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Good morning. Kids can be dismissed. My dad made it from Rockville. I don't know what everyone else's excuse is. Heavenly Father, thank you for keeping us all safe. Please watch over those who are not with us here today. As we study your word, God, I pray that you will open up our understanding of it and help us to apply it to our lives so that we can grow into maturity. In Jesus' name, amen. I've found myself in another series again, but I think this is the last one. A couple weeks ago, we talked about the history of the Friends Church and their beliefs. The point of that message was, as a church unify and get on the same page as far as our beliefs and practices. The next Sunday, I clarified some stuff about that. Then I talked about the goal of "Go and sin no more." "Go and sin no more" is the road that leads from salvation, not to salvation. Sinlessness was the point of last week's message. After those messages, I talked with some people and heard some comments. I realized that there's a part of all of this that I haven't discussed yet. That's what I said, and that is spiritual maturity. I know in my life that I said, "Am I saved?" "Yes, check." "Am I trying not to sin?" "Yes, check." "Good." I'll pop up my feet and I'll coast on down the lazy river to heaven. I realized that there's more to the Christian walk than just sinlessness. Spiritual maturity is not getting rid of the stuff in your life that's sin. It's getting rid of the stuff in your life that prevents you from being all that you can be in Christ. The bar is set really low to become a Christian. If you're unsaved and you want to be a Christian, you just have to put your faith in Jesus. Return away from your sin, trust in Jesus, and from that moment on, you're safe. It's kind of like when you go and fill out your car insurance with the insurance guy. You sign that paperwork and he's like, "I still have to process your check and I still have to file this paperwork from the company." But from the moment you leave the office, you are insured, so don't worry. It's the same thing. When we become Christians, that moment we trust in Jesus, we're saved. There's still a lot that needs to be done in our lives, but from that moment, we're saved. We're called not just to sinlessness, but maturity. Sinlessness, if I can use this in a metaphor, is like a little kid who teaches a little kid not to touch hot burners or stick knives in electric sockets. That's sinlessness. That's not doing the things that are going to kill you. But maturity is like learning how to keep a job, learning how to pay the bills, raise kids. That's maturity. I'm sure you know that there are kids, all of you have known kids, who just do the bare minimum. They seem to be incapable of thinking and doing things on their own. If you tell them, "Clean your room," you say, "I want this room to be spotless when I get home." You can almost guarantee that when you get home, everything will be shoved in the closet or under the bed. They don't care about the spirit of what you're saying, they care about the letter of what you're saying. That's immaturity. That's what we need to be against in Christianity. It's not just worrying about the sinless letter of the law, but actually becoming mature. I'll go ahead and be a little bit forward. I know I've had several of you talk to me about your beliefs on alcohol. Some people take the occasional drink. Like I said, no one's getting kicked out of the church or anything. We don't do that. I'm a little worried that stuff like that, not necessarily that, but stuff like that, we look at it and say, "Is it sin?" "No." "Okay, then I'm going to do it." We just take things that we want, we weigh them against the standard of "Is it sin?" If it passes that, we just stop thinking about it and say, "Yeah, I'm going to do it." But the truth of the matter is that those choices we make affect more than just whether we get into heaven. They affect our ability to be useful to God and useful to carrying out His work here. The perfect example of that is, if we're talking about alcohol, that would be alcoholics. If there are people in this church who struggle with trying not to drink, then if you're someone who occasionally drinks, and I'm not saying you get drunk, but if you occasionally drink, you think alcohol is fine, then at best you're a person they can't talk to about their struggle. At first, you may be a stumbling block causing them to mess up in what they're trying to overcome. Maturity means thinking about more than just yourself. I'm sure if any of you have had kids, you've used that exact same phrase as you've been raising them. You've got to think about more than just yourself. Our society struggles with things in this day and age like alcohol, violence, lust, and greed. When we get close to that stuff, when we stand next to it, when we flirt with that stuff, it weakens our ability to shine like lights in this world. I'm not saying that you're using any of those things to access or to a level that is sin, but when you get close to it, you weaken yourself. Going to Las Vegas may not be a sin. I don't believe it's a sin. But if you say you're taking a trip to Vegas, people on the outside of this church, they're going to say they're going to Vegas for a vacation. I go to Vegas for a vacation. I go there to drink and gamble and party, and they see you going, for lack of a better word, to worship at the same idols they worship at. They don't care that you're going to watch David Copperfield, and you're not going to gamble or drink. They just say, "You're going to Vegas." I go to Vegas. I know exactly why you're going. So we have to be careful, because when we flirt with the stuff that the world struggles with, that the world seizes idols, we weaken and water our message down. One of the things that I love about the Friends Church, and one of the reasons I came back here is because friends have a history of not flirting with that stuff. When we talked about the history of Quakers, and we talked about how they took that hard stance, even the clothes that they picked out and wore was carefully thought out. They didn't want to wear clothes that sent the wrong message. They didn't want to decorate their building with anything that sent the wrong message. They wanted to have a very pure, straight line walk, Christian walk. I'm worried that maybe some of those early friends thought that this somehow made them more holy or more loved by God. That's not true. But it did make them very useful to God when they did that. Now, if you're new in Christ, if you're a new Christian, or if this message isn't... I'm not talking to you, I'm actually talking on your behalf. I'm talking to the people who are supposed to have it all together. I'm talking to the people who have been doing this a while. Because for people who are weak in the faith, they still have big struggles, and you need someone strong to help you along. A great example of this is when I was in Hawaii for my discipleship training class, we went down to this place called Waipio Valley. It's really beautiful, and it's really deep. It's a valley. You come to it up on top of a mountain, and then you go down the mountain to this valley, and you're at the beach, and they film movies there and stuff because it's gorgeous, and there's wild horses. Where do you see wild horses? When we were done with our little time down there, instead of driving us out, they made us hike out. It's like a 45 degree incline up a mountain. It's just insane to try and hike that. I was not a fit, healthy young man at the time. We start out, and we're walking in our little group, and I'm just getting winded and exhausted, and I can't get up this stinking hill. It's so steep. One of these fit, young little kids behind me, he comes up behind me, and he puts his hand on my lower back, and he actually also does the girl next to me because she's having a hard time, and he just leans forward and starts pushing us. Suddenly, I'm like, "Wow, I'm flying up this hill. This is easy." I look back, I'm like, "Are you sure you're okay?" He's like, "Yeah, it's cool. We're fine." We went up the hill like that, and he helped me a big chunk of the way by doing that. That's what spiritual maturity allows us to be, is like that fit, young, healthy person who helps along those who are weaker in the faith. Let's have some Scripture for this. 1 Corinthians 6, verses 12-13a, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. And also Romans, chapter 14, verses 15-22, "Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let your good be spoken of as evil, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things which one may edify each other. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Just as a soldier has to give up for a time his freedom and his family and his safety to achieve his goal. Just as an Olympic athlete for a time has to give up junk food and late nights and TV and hobby and friends to achieve his goal. This is what maturity means to us. The stuff that we may have, the stuff that is not forbidden as sin in this life, we can give those things up if they make us more useful in the hands of God. You do not have to give it up, but we choose to in order to become a better spiritual athlete. Philippians 3.14 says, "I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." It says languages like Olympics. We are spiritual Olympians. We are not here to coast down this lazy river and just enjoy life to heaven. Heaven is supposed to be the enjoyment time. This is supposed to be the work time. Let's talk about bishops. The New King James Version uses this word "bishop," but some versions translated as elder or overseer. It basically just means an elder, someone in the church who oversees and takes care of other people. It comes from 1 Timothy 3. This is a faithful saying, "If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work." A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence, not a novice, as being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil, and moreover he must have a good testimony with those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach in the snare of the devil. Paul is writing to Timothy here, and he is saying, "Look, when you go through all of the people in the church and you are deciding who is going to be an elder, don't pick the people who have multiple wives or who get drunk or have bad behavior or who are inhospitable or who are violent or greedy, all of those people existed in the church." Paul was telling Timothy, "Look for the people who have matured. Look for the people who have overcome the temptations and the snares of this world that weigh you down and slow you down from being a mature, powerful Christian." He goes on to talk about deacons. A deacon is someone who is like a servant in the church. He must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience, blameless. Their wives must be reverent and not slanders and temperate and faithful. Deacons must be the husband of one wife and rule their children and house as well. If you heard that line about "not given to much wine" and you think, "Well, it says not much wine, didn't say no wine," if that's the thought that came to your head, then I just want to say that's the attitude that I'm trying to fight against. Stop looking for the bare minimum Christian. Stop looking for the least common denominator Christian and start saying, "I'm going to excel and I'm going to voluntarily give up things that I don't need to give up, that I don't want to give up, but I know will make me a stronger, better Christian if I do." I'm not threatening you. I'm not saying that you are in sin. I'm not saying you won't go to heaven unless you do this. I'm just challenging you to be more, more mature, better, more effective Christian. Hebrews 12.1 says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." It says, "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which ensnares us." So the sin that ensnares us is not the weight. There's the sin, but there's also these weights. I'm saying these weights are the things of this life which aren't necessarily bad, but which just slow us down from running the best race we can run. You won't lose your salvation, but you might waste your life if you don't lay these things down. Because Jesus says, "Don't lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourself treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." It seems like so often sermons are about, "Don't do this because it's sin, and it separates you from God," and it's not what we're talking about today. I'm not talking about stuff that separates you from God, I'm just talking about stuff that makes you useless. There won't be punishment, but there will be loss if we don't lay this stuff down. Because the richer you make yourself in this life, the poorer you will make yourself in the next life. The more comfortable you make this life, the more meager will be your next life. So follow Jesus' example. 2 Corinthians 8-9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that through his poverty you might become rich." Jesus had every right to keep and enjoy his riches, his power, his glory, everything that God has, Jesus had, that he laid it down voluntarily and became poor, so that through him we might be brought out and we might become rich. Now God's saying, "Take your riches," whether they're literal money, or whether it's just your time or your freedom or whatever, "lay that stuff down. Make yourself poor so that you can make other people rich." And again, talking about rich money, talking about rich in the kingdom of God, rich spiritually, bring people into this kingdom, bring them up out of the sins that they struggle with. You do have every right to keep and enjoy what you have, but if you give it up, you will become more useful to God. Give up time. This stuff you say, "It's my time." That's my money. Maybe it's certain foods or certain beverages that you love. Maybe it's certain forms of entertainment. I can't tell you how many times I've been at Quaker Haven, and some kid has said, "You ever seen this show?" It's a show that I shouldn't have watched, but I did. Now I'm at this weird place where it's like, "Either I have to lie," or "I have to confess that I've seen it, it was bad, I should not have seen it," and I had this really awkward conversation. If we give up stuff like that, then we become more effective. We can say, "No, I didn't see that movie because I knew that it was full of violence and sin and everything, and that's unhealthy for me." You can have a good example. Maybe you have to give up certain comforts or hobbies. Maybe you have to give up certain language you use, or certain attitudes you have, or certain rights you feel you have. What can you give up so that you can help those who are weak become strong? Maybe you're giving it up in order to give time and money to them to lift them up, or maybe you're giving it up just to set a good example. Someone who struggles with this or that sin and temptation, and you say, "I know the world's...you're struggling with sin here," and the world says, "You just have to be this good. You don't have to be perfect. Just make yourself this good." But when you hold yourself to this standard, then you become strength for that person. God says, "I've got a great deal for you. Take that time, money, entertainment, comfort, whatever, trade it in during this life, trade it in for the stuff I want you to do, and in the next life you'll get it back 100-fold. Whatever you give up for the cause of Christ in this life, you will get back. The world's collective jaw will hit the floor when you give up these things, which people are like, "That's not sin. It's not wrong for you to do that. Why are you giving it up?" They won't understand. Some of them will scoff at you, but others will say, "Thank you. Thank you for setting such a good example." A long time ago, this country, early on in this country, we were a very legalistic country, and the churches reflected that. The churches had a really hard time accepting people who came in who weren't dressed in suits, who weren't shaved, or guys with long hair, or whatever. The church had a really hard time with legalism, and God brought us through that. He started bringing hippies into our church so that we could learn to love these outcasts. That happened around the '60s and '70s, the Jesus movement and all that. Somehow, we've now carried that too far in the other direction. Now, we're at this place where we've become too easygoing. We've said, "Yeah, sure, anything goes, whatever." The world is now struggling with licentiousness. The world doesn't know how to say "no." The world doesn't know how to turn it down. Rather than trying to make ourselves relevant by meeting them on that level, what the world needs now is discipline and maturity, an example set of discipline and maturity. I know that those sound like dirty words. Discipline and maturity in a human life is like oil changes entire rotations on your car. They just make your life work better. Discipline and maturity make your life work better. That's what the world is short on right now. When people are newly saved Christians and they come into the church, they need someone who says, "Yes, I love you right where you're at, but at the same time, I'm also going to call you to a higher standard. I'm not just going to say, 'And you're fine.' You're saved, whatever. Welcome to the mill, the farm." It's not just, "Okay, you're in the door, you're done." No, once they're in the body of Christ, we call them upward, that call to maturity and discipline. That's what the world is craving because that's what they're short on. They know they don't have that maturity and discipline in their heart, and they long for it. They're looking for someone to fulfill that. It can be fulfilled in Christ, but when they come in here, they need to see that. It doesn't mean we have to get all stuffy and religious. It doesn't mean we have to go back like we were before when we were all legalistic. We still welcome everyone in. Once they're in, we don't just stop, we call them upward. We call them to an effective, powerful life in Christ. They think that maturity and a joyful life are enemies, and we need to disprove that. You can ignore everything I've said today, and it really won't affect your life. It might affect your afterlife, though. What a sad day that will be. The life of maturity I'm calling you to is not sad and somber, but it is joyous. I don't know if any of you have ever trained as athletes, but that feeling when you have been practicing and practicing your running or whatever, and after a year, you look back at where you were a year ago, and you feel that joy and pride in all of the progress you made, that's what I'm calling you to. I'm calling you to a more spiritual fitness, spiritual healthiness. I hope that you heed the call today to spiritual maturity. We're going to have our time of open worship now. I'm going to start with prayer. Father, we thank you that we are saved, that we are forgiven. We have been made right by the blood of Jesus. But now, God, please help us to examine our lives closely to see what things are weighing us down from being all that we can be for you. God, I know that you're not calling us to become incredibly different people today. I know that this is not just some light switch we have to go flip. But help us just to find one little thing at a time that we can change to become more effective for you. Please open up our minds now as we sit here, God, and as we meditate with you. Help us to find little changes that we can start to make over the course of our life that will make us more effective and more powerful in your kingdom. When Matthew was talking about what you've got to give up, I went back to something that we gave up. My wife told me about this time when I stood in the living room of that house down on Marwood Trail and said, "Honey, this is the house I'm going to live in when I die." And we loved that house. And that was a beautiful home. Everything about it was nice, and it was 15,000, 20,000 pounds of weight on our lives. And when we went to Kona and submitted ourselves to the Lord, that's the first thing he said was, "You've got to give up that house." And we did. Praise God. I still miss that house. I probably never have anything nearly as nice the rest of my life. But you know what? That was fine. It was really fine. Because we were freed up to do just exactly what God wanted us to do, and that's what we've been doing the last 16 years. And we've done it all without 938 Marwood Trail. So he's right. I didn't raise this kid, by the way. I have no idea how he got so smart and into the Spirit. Good morning, everyone. I was taken by the word "to give up." Give up lends itself to sacrifice. And that you still want. However, we should look for this desire to do that. Not just to give up, not to sin as well. It should be a way of life. If you're like me and you have kind of an extreme reactive kind of personality, and you go home today and you say, "I'm giving up TV and sports and alcohol and chocolate and music and everything," in a week you're going to crash. You're not going to be able to keep that up. But when you crash, don't feel bad. Just say, "All right, let's be realistic. Let me pick one little thing that's in excess, one little thing that obviously, if I give up, I will become more useful." And just start small. And when that little thing becomes easy, add another little small thing to it. Because, like I said, this is like training like an athlete. You don't become a perfect athlete in one day. You ask Rick White, you don't jump over the high jump in the first day. So I think that... Yeah, let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You that You want us to be these spiritual athletes, spiritually mature, and You are going to be our coach through this. You are going to help us make wise decisions, and You are going to encourage us, and You are not going to beat us up when we fail, but You are just going to keep cheering us on. We thank You that You have a good plan for us if we will just submit and listen to Your Spirit and trust in You. Thank You. Thank You for this love and for this opportunity. In Jesus' name, Amen. I won't make you give up your lunch with TMCL. Obviously, we are going to Jordan. We leave tomorrow at about 6.55 for Chicago O'Hare, and then we fly on out on Royal Jordanian after that. Question, what are we going to be doing when we get there? Well, here is the plan. God likes it. We are going to be doing some work with the studio, with the women's ministry, doing some translation, doing some English teaching, sharing with young Muslim guys and gals about the love of Jesus Christ. Lane, you would appreciate this. You are going to go put a roof on a house, right? And you get there and God just knocks your socks off with what He has for you. That is what we are praying for. The divine appointments, the opportunities that we have, not the slightest idea what is going to happen. That is what we are hoping is going to happen. Now we know it will. God is, to use the straight term, cool that way. So, I appreciate you guys praying for us. We will be there till the 25th of April. So, we appreciate your prayers. We have covered them so much that we appreciate them. But I just want to thank you all in the loving church that you are. Why am I here today? This is my church. 16 years later. Yes? Absolutely. Let's pray for my parents. If you want to come gather around, go right ahead. Yes. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you are You have pulled my parents out of the church. And I thank you for your support. And I thank you for your support. And I thank you for your support. And I thank you for your support. And you have pulled my parents out of normal life To be free to travel around the world And to put their hands to whatever work you have prepared for them. We ask God safety over this trip. We pray that they arrive safely with all their luggage. We pray that the people that you want them to come across That you would arrange those divine appointments That you would give them just the words to say. We pray that you will help them to know how to handle every situation Know just what to do. Help them to have a vision and a heart and a love for the people there And just a plan for their future and show them what part they can play in that. And help us to keep them in our hearts as they're there And to cover them in our prayers And bring them back home safe and sound again. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.