Sermon Series: The 12 Marks of Christian Maturity
Sermon Title: You Recognize the Need for Change

Text: Romans 12:1-2 -- I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Introduction: In 1984, **Vyacheslav Borisov** was a General serving the Russian army in Afghanistan. Borisov and his men were sent on a mission to find and destroy an Afghan leader. On that mission, the helicopter that he and his fellow soldiers were on crashed in the **Panjsher Mountains**. Borisov was the only person on board who cried out for God's mercy as the helicopter went down, and as it turned out, he was the only person to survive the crash. Borisov says that in his first moment of consciousness after the crash, he saw the bodies of his fellow soldiers and heard the sound of gunfire nearby. In spite of the threat, he felt an unshakable peace. Through a translator, Borisov said, "***When I saw the fire from the helicopter, there was a great change that happened in me. I realized I was alive, and at this moment, I realized that God truly exists because he saved my life***." He adds, "***I was the only one who cried out to God, and I thought he who calls upon God's name will truly be saved***." Borisov is grateful to the United States because his first Bible came from an American. The chaplain who gave it to him encouraged Borisov to deepen his faith and become more involved in God's work. Not long after, the General retired from the Russian military. ***Today, he remains the first Russian General to be ordained as a minister of the gospel in Moscow***. What is his passion? He raises money that is used to purchase Bibles to be distributed to Russian soldiers.

Though stories like this encourage many believers as we hear of how God is working powerfully in the lives of people around the world, for a few, they seem to have the opposite effect. They wonder, "***Why is it that God is radically transforming people like Vyacheslav Borisov and then using them for His glory, while I continue to experience a great deal of struggle in my Christian life***?" **Listen, if you're feeling this way this morning, then I think this message is for you**. It is the ninth message in our preaching series, **The 12 Marks of a Mature Christian**. So far, we've said that ***YOU'RE GROWING IN CHRIST*** WHEN YOU EXERCISE FREEDOM RESPONSIBLY; WHEN YOU STOP MAKING EXCUSES FOR YOUR FAILURES; WHEN YOU STOP HOLDING GRUDGES AND LEARN TO FORGIVE; WHEN YOU VALUE YOUR INTEGRITY MORE THAN YOUR IMAGE; WHEN YOU LEARN TO DELAY GRATIFICATION; WHEN YOU BECOME A PEACEMAKER; WHEN YOU SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY; AND, WHEN YOU SEE YOUR TRIALS AS OPPORTUNITIES.

Now this morning, I want to talk about another evidence that you're growing in your faith. It is seen in that **YOU RECOGNIZE YOUR NEED FOR CHANGE**. The Bible is clear that when we place our faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, God makes us new creatures in Christ (**See 2 Corinthians 5:17**). **We can never again be what we once were before we met Jesus. Why not? Because Scripture says that we are raised to new life in Him** (**See Romans 6:4**). We become slaves of righteousness, though formerly we were slaves of sin (**See Romans 6:19**). The Apostle Peter tells us that at the moment we were born again, we received everything necessary from God for life and godliness (**See 2 Peter 1:3**). There is nothing else God has to give us so that we can live in a manner worthy of Him. We have all that we need. So, this begs the question, "**Why, then, do we continue to struggle with sin**?"

The answer is that while we are saved from the penalty of sin, and given what we need to see the power of sin overcome in us, this process is not one that occurs in a moment, but over a lifetime. That's why we're told to "**work out our salvation in fear and in trembling**" (**Philippians 2:12**). **Any wise Christian understands that the world, the flesh and the devil battle for control over us in order to keep Christ-followers from experiencing real and lasting change in our lives**. Sadly, some are lulled into a sort of spiritual slumber that convinces them

that they can't change in any case. They are what they are! Sure, they're forgiven of their sins by the shed blood of Christ, but they're going to have to wait until they reach heaven before their struggle with certain sins will be over.

IF YOU FELL THIS WAY, I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT THIS IS A LIE RIGHT OUT OF THE PIT OF HELL! God never intended for His children to live defeated Christian lives, always assuming that it's just the way it is. **Please listen as I do my best to explain to you how you can change in any area of your life and become the person God wants you to be right now**. Open your Bibles to **Romans 12** and let's see what the Bible says about the topic of THE PATHWAY TO CHANGE, one that should be near and dear to all of us. It all starts with this …

WE MUST LEARN TO SURRENDER OURSELVES (**Romans 12:1 --I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship**). **Here in this verse, Paul informs us that the first step in life transformation is to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices**. The word used for "**body**" refers to more than just our physical self, but to ***the totality of our lives***. Christians are not expected to offer bloody sacrifices on an altar (as the Jews were directed in the Old Testament), but we are commanded to offer God a 'spiritual' sacrifice by presenting our very lives to Him. Why is this necessary? **As I mentioned earlier, when we were brought into this world, we presented ourselves to it as instruments of unrighteousness** (**See Romans 6:13a**). **Now, however, having been saved from sin we must present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness** (**See Romans 6:13b**). Here in **Romans 12:1**, Paul uses three words to describe what this sacrifice to God looks like: **(1)** LIVING – The idea is that we are not a sacrifice that dies the moment we present ourselves (*though we have died with Christ to sin*—**See Romans 6:8**), but that we determine to live for Him the rest of our days until we die; **(2)** HOLY – This implies that we are to offer ourselves to God as those set apart from the corruption of this world and dedicated to His service; **(3)** PLEASING – **this kind of sacrifice** (*a complete giving of ourselves*) **will always be accepted by God**. The outcome is a life consumed with the true worship of God, not confined to one place (the temple) or one time. And it all begins with surrender.

If you're wondering what it looks like to surrender, let me illustrate it for you. **Surrender takes place when you give up control**. When you let someone else take over. When I was maybe ten years old, I went swimming with my friends in a lake not far from my house. I thought I was a better swimmer than I really was, so at one point I decided to swim out to the middle of the lake. Wisely, my friend's mom followed me not far behind. I made it to the middle of the lake, but when I turned to swim back, I realized that I had no strength left. I said, "**I'm tired**," and then I began to go under. Mrs. Salina quickly grabbed me. She said, "**Kerry, don't struggle. Just let me help you**." I took her advice and relied on her strength and swimming skills to safely return me to shallow water. **That's what it's like to surrender ourselves to God. We let Him take over, and stop trying to do everything in our own strength, knowing that He has the power to guide us through life and get us safely home**. (**Review: We must learn to surrender ourselves.**)

WE MUST LEARN TO RENEW OUR MINDS (**Romans 12:2a -- Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**). Now, remember that only those who have offered themselves as living sacrifices to God have the power and resources for change available to them. We have to get that first step right, but when we do, these are our next steps:

- **Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world.** Those who live according to the pattern of this world, who hold up unbelievers as examples of how to live, have a belief system that has been corrupted by sin so that they have lost their way (**Ephesians 4:17-18 -- Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart**). This is Paul's way of saying that lost people can't see the light because the world is in the way. **The last thing any Christian should want is to follow after them**.

- ***But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*** It is my conviction that people cannot act contrary to their belief system for very long. They can try and perhaps succeed for a while, but eventually they will default back to what they believe about the world. For example: **If you believe that people cannot be trusted because they are only out to hurt you, then you will keep your distance from others, no matter how much they desire a relationship with you**. The implication of this reality, of course, is that the life you are living may not be what you want of what the Lord wants, but it is the product of your beliefs.

  If you are not satisfied with it, the only way for you to experience real transformation is to RENEW YOUR MIND, i.e. to change your belief system (**Ephesians 4:23—*be made new in the attitude of your minds***). This requires that you ***feast on God's Word*** (**which is the truth**); ***abide in God's Spirit*** (**who leads us into all truth**) and ***fellowship with God's people*** (**who instruct us in the truth**). Then, as God brings our thinking into conformity with His Word, we begin to see life very differently.

  According to a story from **the Reuters News Agency** (*dated March 29, 1994*) a Chinese woman began to suffer mysterious symptoms when she turned twenty. She was losing the ability to nimbly use her legs and arms. Doctors could not find the cause and so the symptoms continued. Many years later, the woman also began to suffer from severe migraine headaches. Again, she sought help from doctors. This time a CAT scan found the source of her problem: a rusty pin was lodged in her head. The head of the pin was actually outside her skull while the rest of it penetrated into her brain. A short time later, doctors performed surgery and successfully removed it. Later the surgical team expressed amazement that she had "***lived for so long a time with a rusty pin stuck in her brain***." After further study, they determined that the pin had entered her brain when she was very young, before her skull had hardened. Of course, the woman had no memory of ever being pierced by a pin in the head. **Like the rusty pin in that woman's brain, beliefs born of an unbiblical worldview lodge in our minds often at an early age and do untold damage to us. It is only when we renew our minds and our beliefs change that the healing process takes place**. WHEN WE SURRENDER OURSELVES AND RENEW OUR MINDS …

ONLY THEN WILL GOD CHANGE OUR LIVES (**Romans 12:2b -- that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect**). The Apostle Paul tells us that the result of a life surrendered to God and a renewed mind is a changed life. When we position ourselves so that God begins to transform our belief system we are able to discern and align ourselves with His will. Obviously, this is a lifelong process whereby we come to understand and agree with what God wants of us and then put it into practice. **We know it is what God wants because it is good** (**RIGHTEOUS AND HOLY**), **acceptable** (**THE KIND OF THING THAT GOD APPROVES**) **and perfect** (**EVERYTHING THAT IT SHOULD BE**).

Here are three more thoughts about CHANGE:

- **Why should I change**? Paul answers this question for us in **verse one of chapter twelve**. He says, "**in view of God's mercy**." What is he referring to? In the first **eleven chapters of Romans**, the apostle has been calling attention to the many grace blessings that God gives to His children (the gospel message—**Romans 1:16**; a righteousness that becomes ours by faith—**Romans 1:17**; eternal life—**Romans 2:7**; justification by faith—**Romans 5:1** etc.). **Paul points to these blessings as our motivation to be completely dedicated to Christ**.
- **How can I change**? As a believer in Jesus Christ, you have all the resources necessary for life and godliness (**See 2 Peter 1:3**). This does not imply that you can do this alone. **It simply means that God has made available to you all that you need** (i.e. His Word, His Spirit and His People) **to grow**. So, the choice is really up to you. Do you want to change?
- **What should I change**? I would like to suggest that you examine yourself and look for ***sinful patterns of behavior***. **(1)** Are you an angry person or perhaps a habitual liar? **(2)** Do you treat people in an unloving

manner? **(3)** Are you consumed with lust? **(4)** Does fear keep you from doing things God wants you to do? **(5)** Do you feel the need to be in control all the time? **(6)** Do you battle some form of addiction? **(7)** Are you obsessive and compulsive about certain things? All of these behaviors and many others are driven by beliefs that come from an unbiblical worldview. **Each one needs to be exposed, repented of and replaced with the truth of God's Word**. If you have trouble identifying any sinful patterns, ask someone who knows you well. They will almost certainly be able to help.

Conclusion: **For a long time in my life, I feared losing in anything**. I was one of those people who didn't take it very well, to say the least. This fear had two detrimental effects on my life. (**1**) It kept me from trying anything that I wasn't certain I could succeed in; and (**2**) I became a person who would do anything, short of cheating, to win. I took control whenever I could and ruffled a few feathers along the way. During my high school years, I became a Christian. Not long after, I went off to college and was discipled in my faith through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. It was at that point that I finally began to see this compulsion to win as a bad thing, a character flaw. **I started asking why I couldn't accept losing**. I even reasoned with myself that the only thing that made competition fun was the potential to lose. That's true, isn't it? If I really wanted to win at everything, all I had to do was compete against people whom I knew I could beat. "**Come on grandpa. Get out of your wheelchair and I'll race you in a hundred-yard dash**!" When I brought my fear of losing up to a couple of Christian friends, they suggested I memorize scripture as a way of overcoming it, so I did…verses like **Hebrews 13:6 – The Lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid** and others like it. Unfortunately, I didn't really see much change and so continued to battle this fear throughout my twenties and most of my thirties (*During my seminary years, I actually got in a fight with someone during a baseball game because we were losing*). Eventually, I came to realize that it wasn't enough for me to acknowledge a sinful behavior or even to memorize Scripture. The only hope I had for change was to **surrender this to the Lord**. **I NEEDED TO GIVE UP TRYING TO CONTROL THIS FLESHLY DESIRE AND INSTEAD CRUCIFY IT.** So, I prayed… "***I give up. I surrender. Lord, You know that I cannot change my life. I have tried to overcome this fear of losing and all that has done is produce the same frustration that Paul mentions in*** **Romans 7:15** (**I do not understand what I do; for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do**)***; I have memorized your word. I have sought accountability, but nothing has changed. If you do not work on my behalf, I have no hope of overcoming my sin***." ***I believe that was the turning point for me***. As I ***continually*** surrendered my life to Christ, as I yielded to the Spirit of God, abided in the Word of God, and fellowshipped with the people of God, the fear of losing began to go away. Today, I can enjoy competition without having to win at everything. I'm convinced God did that for me, and He can change you, too. Will you surrender your life to Him today? Will you start by presenting yourself as a living sacrifice that is meant to bring Him glory in all you do? Will you ask Him to renew your mind so that you will operate based on the truth of His Word and no longer according to an ungodly worldview? If you will, I'm quite confident that He will change you as well.