

## Session #3: Five Movements Towards Spiritual Maturity (Part 1)

### Watch!

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/zhWObBzP1BU>

### Study!

#### **The Decline of the Soul**

There are many things to be said about the decline of the soul but there are three major characteristics I would like to highlight.

First, the decline of the soul is a slow process.

People do not backslide overnight. They move from carelessness to compromise, from compromise to complacency, and from complacency to a decline of the soul into carnality over a period of time. Spiritual dryness, and the resultant emptiness, creeps in unnoticed at first. Over time, they become entrenched in the soul.

Second, the decline does not proceed in a straight line.

Now this is most subtly deceptive. If the decline were a straight line plunging downwards, we would notice it. Instead, it goes up and down in an irregular fashion. And we are deceived into thinking we are alright spiritually because every time it goes up, it gives us false hope. That is why many Christians have a spiritual roller-coaster experience and yet believe that things are normal. We take the roller-coaster Christian life as the normal Christian life. Such a state of affairs cannot be reversed. Unless God breaks in!

Third, the decline of the soul can be reversed only under specific conditions. But many are unwilling to walk the journey and meet those conditions.

The journey of return from the subtle decline of the soul starts with repentance. That's a key condition. When God breaks in and we break with our sins—repentance is the key—there is breakthrough! After repentance and to reverse the decline, the other conditions which must be met are spiritual hunger, accountability and spiritual formation.

When we move from repentance to spiritual maturity, there are five key processes of spiritual formation that are foundational. They are: the search, the struggle, the surrender, the service, and the significance. If we ignore spiritual processes in our spiritual journey, then our spiritual growth will be sorely hindered.

\*\* Extract from Chan, Edmund. *Cultivating Your Inner Life: Reflections On Spiritual Formation in Discipleship Today* . Covenant Evangelical Free Church. Kindle Edition.

## Scripture Focus: Romans 7:18-19

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

### Lesson Framework:

Five Movements Towards Spiritual Maturity (Part 1).

**The first process of spiritual maturity is our deep search.** At every season of our lives, we seek something. Deep down, we know there must be something more. But what is our deepest search? What are we looking for? At the heart of this deep longing is the search for God. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God". This is the starting point! In our search for God, we want a *quick* search but God calls us to a *quiet* search. Be *still* and know.

The word "still" in the above verse means "cease striving", and the purpose of being still is to hear God. In other words, stop striving. Halt our inner compulsions for a moment. Stop!

Many times we search for two things: security and satisfaction. We need to realise that both these things are not found anywhere else, except with God.

Alexander MacLaren says, "We have the hunger for eternity in our souls, the thought of eternity in our hearts, the destination for eternity written on the innermost being, and the need to ally ourselves with eternity".

To search God and His will, we need to be calm. Learn to listen to Him and to hear Him. When we are searching for our purpose, the search must always begin by searching for Him. To do that, we must be still, cease striving, calm down. Cultivate the practice of silence and solitude. This is where the search begins.

**The second process of spiritual maturity is our desperate struggle.** When we listen to God, He will surface something that will cause us to struggle. Why? Because there are two conflicting natures within us. There is a difference between knowing God's will and doing it.

"<sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."  
(Romans 7:18-19)

In the verse above, Apostle Paul revealed his inner struggle. The good he wanted to do, he didn't do. He did the things he hated, and he didn't do the things he wanted. He was struggling between his own sinful nature, and the will of God.

Two things we struggle in are: renouncing self-will and embracing God's will.

Embracing God's will requires three movements:

1. Perceive God's will
2. Pursue God's will
3. Prefer God's will

We may not always like the will of God but we must learn to delight in the will of God and do the will of God—no matter what. That's the struggle we face.

**The third process of spiritual maturity is our full surrender.** After the struggle, comes the surrender. Surrender is about yielding it all. Edmund Chan says, "The greatest paradox of Christianity is wanting God, but not surrendering to Him!"

There will always be a struggle as we like to be in control, but God will give us the power to surrender.

<sup>5</sup>Trust in the Lord with *all* your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.  
<sup>6</sup>In *all* your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths."  
(Proverbs 3:5-6, emphasis mine)

In the above verse, there is one word that is repeated, and that is the word "all". Partial surrender is still not absolute surrender! We have been bought with a price and are called to surrender it all.

What is God saying to us? What does He want us to lay on the altar and slay? Lay it all down—our pride, our ego, our reputation, our prestige, our aspirations and even our anxieties. Lay down all our inner compulsions. Onto the altar it goes and down comes the axe.

Spiritual maturity is about how surrendered you are to God. So surrender everything to God—it's not about giving up, rather it is giving *in* to God. We're not raising the white flag and throwing our hands up in the air. We are dying to ourselves in order to serve God. Let God do His work in our lives, in His way, in His time, for His will and glory.

"Christian discipleship is a decision to walk in His ways, and then finding that the way integrates all our interests, passions, and gifts, our human needs and eternal aspirations. It is the way of life we were created for."  
- Eugene H. Peterson

## Reflect!

What is your deepest search?

In what area of your life (e.g. finances, relationships, spare time) do you sense the struggle?

What do you need to surrender to God today?

## Discuss!

Q1: What do you prioritise most in your life? Be honest with yourself and write down the 5 most important things in your life. Share with your group if you're comfortable.

Q2: Read Mark 10:17–22. From the passage, what was the deep inner struggle of the rich, young ruler and why?

Q3: Is there something in your life that you cling to as much as the rich, young ruler did? Do you think you could let it go to be all-in for Christ?

Q4: Read Luke 14:33. Discuss the difference between “giving up” versus “giving in.”

Q5: Read Luke 14:26-27 and Matthew 10:37. Jesus commands us to not place anyone, even our own family, above Christ. What would this look like in your own life?

Q6: Usually, it's through personal trials or hardships that bring us to our knees in complete surrender to the Lord. What can we do to live in this surrendered state daily, whether in good times or bad?

Q7: In ancient Jewish culture, your family would disown you for following Jesus. Would you still follow Christ if there was a great cost, such as this, to you?

Q8: To truly live a life of significance, Jesus not only expects us to live for him, but also to die with him. In your own life, how would this look practically?

## Between Sessions

### Challenge!

Take some time to complete the below activity. With each of the sections below, write down how they each relate to you and note specific areas of your life where you need to actively deal with. Answer the reflection questions below and be prepared to come next time to share your experience of how God may have been speaking to you through this activity.

#### **Deal with your inner struggles**

“Lord, why is that I want to love you so much, but in fact, love you so little?”

#### **The primal wounds of the heart**

Wounded people cannot love.

“I’m hurt”

#### **The cynicism of the mind**

Doubtful people cannot love.

“I doubt”

#### **Paralysis of the will**

Helpless people cannot love.

“I can’t”

#### **Overcrowding of the soul**

Busy people cannot love.

“I’m too busy”

#### Reflections

1. Of the four inner struggles, which are you struggling with right now?
2. What would it take for you to come clean with God in order to come close to God?

### Memorise!

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

(Psalm 46:10)

### Prepare for next session!

Take some time to read the below text, journal your reflections and come prepared to share at the next meeting.

Do you consider yourself a secure or insecure person? In today’s performance-driven world it is easy to feel insecure—wondering if others like you, if you’re doing enough, are good enough or questioning your own abilities. However, if your security is found in God, there will be no need to worry. So you could say that being insecure is a result of an surrendered heart, by not placing our security in God alone.

It isn't right, but we often evaluate how we are doing in life by comparing ourselves to others. If we only look at external success, we subscribe to the thinking of the world. We try harder to do better, and then performing better leads us into a vicious cycle of further insecurity. Being so performance-driven results in fragile egos, comparison, competition, envy and jealousy. But that's not how we are called to live. We are to live for the approval of God, not the applause of man. Only when we truly submit everything to His purposes and plans can we come to a place of real security. We must come to a place where we have nothing to prove, nothing to lose and nothing to hide.

### **Nothing to prove**

When we have nothing to prove to others or even ourselves, there is no need to perform or impress according to the world's standards. This state of **deep security** in God comes from knowing that the God of the universe has accepted you, adopted you and guaranteed your future with Him. By God's grace and through Jesus Christ, we are accepted forever and eternally secure in God.

### **Nothing to hide**

Living with nothing to hide is living with **true integrity** before God and before men. Not carrying secret sin or living double lives; or behaving like an angel at church but a devil at home. Though we may fool some, we can never fool God. This state of true integrity comes through keeping our conscious pure before God and walking in true repentance and authenticity.

### **Nothing to lose**

When you can truly say you have nothing to prove and nothing to hide, then you can come to a place where you have nothing to lose. This is a state of **absolute surrender** to God; recognising that your life is no longer yours, but belongs to God. Everything you have, are and will be, belongs to Him. It's a life of denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus and going "all out" for Him.

So to be truly secure, we must find our security in Christ alone. Otherwise, we will look for it in our acquisitions, accomplishments or abilities and we cannot let go of our sense of "control". We are then insecure and fear absolute surrender, the thought of losing all for the sake of Christ. Living with nothing to prove, nothing to hide and nothing to lose is how God wants us to live. We must learn to surrender everything to Christ and find our satisfaction in Him alone. When He is everything to us, then He will be absolutely enough.