “I feel good. I know he would sign it, so I just signed it.”

You remember when they were little that you would go to the doctor and the doctor would say, “Hey, your son is at a 98 percentile in weight and the 89 percentile in height.” We pretended like we knew what those numbers meant. All of the dads, we competed with it. “My son’s in the 98 percentile; what’s yours?” We have no ideal what that means, right? But then they graduate, and these growth markers took them from infant to toddler, and from toddler to kid, and from kid to student or teenager.

And when they get into school, those markers are all over the place with new ones. Now it’s your daughter should be reading on a level N. Oh, I don’t know that, right? What is she reading at? Well, F. I remember F, but I don’t know what N is. Or your son should be doing so many pullups. And then they turn 13 and you throw all the growth markers out the window because they are stupid. Their brain is no longer attached at the top and there are no synapses connecting the right side to the left side of the brain. If you ask them why they did something, they say they don’t know. And they’re telling the truth. They don’t know why. You remember that because you remember your dad asking you why you did something, and the answer was I don’t know. It’s just a victory to get up in the morning at this age.

But we pay attention to all these growth markers in their academics and in their education and in their physical growth, in dance and piano and sports and every other thing. If we’re not careful, we ignore all the spiritual markers for their spiritual maturity and their spiritual growth.

## **Growth Markers**

Let’s back up to the beginning of Chapter 2 and get a running start. We’ll just go verse by verse. Again, there are eight growth markers and we’ll get as far as we can.

**1. We rely on Jesus for help.** Look at Verse 1. ***1 My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin.*** That’s kind of the whole focus because... and there was a heresy that said you can know Christ and do whatever you want to do, and he’s dealing with that. He says, “No, no, no you know Christ; don’t sin. Just don’t do it.” That’s where I would be as a counselor. I would just say, “Just stop! Next.”

***But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.***

Now that word *advocate*, John is the only Bible writer to use that word. In the whole Bible, he's the only one. Remember that over in the gospel he used that word to refer to the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I'm going to go away, but if I go away, I'll send another one like me, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit." In fact, modern translation changes the word advocate to *Helper*. I'm going to send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. He is the Helper when it comes to all things true. It's part of his job to lead us to the truth and all things true, convict us of sin and of righteousness, who we are in Christ. The Holy Spirit leads us into the truth.

But as you deal with all of this, Jesus is our Helper when it comes to sin because when you are saved by his blood, your sin is wiped away, it is cleansed, it is taken care of, but your desire to sin is not dead. You will occasionally sin. John's saying I'm writing you to say don't sin but I know you and I know people and I know how this is going to play out and so you might sin and if you do, I don't want you to go backwards in your spiritual growth; I want you to keep moving and moving forward because Jesus is your Helper when it comes to sin.

When Katherine, my youngest, was a baby, around a year old or nine months old, I would come home from work and Meredith never one time gave me this report: "Hey, Katheryn fell 98 times today." That was never the report, because that's what parents do. The report was, "She took a step and a half today." If we, as earthly parents, gage growth that way, how about your Heavenly Father who knows exactly what you need. I think in heaven there are moments... In fact, I think God in heaven is speaking over you today and he's saying, "Come here, come here, Michael, come here, come here, all you angels come here. Watch, she's going to respond today. He's going to hear the word and obey it today. Come watch." God measures your growth and your steps not your falls. The only way Jesus can be our Helper is if we confess our need for help. So often our spiritual growth is stunted because we aren't willing to say, "I don't have this." "I can't do this." "I don't know how to do that." "I need help." I'm convinced spiritually if we would just raise our hand more often and say, "I need help, we would get it."

**2. We are obedient to God. 3 And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments.** These are getting harder, like right out of the chute progressively harder. We were allowing Jesus to help and now we're obedient. **4 If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth.** We are forgiven our sins, but now we've got to grow and move from just needing forgiveness to obeying God, to leaning into obedience to God in order to grow spiritually.

I used to tell my kids all the time, "If you want to mature, you need to practice what we call in our house instant obedience." Because **delayed obedience is disobedience.** So, do what I say when I say it immediately, and then we can ask questions after you've done it. Because I want you to mature and I want you to trust your daddy's here for you and that what I ask you to do is the right things. Well, spiritually, we need to practice instant obedience so that when God gives us something to do, he's saying, "Watch, watch, watch, they're going to respond. They're going to trust me. They're going to faith me instant obedience."

**3. We love God and his word. 5 But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him.** That's the reason I combine with these 51 other pastors every year to write these devotions that just came out. I haven't even read this one. It just came out

yesterday. The reason I partnered with those pastors to write a 52-week devotional every year is because I want to push people to get in the word. I want to plan where they will get in the word, and they will start little with Gerber and then move to a little more mature and they are eating up the Word of God so that they have to have a passion for getting up and reading the Bible. You've got to take his word and put it inside of you if you want to grow. There is no shortcut to this. Hear me. There is no shortcut.

I've got some couples who I've seen a few times in the last few years. The wife is like, "I'm out; I'm done with the marriage."

"What do you mean you're done with the marriage?"

She said, "I'm done."

I said, "Well, what gives?"

She says, "He will never spend any time in the Word. He tells me he's going to change, but he will not spend time in the Word."

I'll ask him what's up. He's like, "I'm dyslexic and I don't read well, and I can't figure out... I come hear you preach, and it all makes sense, but when I sit down and try to read the Bible, it doesn't make any sense."

I say, "Get it on audio. Find an audio version of the Bible and listen to it. If you can't read the black ink on white pages, then take it in in an audio fashion." It's changed his life. He's listening to it on the way... He's a roofer. Her listens to it all the time on the way to roof a house or do an estimate or give a bid and it's changed his life. The Word of God will change your life and it's about getting it in your heart. A spiritually mature life, one where we are adulting, is marked by an increased desire for the Word of God. You've got to crave it like a crave a steak from Mahogany because it's food for your soul and a light unto your path.

#### **4. We are becoming like Christ. 6 *Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.***

This is hard isn't it? In fact, I read that one and thought *I'm out*. I should live my life like Jesus did. In other words, I should be Christlike. I'm becoming Christlike. You can't become Christlike in your own power. That's got to be Christ doing it in you and through you. As you begin your growth walk with Christ, the whole point is to be like Christ, not to go where Jesus went or wear what Jesus wore or do what Jesus did. We can't do that on our own. But it's becoming Christlike. As we obey him over time, we are becoming more and more Christlike. He is transforming us.

It is a process, but it also a one and done. It's both because when you come to Christ, he comes in you, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside you, you are transformed in your spirit man, which is, by the way, where your identity lies. You have been cleaned, you have been justified, you have been made righteous, you are a co-heir with Jesus Christ.

All of those things, when Paul talks about all the things that happen when the spirit of God came to live in you, have e-d on the end of all those words as if they are past tense. It's a one and done thing. It happens in your spirit, but it is not one and done in your life because there are multiple components. You also have a body and you have a soul, which is your mind, your will, and your emotions. And you, according to Paul and Philippians, have to work out your salvation. You are not working for it; you are working it out. What does that mean? It means it is in you. It is done on the inside of you. Now you come to the realization of the truth and you work it out. You work it out in your thoughts, you work it out in your emotions, you work it out in your conversations, and you work it out into the way you related to one another. You work out what is done in you in your life.

Here's the thing I want you to hear today. There is no retirement in the Kingdom of God. It does not exist. There is no point at which you go with God, "I'm good. I've grown enough. I'm just going to coast this one out. I'll just sit this one out." I don't care how old you are; you are below the retirement age spiritually. You never get on an escalator in your spiritual walk. It is always you hearing the voice of God and responding to the voice of God and teaching us how to do that chapter.

One of the things that Ted said to me in the last year or two... There were a couple of people that he was dealing with. He looked at them and said, "Teach us how to die." What an incredible lesson. To teach somebody how to die with faith and to die with dignity and to die still chasing after Christ and still loving their family. So, you never get to retire.

Does anybody see a place where your growth has stopped? Does anybody see a place maybe you ought to back up and work on a little bit? Let me back up just a second. Remember what I said earlier about we would get help if we would raise our hand and say we need help? Remember in the very first chapter of 1 John, he says, "If you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive your sin and cleanse you of all unrighteousness." There is a principle of confession in the body of Christ. When you confess, you get help. When you pretend, you don't get any help. So let me ask the question again. Does anybody see a place where your growth maybe has stopped a little bit? There are a lot more hands. Does anybody say, "Hey, I figured out where I ought to address a few issues in my spiritual growth and markers"? Yeah, a lot more hands.

Here's the thing about church. That's what the faith family is supposed to do. The devil has duped us to say, "Hey, your faith family is where you're going to pretend to have it all together." That's ridiculous. The faith family is where you go and practice faith. It doesn't require any faith to pretend like you have it all together. It requires faith to grow in your faith and your walk with Jesus Christ. It requires faith to go tell the truth and to say, "You know what? The Holy Spirit lives in me. I am righteous. I am a child of God. But I did not act like that this week and I need help with that, I need accountability with that, I need encouragement with that."

I love my church and I love that I get to preach on a regular basis to eight or nine campuses and people all over the world, and I love my contribution. It's my only contribution to the church by the way. I have some vision and I get to communicate the truth. I don't organize the church. It would look like a bowl full of spaghetti if I organized the church. I don't set HR policies. I don't even know what HR stands for. I'm not interested in all of those things, but there are people on our team who do all of those things.

Even though I love what I get to do on Sunday morning, I cherish what I get to do on Sunday night, where I sit in the living room with eight other adults and get to be Alex, a child of God, not the pastor. And I get to be fresh and real and honest and confess, and we move one another on towards spiritual maturity. You need that; you can't just come sit in rows. If your experience with Woodland Hills Family Church is the same as your experience as if you went to the Imax where you just come in watch and leave and don't know anybody, you are not growing. That's not what church is supposed to be. You're supposed to know somebody and be known by somebody. You're supposed to be in fellowship with believers where you are pushing one another on, spurring one another on to spiritual growth.

Let's close with prayer. I want to pray over you and I want to speak a blessing over you. I tried to find a way to turn four growth markers into eight growth markers to give you a just a really quick gage, like that tool you plug into your car dash and it kind of tells you what's wrong. I'm trying to figure out what that is? I think it's found in the title father and mother. That's what John says to those who are mature in the faith, you're a father and a mother. That's so simple and self-explanatory. Meaning that you have come to a place where you are bringing other people to Jesus Christ. You want to know if you're growing? That's a great gage.

Am I talking about Jesus? Am I telling people about Jesus? Am I investing in people with the intent purpose of bringing them into a relationship with Christ or inviting them to church? If the answer is no, then you're not mature. Some of you, the answer is no because you're way back here on the growth chart. You're on two and there are six more and you need to grow, but there are some of you that do take in the Word of God and you are reading the books and you know what Matt Chandler has to say and Francis Chan and all of them have to say. You take it in, but you're not leading anybody to Jesus. You're a theology hound. You chew it, but you won't swallow it and let it apply to your life. You say that's convicting? It's meant to be because we have to experience the growth that is available to us. I don't have time to go through the other four with you today, but I just want to let the Holy Spirit do his work in you and on you. Would you just hold your hands as if you're going to receive something from him?

Close your eyes and bow your heads. Father, I pray over this church today. I pray you would convict us as your children, you would cause us to grow, and you would spur us on towards that growth. Even now, while we're praying, give us somebody that we are supposed to be investing in, in our heart and mind. Give us somebody we're supposed to lead to Jesus. Give us somebody we're supposed to bring to church. Give us somebody we're supposed to assist and help minister to.

Grow us. Give us instant obedience. Father, I pray over this church. I love these men and women and I pray, Father, that you would bless them, you would favor them, you would make your light shine upon them, and you would keep them in all that they do, in their coming and their going. Father, we pray together you would grow them.

We thank you, Lord, you don't count our falls; you count our steps. It's in a spirit of grace, amazing grace that you grow us. And so we receive it today. We receive it from you and we receive your promise; move us forward and make us more like Jesus. In Jesus name we pray and together we all say... Amen.