

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today. And I hope this week that you are aware of God, that you heard His voice, that you experienced His presence and that you enjoyed God and the life He's given you. And if you didn't this last week, then may this week be a week that you are aware of God. That you hear His voice, that you experience His presence and enjoy God and the life He's given you because He's given you a great life. In Jesus' name. We are just about done with our collection of talks on movement, mission, and maturity for all of this fall, since August. In fact, we've been wrestling through this collection of talks, talking about movement, mission, and maturity. It's not been as much as a series as it's been these different talks. Things that we believe are on the heart of God that are important to Him and therefore are important to us. We probably only made it through about 50% of what I was hoping we were going to get to talk about. And today is really the last talk of this collection of talks because next week I have a huge missional move, create the future announcement for you. I'm going to update you on all of the initiatives so you do not want to miss. The week after, we will wrap up the entire collection of talks, but this is the last talk, if you will. And this is probably the most talk of all the talks. Because what today is, is I feel like I have a handful of things that are from the Lord. And I just want to say to you, they all might be for you. Some of them might be for you. One of the things might be for you. So, you listen and grab a hold of that, which God has for you.

So, you are called unto maturity. And I believe there is a stirring, there is a desire. There is a heart cry for so many of us in this church to press on towards maturity. What God creates, He calls unto maturity. Jesus makes you in His image and likeness and then calls you unto Christ likeness. In fact, the very first thing He says to the disciples is, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Follow me, move. Fish for men, mission. And I will make you, maturity. We follow He makes. And when we decide to follow Jesus, we have to acknowledge that we have given up our right to immaturity. We've accepted His invitation to maturity. Which means we've considered our ways, we've counted the costs, and we've decided that we want to become the kind of thing that Jesus is making. To follow him means I have thought about it and decided I want to become the kind of thing that He is making. I want to become the kind of person that He is making. And the reason this is so important to look at and decide that you want the kind of life that Jesus offers is because you have to have a vision for it because maturity is hard. Maturity is not easy. It is not comfortable nor convenient and in no way, shape, or form in this collection of talks have I tried to present it to you that way. In fact, I want to say to you straight up, salvation is free, but maturity is costly. Salvation is free, but maturity is not. If we're going to go on unto maturity, we're going to have to have a crucified flesh, a renewed mind, a healed heart, and a surrendered soul. If we're going to go on to maturity, there's going to be some things we're going to have to walk out. Some things we're going to have to wrestle out. Some things we're going to have to submit and surrender. If we're going to go on unto maturity, we're going to have to come to the realization that we are not the hero nor the martyr of our own story. I am not the hero nor the martyr of any story. Jesus is. And so, there's this working out. There's this wrestling. In fact, the apostle Paul says, "My dear children, for who I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." Do you catch it? He likens maturity to

childbearing. He says that if you're going to become mature, it's like labor pains. It's like this awkwardness, this pressure, this stretching, this tension, this uncomfortability. There's this wrestling and this working out reality. And what I want to say that I really believe is a word from the Lord to some of us is, is that you are in the midst of the childbearing pains right now. I believe our church is going through some labor pains. Why? Because we're going from immaturity unto maturity. And so, don't think that awkwardness. Don't think that pain. Don't think that wrestling. Don't think that like uncomfortability of this season and I don't know. Don't think something strange is happening to you. No, you're being made into who God has created and called you to be and a new thing is being birthed in your life. In fact, this is why in Colossians, he says Epaphras, who is a spiritual leader is always wrestling in prayer for you. That you may stand firm and all the will of God mature and fully assured. He said, if we're going to become mature, there's a wrestling. There's a struggle. There's a battle. There're these labor pains, this awkwardness, this uncomfortability. And it's not weird and it's not out of the norm and there's nothing wrong with you. It's part of the process. Because when God takes His hand and puts you on the potter's wheel and starts shaping and molding that clay, there is a pressure and an awkwardness and an uncomfortability as He makes you into what He has created and called you to be. One more and this next one, Paul says, "We proclaim Him, warning and instructing everyone in all wisdom... so that we may present every person complete in Christ [mature, fully trained and perfect in Him]. For this I – say with me, labor, [often to the point of exhaustion], striving with his power and his energy, which works so greatly within me." Paul says, "We're proclaiming Jesus and we're laboring in such a way that every person will become mature, fully trained and perfect in Him." Labor, struggle, wrestle, battle, birth pains, awkwardness, uncomfortability. I mean, have you ever seen a woman at the very end? She's like, "Get this baby out." Like I've had enough of this whole thing. Why? Because it gets awkward and uncomfortable. There is a stretching and a pushing and a pressure, and I just believe there are some great labor pains happening in your life and in our church right now because we want to become mature, fully trained and perfect in Him. In fact, we're laboring all of the leaders, all of the serve teams, all of the people that are working in this church as the body of Christ are laboring so that every person can be fully trained to become mature and perfect in Him. See, what I love about our church is that we're a harbor of hope, a training center for life and a family on mission. We're a harbor of hope, which means come one, come all, come in and experience the hope of Jesus, but we're also a training center for life. We're training to be godly; to be like God and we're a family on mission, beloved sons and daughters who are releasing their Father's kingdom.

What I think is so interesting is we all love the harbor of hope, and we think the family on mission, that's a pretty cool thing. And we love the idea of a training center. We just don't love being trained. Can I just say it like that? I think we all love the idea of a training center. I just don't know that we love actually being trained. Because when you're trained, there's an awkwardness and an uncomfortability and an inconvenience. There's a stretching. There's a pushing. There's a pulling. There's this wrestling. There's this ah thing that's kind of happening, but here's what I want to say to you, you signed up for this. When you complain about your

training, you have to stop and say, "But I signed up for this. I considered my ways. I counted the costs and I decided that what Jesus is making is what I want my life to be." And so, I signed up for this. I signed up for the kids' leadership experience. And I signed up for the student leadership experience. And I signed up for VC college. And I signed up to be a leader. And I signed up to join a serve team. And I signed up to go to a circle and I made a commitment to do mission, move, create the future. Or maybe you just come to this church and you're like, "I've made a commitment so this is my church. I signed up for this is my church, but this is a lot." Okay. And what happens is when we start getting trained and it starts getting hard, we start reacting. We start complaining. We start getting offended. We start deflecting. We start making it about other people and other things. But what if whatever is happening that you maybe don't like is God training you to become like Him? Well, what if in that moment, God is helping you let your less be yes, be yes and your no be no. But what if he's helping you do everything with all your heart unto Him? What if that's the moment where He's helping you practice denying yourself and picking up your cross and following Him? Listen, we have world-class physical trainers in this church, and they would tell you that if you stop every time, it gets uncomfortable or there's a little bit of pain or it hurts, you ain't never going to achieve the fullness of potential that your body can experience. If we stop every time, it gets hard in here, we're never going to experience the fullness of potential that our soul can experience. This is why so few of us ever experience the fullness of our body or the fullness of soul. Because the moment it gets hard is when we back off. What if you could just simply consider the challenge a joy? That's a word from the Lord for somebody else. Consider the challenge a joy. In fact, go to the next verse. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials – when you're being trained in ways that maybe you don't like, but you did sign up for – of many kinds because you know that the testing or the training of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be, say it with me, mature and complete, not lacking anything. He says, consider the challenge a joy. What is joy? Joy is the sense of well-being. That all is well in my life. Why? Because God is working all things together for my good to form me into His image and His likeness. So, as you're being trained and as it's uncomfortable and as you're pushed and as you're pulled and as leaders or the godly relationships in your life or the spirit or the word are forming things inside of you, instead of reacting and pulling out, why not lean in and say, "Thank you, Jesus, that You are doing the very thing that You told me You would do if I followed You." Ha! I didn't actually think You would make me. I just thought I would follow. You're doing the very thing You promised You would do if I chose you. So, keep shaping, keep molding, keep making. I refuse to go anywhere.

John 15, Jesus simply says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing." You know what that means? Your job is to remain. Your job is to rest. Your job is to receive. Your job is to simply open yourself up to the grace of God, and He will make you into the kind of person that bears much fruit. That becomes mature, attaining the fullness of Christ. That becomes a disciple of Jesus who becomes like the One they follow. We don't become mature by trying to become mature. We become mature by looking to Jesus. Maturity is not the point. Jesus is the point.

And if I rest in and remain in and look at and behold Him, He makes me into something I could never make myself into. This is the great journey. And this is why we get so deceived by maturity, because we're convinced it's external. Jesus talks about it's internal. We think maturity is defined by knowledge or age or worldly success. But Jesus says, "While the man looks at the outward appearance, the Lord looks at the heart." And if you want to know what does maturity look, how do I know? Maturity can be defined in two simple words. You can take all of Scripture and define maturity into these two words, love and obedience. That's the definition of maturity in the Kingdom of God. Love and obedience. Why? Because that's what Jesus looks like. Love. He says, "A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." He says, "My disciples," the people who follow me, that I am making to become like me will be known by one simple word. Love. Love. We know who actually is becoming like Jesus by one word. Love. Love. Love is not emotion or a feeling. Love is good will. Is that my will is for the good of another. All my words, all my actions, all my decisions, all my choices are for their good. So, to love God is not to have emotion or feeling. Those things will come. To love God is to have goodwill towards Him. It means all my words, all my actions, all my decisions and all my choices are for His good and His glory. And if I want to love other people, it's not an emotion or a feeling, though the emotions and feelings will come. It's goodwill. It's my words and actions. My decisions and choices that I'm going to do everything in such a way that it's for their good that they might experience the glory of God. That's maturity. This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "And now these three remain, faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." He says love is the measure of maturity. Love is the highest mark of the human heart. Love is what you were created for. It's why right before this, he says, when I was a child, I thought like a child. I talked like a child. I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man, when I became mature, I put childish ways behind me, and I became a person of love. A person of love. Love is patient, and love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It's not easily angered. It always perseveres. Is that what your life is starting to look like? Because that's how Jesus defines maturity. Love and obedience. Go to the next one. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to," say it with me, "obey everything I have commanded you." He says disciples obey. Not some things. Not most things. All things. A disciple is someone who has given up the right to their life. Decided that Jesus is their teacher, their rabbi, their leader, and their Lord. And no matter what He asks them to do, no matter how uncomfortable, no matter how inconvenient, the response is, "Because you say so, Lord, we will do this." Somehow, I'm going to trust that in following You through this uncomfortability, You will make me into who I have already decided that I want to be.

Obedience is the measure of maturity. That's why Jesus in John says, "If you hold to my teaching, if you obey, you are really my disciples. Then, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Whoever you obey is who you are a disciple of. So, if you obey the world, you're a disciple of the world. You obey social media, you're a disciple of social media. You

obey your friends, you're a disciple of your friends. But if you obey Jesus, He says, then we know that you really are my disciple. That you're really becoming like me and you become free. What does it mean to be free? It means I am no longer insecure. I no longer have chronic self-consciousness. I'm no longer enslaved to the things of this world. I no longer live down to my old way of life. No, I'm free to actually be who God has created and called me to be. And He made me in His image and His likeness and now He has called me unto Christ likeness. This is maturity, love and obedience. So, here's the question. Are you growing in love and obedience? Are we growing in love and obedience? Are we getting softer and more surrendered as we age? Or are we getting harder and more resistant as we age? See, this is why maturity is so deceptive. Because right now in this room, the most mature person in this room might be a 15-year-old student or an 80-year-old widow with nothing. We think maturity is the 55-year-old successful wealthy businessman or the 40-year-old fit mom or the couple in their 60s who's retired and has the money to do whatever they want or the 18-year-old athletic captain or the 30-some-year-old influencer. No. The most mature person in this room is the person whose heart is full of love and obedience. Love and obedience. Are you growing in love and obedience? Are we growing in love and obedience? That's a great question, isn't it? Because that's the measure of maturity. Not Bible knowledge, not age, not wealth. Love and obedience. Soft and surrender. And one of the things that's really interesting as you go on this journey towards maturity is that not everybody else is going to be excited about that journey for you. If you're really going to pursue maturity, you're going to have to come to grips with one of the greatest barriers in your life between where you are and who God wants to make you to be are your family and friends. One of the things that I've seen over the years is that it's often the people closest to us in life that prevent us from becoming who God has called us to be. In fact, look at what this says. "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." There's no punches here. Hey, if you want to become like God, just understand up front you're going to be persecuted. There's going to be resistance. Not everybody's going to applaud you. Not everybody's going for you. In fact, some people are going to straight up come against you. Why? Because radical holiness is offensive to an unholy life. Because love and obedience are offensive to a rebellious life. Because extravagant worship is offensive to someone who worships themselves. Because insatiable hunger is offensive to someone who is obese from the things of this world. Because a divine stirring is offensive to a numb and apathetic heart. You have to understand that yes, God has sent you into the lives of the people around you as a living letter, as a light, as an ambassador, but you're also there as a constant source of conviction. If you're actually becoming like Jesus, your life is constantly convicting people around you because within them is the desire to be mature, is the desire for the glory of God, is the desire for the life they were created for. And when you're living it and they're not, if they are resistant to it, over time it becomes an irritant. And it becomes offensive. And it becomes frustrating. I've just noticed over the years, the more I walk with Jesus and the more I grow in my journey of maturity, the more I find that people are actually against me. Not everyone, but you'll find that you'll have more and more people actually coming against you because your life becomes a conviction point. And it's frustrating to them. In fact, look at what Jesus says in this next one. I just want you to see this. "Brother will betray brother to death and

a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." That's so heavy. I can't even make a joke about it. That's the joke. But Jesus straight up says, "Not everybody is going to love that you want to follow me." And sometimes the people closest to you are going to be the ones that hate it. Strong word, the most. But he who stands firm to the end will be saved. Not go to heaven when they die. Saved. Made whole, set free, delivered, become the fullness of who they were created and called to be. In other words, he says, "If you want to go unto maturity, you're going to have to push through the resistance of some of the people around you. One more. "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord will be kept safe." Fear of man is a snare. Have you ever seen an animal trap? It goes in and it snares and the more it struggles, the tighter it becomes. Fear of man. People pleasing is a snare that prevents us from moving forward in our life. And I think a lot of us spend so much of our life trying to please the people around us. But they are never pleased, are they? Isn't it interesting? The more you try to please people, the less pleased they actually are. So, instead of pleasing people, I should try to please the Lord and become who I was created and called to be.

See, if you can catch this with me, here's what happens. Here's you and here's maybe a loved one in your life, okay? You move forward on your journey with Jesus. And as you move forward on your journey with Jesus, you're so excited. You're genuinely joyful. You're growing in God. You're experiencing new things and you start saying to them, "Hey, this is so good. Come on. Let's move forward together. God is good. He is good to us. Let's go." And they say, "Hey, that's cool for you. I'm happy for you. You keep going, but that's not my thing." So, you keep going and you get a little further away. And you say, "Hey, come on. Let's go." And now you're a little more frustrated and irritated because they're not coming, and they don't share your passion or your excitement. And so, you're frustrated, like, "Come on. Let's go. Let's move." And they're a little irritated with you. Like, "Hey, I've already told you, that's not my thing. Stop pressing on me. Leave me be. I'll do my thing. You do your thing." You go a little further with God. It feels like there's even more tension and distance between the two of you. And now you kind of sit in this posture of judgment. Like, they're never going to come. They're never going to change. They're never going to be. And when you say that to them, they respond back by saying things like, "You're not the person I married." "You're not the child I raised." "You're not the parent I thought I had." "I don't like who you've become." And right about here, you have one of two choices. You either keep going or what most of us do is we back off to sustain the relationship. When you get right here and you feel that tension, here's what you do. You keep going and you pop through and you go to a whole different atmosphere and orbit. And all of a sudden you become the most relevant person in their life. Why? Because when you pop through here like Jesus, you become a person of love and you become a friend to sinners and tax collectors. If you will carry on and not choose them over Jesus, you'll break through into a totally different atmosphere and reality. You will become a person of love and obedience. So, you will have so much to offer them that you actually feel very relevant to them because sinners and tax collectors love to be around Jesus because He

was a man of love and obedience. Which means the kingdom was flowing through His life. The tension and the awkwardness are where they are and where we are on our journey. We're not fully formed. We're not yet mature. We respond poorly. We get harsh. We get angry. We get mean. We become cutting. We act. We try to move them out of the flesh. But once I break through, I now can walk in spirit and I have something to offer them. Does this make sense to you? And here's where I see this the most. I see it the most right now in students and in men. Okay, ready for this? For years, parents would come to our church and be like, "Please do whatever you can to help us get our student, our young adult here. We've lost them and we can't get them here and they don't want anything to do with it." And for years, women would come to the church and they'd be like, "Please, please help me get my husband here. Is there anything you can do? I can't get him to come. He wants nothing to do with it." And somewhere over the course of the last five years, that thing has completely flipped. We now have students that are passionately following Jesus whose parents want nothing to do with it, are actually hostile and angry and offended about it. And I am watching scores of men try to follow Jesus and lead their family whose wives and children want nothing to do with it. And the wife will say, "That's your thing, great. Sunday is my day. You take the kids to the church and I'm going to have a me day." If you're a student or a young adult and that's your story, here's what I want to say to you. Follow Jesus no matter what. Listen to me, honor your father and mother. And even though you don't have biological parents who maybe are leading you on this way, you have hundreds of spiritual parents sitting right here that love you and are for you and believe in you. Yours is a generation of radiant faces, burning hearts and holy lives. Carry on in Jesus' name. He's brought you here and we will help you become who God has created and called you to be. And men, here's what I say to you. If that's your story, choose to follow Jesus, no matter what. You get to decide. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord even if I'm the only one in my house that serves the Lord. The greatest thing you can do for your wife and for your children is choose Jesus. The only thing you have to offer your wife and your children is Jesus. And remember, He gave you a calling before He gave you a companion. God gave Adam a garden before He gave him an Eve. And the first thing that happened to Adam was he opened up his eyes and he looked into the face of God. The primary calling of a man is to open up your eyes and look into the face of God. You don't look at your wife. You look at the face of God. Then, you actually have a radiant face to shine upon your wife. So, carry on in Jesus' name. In fact, prophetically, look at this. "He will bring back the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the hearts of the sons to their fathers." It's happening right now. He's bringing the hearts of the next generation back to the things of God. And He's bringing the hearts of sons, men, back to the Father in Jesus' name. And if you feel like I can't do this, I'm like defeated. It's so hard. I know. You know what you need? You need godly relationships. You need other men and other students and other young adults to walk with. In fact, that's why Proverbs tells us, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." You got to walk with other people that are going on the journey you're going on. That's the only way you work through this because otherwise you have all these anchors. And some of you don't have one person. You have 20 people. Everything from your boss to your spouse, to your children,

to your parents. You're like the only one. You're the radiant, bright light. You need other radiant, bright lights so your flame doesn't go out.

See, the world understands this. That's why the world says if you want to get wealthy, hang out with wealthy people. And if you want to be an influencer, hang out with other influencers. And if you want to be an athlete, hang out with other athletes. Okay. Well, if you want to be mature, you got to hang out with other people that are becoming mature. He who walks with the wise becomes wise. And that's not just true horizontally. It's true vertically. If you walk with Jesus, wisdom personified, you will become wise. And you will actually become like him. Which is why He says, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." One of the reasons of actually, not figuratively, subjectively, flowery language, actually following him was He knew if you just walk with Me, you're going to become like Me. If you just get around me, you're going to become like me. You'll learn to act like, think like, and talk like, believe like, and live like. Why? Because culture isn't demanded or declared. Culture is modeled, experienced, and then imitated. If I just get around Jesus and I get around other people that are going, I will see it modeled, I will experience it, and then I will naturally just start to imitate it. I'll wake up one day and my life will look a whole lot more like Jesus than it ever had before just because I kept going. Are you with me on this? See, in Ephesians 4, it's probably one of the greatest passages on what maturity looks like. Now, I know, here's your piece of ribeye. If you've been here the last few weeks, okay? This is not a milkshake. Here's your piece of ribeye. One more long one in the collection of talks. We've earned it, all right? We've earned it. Let me just read it to you.

It was He, Jesus, who gave some to be apostles, some to be a prophet, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, spiritual leaders, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become, " say it with me, "mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head, that is Christ. From Him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up as each part does its work." This is probably the masterpiece passage in Scripture on the journey of maturity. It says we're going to become mature. We can attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. We can have unity in the knowledge of the Son of God. We don't have to be tossed back and forth by the craziness of this world. We will grow up into Him. As each part does its work, we will be built up. It tells us we are called to become mature and it tells us exactly how to pursue it. Can you see it? Can you see the two ways it tells us that we will become mature? Spiritual leaders and godly relationships. If we're going to become mature, it tells us how. We need spiritual leaders and we need godly relationships. Spiritual leaders, it was God who gave, Jesus who gave as a gift, spiritual leaders. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, spiritual leaders to prepare God's people, you, for works of service so that we might become. The word prepare there is the word, it means to equip, to mend, to rearrange. It's literally a word that is used for mending

and repairing old time fishing nets. If you had a fishing net and it had a hole in it, you'd throw it out and you'd pull it in, all the fish would swim out the hole so they would prepare, mend, equip. They would fix their net so that when they cast them out, they would pull it back in and they would catch the fish. So, God has given you spiritual leaders in your life to mend and repair the tears in your soul so that you can become who He has created and called you to be and live a life of useful, purposeful beauty and glory. You need spiritual leaders, it says. Not Instagram influencers. Not your favorite Bible study person. Not your favorite podcaster. Those are fine. There's nothing wrong with those things, but you need spiritual leaders, anointed and pointed leaders that Jesus says are a gift that He has placed in your life, that watch over your soul, that wrestle in labor pains until Christ is formed within you and carry you on their heart into the presence of God. You need spiritual leaders if you're going to become mature and you need godly relationships. The whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament. What is a ligament? A ligament is the thing that attaches two parts of your body together. Now, you are the Body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it and you might be a different part than the person sitting next to you, but it's the ligament or the relationship that connects the two parts together. And if we don't have ligaments, then you just have all these dismembered or broken, unable to be used parts of the body so we will never become who God has created and called us to be. The supporting ligaments are the godly relationships where we talk about, learn about and become like Jesus together. Not where we talk about sports and we hang out because we live in the same neighborhood or our kids go to the same school or we're on the same team. No, people that we actually talk about the things of God with. Spiritual leaders and godly relationships are what Scripture tells us is required to become mature.

So, isn't it interesting that we live in an age of individualism and isolation? I just want you to think about this with me. Isn't it interesting that we need spiritual leaders to become mature and we live in an age where we're individuals? We do what we want, when we want, how we want. I don't need anybody else. I'll take it when I want. I'll come and go. Good product, good service. Not a great price, I'm out. And then, isolation where we choose to kind of do our own thing and live our own life and completely separate us from everybody else. Here's what you need to understand. That is the cunning and craftiness of man. That is the cunning and craftiness of the kingdom of darkness to make you think you can become mature in a life of individualism and isolation. In fact, the moment you reject spiritual leadership in your life and godly relationships from your life, you have just chosen perpetual immaturity. This is either true or it's not. It tells us how we become mature, clear, godly relationships, spiritual leaders. So, the moment I reject those, I've chosen a life of immaturity. Why? Because I can't make myself mature. We've already covered this ground. And here's what you have to understand. You don't get to pick the method in which you're made. You're like, "I don't like this." He doesn't care. He's the potter, you're the clay. You don't get to pick the method in which you're made. You don't get to say, "I want to become mature. I just don't want to do it through spiritual leaders and godly relationships." Jesus will smile and step back and say, "Let me know when you've exhausted yourself." Because you've chosen perpetual immaturity because he says,

"This is how I do it." So, here's where faith comes in. Do I have the faith to follow and let Him make me the way that He says He makes? You have a responsibility to pursue individual maturity so we can have corporate maturity. We're the Body of Christ. And if we have an immature hand, we have an immature body. If we have an immature leg, we have an immature body. We are as strong as our weakest part. So, we must go after this if we want to become who God has called us to be.

See, if you remember from the beginning, I think it was week four. We talked about the stages of the critical journey. We talked about this journey of faith. We talked about moving forward and this is how most people's journey looks like. You have an awakening. You have a learning. Season, you have a contributing season, then you hit the wall. And if you get through the wall, there's an inward journey and outward journey and a life of love. You can go back in week four, but I just want you to see something for a second. You have an awakening. Your eyes open. You get really excited. And then, you start learning. You're growing, you're changing, you're taking it all. And then, you contribute, you serve, you lead, you give. You kind of become a part of what's actually happening. But then you hit the wall. The dark night of the soul. The place of disillusionment. A situation or a circumstance, a transition, empty nesting. Young adulthood is over. The loss of a loved one. All of a sudden, all the easy, trivial answers that you judged everybody else over no longer seem to work for you. But if you get through the wall, you go to an inward journey. God does this deep work inside of you. And then, you go to the outward journey where you do much of the same things you did in three, but you do them with God instead of for God. And then, you get to this place, a life of love, where you become a sage or a saint. And if you remember this, we talked about how here's what happens. We have an awakening. We go to a charismatic church. This is the best ever. We learn everything there is. We take it all in. We start contributing. But then we hit the wall and we decide this thing doesn't work so we bounce all the way back and we go to a Calvinistic church. And we're like, "Oh my gosh, this is it. Where has this been all my life?" I learned everything. I start contributing and that doesn't work. We hit the wall. We go all the way back. Now, we go to a Catholic church and we're like, "This is it. Where has this been all my life?" We learn everything about it. We start contributing, but we hit the same wall and we go all the way back to the beginning. Now we're like, it's social justice. We hit the wall. Now we go back and now it's about my job. We hit the wall. Now it's about a hobby. I hit the wall. Now I go back and now I might try a different religion. Hit the wall. Now I might try deconstructionism. Hit the wall. Now I go back and just raise chickens in my backyard. Why? Because I never broke through the wall that has kept me on this side of immaturity that's prevented me from getting to that side of maturity. The American church lives in one, two, three wall. That's why we never become mature. The Kingdom of God is all about four, five, six on. So, how do you get through the wall? Ephesians just told us, spiritual leaders and godly relationships. I have never seen anybody work through their wall without spiritual leaders or godly relationships. Why? Because Jesus tells us it's not possible. It's not possible. What do spiritual leaders do? They walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. They give us direction in the dark night of the soul. They carry us on their heart into the presence of God. They stay in labor. Like you understand a

spiritual leader lives in a constant sense of birth pains until Christ is formed in you. And then, godly relationships, people who walk with us and know us and love us and will sit with us at that wall as long as it takes. They won't let us go back. And when we try to go back, they grab our arm and they say no. And they will be willing to offend you and confront you to get you through. So, isn't it interesting that when Jesus invited the disciples to come and follow Him, He invited them one, two, and three into Him as a spiritual leader and each other as godly relationships. And that's how they became men of four, five, and six. So, could it just be that God has invited you into a life where you need spiritual leaders and godly relationships so you can get through the walls that come when you least expect them? But it only works if I have a vision to become a life of love kind of person because otherwise, it's too hot. It's much easier to just pop around to churches and pop around to religions and pop around to things that make me excited for six months, 18 months, five years, whatever it is. It's much harder when I hit the wall to be like, "God, what do you need to do in here? And I ain't going anywhere." And my leaders and my godly relationships aren't going to let me. So, here's the request, ready? The request is, is that every person in this church, you say this is my church, then I'm asking, I'm challenging, and I'm basically telling you this is your responsibility, is that you need to have three to five godly relationships in this church. Three to five godly relationships. Talk about, learn about, and become like Jesus. Not acquaintances, not friends from work, not friends from the neighborhood. I'm talking about people that you actually sit there and you talk about Jesus. We like to talk about ourselves, the world, and others. I'm willing to go along today, so stay with me. It's the last talk in the talks. So, campuses, be ready. But we're supposed to talk about Jesus, His word, and the kingdom. So, do you ever talk to anyone in this church about what God's doing in your life, working out your salvation with fear and trembling? What does this passage mean to you? I think God is saying this to me. I'm wrestling through this. Would you pray with me on that? I'm not sure what kingdom decision would be in this moment, but it's really important for me to make it. Will you help me wrestle it out? That is what a godly relationship looks like. And if you're new and you don't have any, let me show you this. Go to the next. "Let us consider. You have to consider now." You have to think about this. "Spur one another on towards love and good deeds, love and obedience. Don't give up meeting together as most people do, but if you want to be mature, then you got to do it. And it's worth it. And you're like, "How do I do it?" Two minutes of kindness. Come early, stay late. Go to the atrium. Show up to different activities. Make yourself available. Raise your hand. Go to Valley Creek 101. You have to just start by putting yourself out there. Give yourself the same counsel you would give to someone else who is trying to meet a new friend. There's always, all the things. But you got to, by faith, do it. But you won't do it if you don't want to be trained. I love the idea of being trained. I don't like training. This is the training. And for us introverts, this is hard. That's why you got to find them. You got to get it; make it happen fast. It's hard. Rip the Band-Aid off. Get in there and get them, and then you're good. Now we've got our three to five and we're safe again. You know what I'm saying? Somewhere, an introvert in our church right now is like, "I love you. I didn't like anything else you said today, but that hits deep."

And if you've been around here for a while, here's what happens. When you're at one church for a long time, other people come and go. Other people move on. Other people deconstruct. Other people leave. Other people get sent by God to go do new things. Okay, ready? Next verse. The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." If you've been here and you had great godly relationships and they are no longer here for whatever reason, I think this is a word of the Lord for you. Stop grieving Saul and start looking for David. Stop. Stop grieving Saul. Saul was the king. He got rejected by God. And Samuel, the prophet, just sat down. And so, God had to rebuke him and had to correct him and said, "Samuel, it's not over because Saul isn't here. I've already picked David." Saul's grief was blinding him from seeing David standing right in front of him. And I think there are so many of us that are looking back at glory days and this circle. And when I had a small group, and you remember when we had Sunday school on campus? Yeah, yeah. The problem is, is that grief is blinding you from seeing David who's standing right in front of you that has been chosen by the Lord. Which means if you've been grieving all that time, you froze in time in your maturity. If I need spiritual leaders and godly relationships to become mature and when those relationships fell apart for whatever reason and I didn't pursue new ones, then just so you know, you froze in time. You froze in time. It's like grandma and grandpa coming back in time and like, "You look exactly the same as you did nine years ago, little Billy." We'd all be like, "Something's wrong with Billy. That's not healthy." Grandma and grandpa, if they don't see a kid for 48 hours, they're like, "You've changed so much." And I say it with compassion, but it's time to stop grieving Saul. It's time to fill your horn with oil, with the hope. Because God's already chosen great godly relationships for you to go pursue in Jesus' name. There is a great David waiting for you to engage with, to go into the future with. With me on this? Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish. You'll bear fruit in old age. What does it mean to be planted? And that just means connected, rooted, the ligaments, one another's. But you need that to become mature. I get it. I get it. I'm an introvert. I get it. I see all the same news articles that you guys see about how bad church leaders are in this era. I get it. I see it all. It just, at some point we have to decide. I'm going to choose to go by faith with what Jesus says over what I see and experience in the world around me. Because I refuse to allow the cunning and craftiness of the work of darkness to keep me from becoming the whole measure of the fullness of Christ in my life and in this church. So, I reject individualism and isolation in Jesus' name. And I accept spiritual leaders as a gift and godly relationships as the way of building me up. Because I want to become what Jesus has created and called me to be.

Lots of little words today. You grab some, all, one. But let me close with this. One day, a spiritual seeker went to a monastery. This is an old story. Spiritual seeker goes to a monastery and when he walks in, he sees an old monk sitting there and he says, "Father, do you still wrestle with the devil?" The old monk chuckled and he looked at the young man and he said, "No, my son. I grew old and tired and bored of wrestling with him. And he grew old and tired and bored of wrestling with me." The seeker says back to the monk, "So, your life is easy then?" The monk chuckles once again and says, "Oh no. It is much harder now. Because now I

wrestle with God." He looks at the monk and says, "You wrestle with God and hope to win?" He says, "No, I wrestle with God and hope to lose." That is the narrative of maturity. At some point in time, you must grow tired and bored of wrestling with the devil. Of wrestling with the lust of the flesh, the cravings of the flesh, the pride of life. The lust, the greed, the immorality, the gossip, the slander, the things of this world. At some point in time, you must grow tired and bored of wrestling with the devil. And then, you start wrestling with God about deep and meaningful and real things like faith and hope and love and mystery and grace and submission and surrender. And you hope to lose because I want to see His Kingdom come and His will be done in the deep places of my life. And so, the last thing I say to you as this part of maturity and a collection of talks is, may you grow tired of wrestling with the devil. May you start wrestling with God and may you lose in Jesus' name. And experience that you are fully known, fully loved, with no fear of rejection. That you might become everything He has created and called you to be. So, Jesus, thank you for today. Thank you for this journey. Thank you for this path that we're on. We call out to you. We cry out to you. Make us mature. Lead us, guide us, shape us, mold us. Lord, I feel like there are so many things today. You just laid a buffet of different things for different ones of us.

Holy Spirit, give us ears to hear what we need to grab ahold of, eyes to see that which You want to show us and a faith to now move forward. God, I want to wrestle with You, and I want to lose in Jesus' name. Amen.