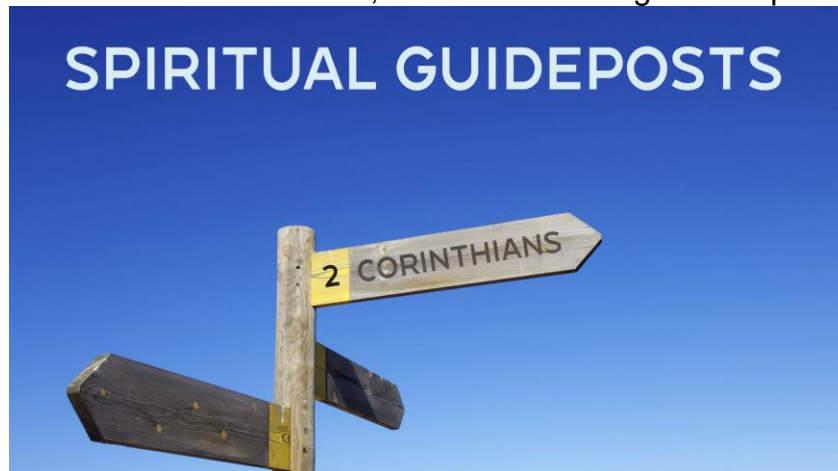


In our time together over the last three weeks, we've been talking about Spiritual Guideposts...



where to look when navigating through this life...AND part of knowing where we are on our journey is being able to assess or measure our progress on that journey. Today we're going to seek to do that as we talk about: "How to Measure Spiritual Maturity."

Now Church family, I must tell you that when ONE is seeking to measure spiritual maturity as a follower of Christ, **I'm convinced** there is one main criterion that bubbles to the top: HUMILITY. Jesus, our Savior, exemplified humility in everything He did...to the point of **humbling** himself, to death on a cross. Micah the prophet tells us that we're to "walk humbly with our God." So, if you and I want to measure and determine if we're growing in our Christian faith...then we simply need to ask ourselves: Am I humble? That's a hard question to answer, isn't it?

You see, I've never had someone come to me and say, "Pastor, I need some counseling because I'm not humble enough." ☺ It's not something we necessarily think about a lot and for most...it's easy to think of all the ways as to why we **ARE** HUMBLE. But, the question is: would others describe us as humble? Do I think of others above myself, or does everything center around me? How much do I ask others how they're doing? Would I be described by others who know me well as a humble person? Think about that for a moment...that's humbling!

Let me try to give you a "Christian" definition for HUMILITY.

Christian Humility: it is an understanding that one is utterly and completely unworthy of anything apart from the goodness, mercy, and grace of God found in knowing Jesus Christ and one acts and lives accordingly.

That's humility. Humility is finding our complete and total worth in Christ. Humility is the attitude that recognizes one's spiritual bankruptcy. Blessed are the poor (humble) in spirit. Humility is the attitude that thinks lowly of oneself and sees others as the ones to esteem. Humility is the eagerness to give God all the credit for everything that is good and profitable in one's life.

Humility. Now let me ask you this question: Would you use that word to describe the Apostle Paul? Probably not. I wouldn't. I would immediately think of his courage, boldness and total dedication to Christ. But, why were those things true? Why was he courageous and bold and dedicated...it's because he was humble! You see, it's when we humble ourselves to the yoke of Christ that we

walk in His power and His strength...remember the video from last week...the man fighting the powers of Hell. We go as sheep (humble), but the faces of lions...power and courage and boldness to stand up in the face of persecution and trials.

AND that was the Apostle Paul a warrior...a warrior because he was humble...and it was that humility that made him powerful; and yet, he was accused of being an arrogant, pompous, mean-spirited tyrant...by men who wanted to discredit him and get rid of him, so they could fill the leadership void with themselves because of his removal.

You see, a dividing line had been drawn in Corinth...a proverbial line in the sand...and so, the Corinthians were trying to decide who was the true messenger of Christ, who was the true apostle. Was it Paul or was it the false teachers who had wormed their way into Corinth? Paul declared himself to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ and he had the proof to be back it up: miracles, divine power to raise the dead, heal the sick and preach the truth that changed lives. And yet; sadly, the Corinthian church were wooed and deceived by these false teachers into believing that they were, in fact, the true teachers and Paul was the false apostle. So now let's watch this drama continue to unfold:

2 Corinthians 10:12-18

¹²Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding. ¹³But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. ¹⁴For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. ¹⁷"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

The false teachers in Corinth were called by some scholars: "The Kings of Comparison." And we know something about that in our day. You see, perhaps in no other time in the history of mankind has there been an era in which humanity has been caught up in such a constant spin-cycle of comparison, as our day. We're constantly comparing ourselves to one another by what we drive, what we wear, how smart or gifted our kids are...and because of that we constantly wonder, "How do I measure up."

If you don't believe what I'm saying is true...just sit down and scroll through social media for a few minutes and you'll see it on full display: COMPARISON, (and I'm guilty of it too). But church family, that's not how we're to measure ourselves...by comparing ourselves to one another...NO...our comparison is to be made in regards to Jesus, not one another. Jesus is to be the one to whom we look...He's our Master. Yet, for these false teachers of Corinth... They measured themselves by themselves. They ran their own "mutual admiration society." And yet, they had invented the standard themselves. Watch verse 12.

2 Corinthians 10:12

¹²Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

Now before we investigate deeper this idea of comparison...I want to point out something. Look back at the word "measure." That's the Greek word for "kanōn," from which we get the word: "canon" (C-A-N-O-N), not like "cannon," a weapon...it's the word that's used to describe how we got the canon of Scripture...it's to measure against a standard. Think of a yardstick or tape measure. See the screens...

The Canon of Scripture

- The term "canon" has its origin in a family of Semitic words that referred to a reed or a rod.
- In ancient times a straight rod might be marked for the purpose of measuring.
- The word came to refer to a series of marks used for measurement.
- The "Biblical Canon" is the list of books which should be considered the authoritative standard by which faith and conduct is measured.

BTW...when thinking about the NT and how we got the NT...the 27 books...understand that the MEASURE was really tight. In the NT there are ONLY 8 authors. That's it! 8. And this is what you had to measure up to in order to get your "work" into the canon of the NT. As an author, you had to be either:

New Testament Canon

Apostle: **Matthew, John, Peter, Paul**

Missionary Companion to Paul: **Mark, Luke**

Family Member of Jesus: **James, Jude**

The standard OR measure was amazingly tight to get into the NT...and that protected the NT from heretical writings like gnostic gospels, fake gospels...in contrast...for these false teachers...their standard wasn't tight...it was objective in any way...their standard was themselves. They invented their own standard and then measured themselves by it. And in their own minds, they were great and they patted themselves on the back for how amazing they were...and particularly when compared to the unimpressive Paul...

And here's the thing...when you have people like these false teachers...these braggarts and blowhards...if you say anything that would contradict them in any way...they will attack you PERSONALLY...and assault your character without any regard to kindness or common decency.

Paul says, "I'm not about to get involved in this kind of false comparison. They want to elevate themselves and put their names in lights...so be it...not me...I'm a jar of clay...I'm nothing apart from the grace and mercy of God." HUMILITY vs ARROGANCE/PRIDE. For Paul...it didn't matter what they thought about him...it only mattered what God thought about him, and that's a good lesson for us Church family. Watch verse 13.

2 Corinthians 10:13

¹³ But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you.

Did you catch what Paul was saying without saying it? He said, "I'm not going to boast about things I didn't do." But that's exactly what the false teachers were doing. They came into town and were taking credit for what Paul had done. Isn't that annoying...when you do something and someone else takes credit for it! That's a lack of character on their part and it's prideful arrogance. Paul said, "We're doing exactly what God assigned us to do." **Turn in your Bibles to Romans 15**. It's right beside of where you are...Romans comes right before the two letters to the Corinthians. Watch how Paul describes the sphere or "realm of territory" that God had given him to spread the Gospel.

Romans 15:17-21

¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Apparently, the false teachers in Corinth were claiming Paul was "out of bounds"...that his coming to Corinth was somehow wrong...that it wasn't his territory. But, that's simply not true and he said as much in...

1 Corinthians 3:10

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

Listen carefully, Paul was in Corinth before they ever arrived. These guys dogged Paul's steps everywhere he went and they came into every town he went to... and it was always: "after the fact" and when they came...they sought to destroy what he had built. They were invaders, parasites. And you see, church, "fakes," false teacher don't EVER build-up people...they divide, they tear down, and they cause people to choose sides and they use people for their own means. Watch verse 14.

2 Corinthians 10:14

¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.

Right here, Paul sets the record straight! He was there first. Let me show you a map of Paul's missionary journeys...



See the **red line**...that's his first journey.

That journey was from Antioch through Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The **blue line** is his second missionary journey and the purple is the third. But, I want you to focus on the blue line for a moment. Now...locate the Black Sea at the top of the map and come down to the left to Troas. It was there that Paul didn't know where to go. According to Acts 16, he went to bed...and I'm sure he had a fitful sleep...and in the night he had a vision of a man from Macedonia (see the top left), a man who was begging Paul and his team (Acts 16:9) "please come and help us." Then Acts 16:10 records what happened:

Acts 16:10

¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

That was God's call to Paul and his team to go into Europe and they did. See the map again...See Corinth on the far left in the middle?

See how the blue and purple lines run through it? God called Paul there. Paul had every right to be there. Paul points out this fact again in verse 15...

2 Corinthians 10:15-16

¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

Church family...Paul had a simple wish...a simple goal for all the churches he established...that they would become strong enough and mature enough that they could handle the assaults of

Satan without being unended...tripped up and plunged headlong into the trap of following unsound doctrine. The problem was, (for Corinth), they were caught in Satan's trap.

Listen, Paul spent 18 months in Corinth, (second longest of any church...Ephesus was 3 years), and that's because he knew it was key to the region of Achaia and to the massive population center of Athens (nearby). So, he worked himself to death there. He went there at least three times (some say 4 times) because he was so burdened for this church. But he desperately wanted to be able to move on. WHY? Because he WANTED to go to Rome...and ultimately Spain... See the screens...

Romans 15:24

²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Church, the immaturity of the believers in Corinth was holding Paul back. That's awful, isn't it? It's awful to think that a believer's immaturity could inhibit the spread of the Gospel. Is that you? Is that me? Is my lack of growth inhibiting the Gospel? Am I a benefit to Jesus or a hindrance? The church at Corinth had become a hindrance. Why? Well, we're back to where we started, **a lack of humility**. And we see that in the way that Paul concludes this section. He does so in verse 17 by quoting the prophet Jeremiah:

2 Corinthians 10:17-18

¹⁷ "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Indeed, the thought of boasting in himself was repulsive to Paul. How different from the false teachers, who, for their own prideful-arrogant-GLORY, were willing to divide the church and tear it to pieces. Paul said, "I'm not going to commend myself...I'm going to let the Lord commend me." In other words, I'll let the Lord approve my work. And the Lord did approve Paul's work and it shows by how he lived his life.

I ask as we close: Would the Lord approve your work? How are you living...how are you fulfilling your ministry in your "area of influence?" How can you tell? Check your humility. Are we humble...the greatest measure of spiritual maturity?

And so, in humility...now...we come to celebrate the Lord's Supper, Communion...

It was in humility that Jesus came to a house that contained an upper room on the night...He would be arrested...in humility...knowing that all his followers would desert him, run away...one would betray Him and one would deny Him with curses...yet, in humility Jesus longed to eat one last meal with His followers. And so, He instituted the Lord's Supper...bread that represented His body and wine that represented His blood...His body that would be mangled beyond belief and His innocent blood splattered at the foot of a Roman cross...for you and for me. To pay our sin debt.

Philippians 4:8

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

I invite you to come now, as we celebrate Communion together, in HUMILITY Therefore, if you're a born-again believer and follower of Christ, we encourage you to come forward and to do so as families. If you have children who have yet to make the decision to trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they may still come with you, but we ask you to encourage them not to partake until they

have made their profession of faith in Jesus.

You'll notice the tables we have set up. You'll see that we have self-contained communion wafers and juice in a single pack...(it's like opening a coffee creamer)...do so carefully. After you have finished, you can leave them in the containers provided on the tables. **So, I invite you now to come forward beginning with the front rows and remember all He's done for us!**
