

CITY OF THE LIVING GOD

FROM MILK TO MEAT

51

SERIES

In dedication to all the soul-winners that need a Bible study on growth and development in the Christian walk.

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“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Heb. 5:12-14).

When a human baby is born, he or she cannot immediately do the things that a mature adult can do. A newborn is limited in speech, mobility, digestion, understanding, and many other areas. Yet within that child is tremendous potential. As the child grows and develops, new abilities emerge, greater understanding comes, and he or she becomes increasingly capable of fulfilling their purpose in life.

The same principle applies spiritually. Just as a newborn baby is limited in what he or she can digest, a newborn believer in Christ is limited in what they can understand and receive spiritually. We would never expect a newborn child to walk, speak clearly, eat solid food, or understand the responsibilities of adulthood. We understand that these abilities will come through growth and development.

In the same way, we should not place the expectations of spiritual maturity upon someone who has only recently been born again. A new believer needs time, nourishment, teaching, encouragement, correction, and a healthy spiritual environment in which to grow. Their lack of maturity should not be mistaken for a lack of potential.

NOURISHMENT & GROWTH

Spiritual growth begins with receiving the Word of God in a form that can be understood and applied. As believers continue to feed upon the Word, develop a prayer life, participate in the body of Christ, and learn to obey the leading of the Spirit, their spiritual capacity increases. The Apostle Peter states:

1 Peter 2:1-3

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Eventually, however, milk must give way to meat. There comes a time when believers should move beyond spiritual infancy and become capable of receiving stronger spiritual nourishment. Growth is not instantaneous, but neither is spiritual infancy intended to be permanent.

This is why discipleship is so important. The responsibility of the church is not merely to see people born again, but to help them grow after they are born. Evangelism brings people to spiritual birth; discipleship helps bring them toward spiritual maturity.

A mature Christian was once a spiritual infant. A strong leader was once someone who needed to be taught the simple truths of Scripture. Therefore, when we look at a new believer, we should not judge them only by what they are capable of doing today. We should also recognize what they have the potential to become.

With the proper spiritual nutrition, loving instruction, correction, encouragement, and opportunities to serve, a newborn believer can develop into a mature disciple of Jesus. As maturity develops, greater responsibility can be entrusted to them. They learn not only how to receive, but how to give; not only how to be taught, but how to teach; not only how to be strengthened, but how to strengthen others.

This is the progression of spiritual growth: from birth to development, from dependence to maturity, and from being discipled to becoming a disciple-maker. The goal is not simply to produce believers who attend church, but mature Christians who understand their calling, exercise their spiritual gifts, serve others, and ultimately help develop the next generation of believers.

MALNOURISHED CHRISTIANS

At the same time, just as physical growth can be stunted, a Christian's spiritual growth can also be hindered. There are real-life accounts of infants who became severely malnourished because they were unable to receive or properly digest the nutrition necessary for healthy development. Without adequate nourishment, they became dehydrated, weakened, and their growth is severely stunted—sometimes with life-threatening consequences.

The same principle can be applied spiritually. A Christian who never progresses beyond the spiritual nourishment of a newborn believer can become stunted in his or her development. What was sufficient in the beginning is not intended to sustain a believer at every stage of spiritual maturity. There must be a progression from spiritual “milk” to the “solid food” of God's Word as our capacity to understand, receive, and apply truth develops. The Apostle Paul corrects the Corinthian saints for still being on a milk diet and failing to mature in their walk with God.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.”

Spiritual maturity does not happen simply because time passes. It requires consistent nourishment from the Word of God, prayer, and

obedience. A person could be stuck in that stunted stage for life and never develop into their true purpose in God. The author of Hebrew rebukes the believers for having to go back to the basics because they are not willing to mature.

Hebrews 5:12

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

Jesus rebuked those followers that were not willing to progress in their walk with Him. He issued a command to be mature. He uses the word, perfect. This word does not mean perfect and without sin. The Greek word is Teleios, which means “complete, mature, full grown.”

Matthew 5:48

“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

So how do we ensure that we are progressing in our walk with God? The next part of this study will answer this question.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

There are several essential keys to becoming a spiritually mature Christian. These principles are foundational to our spiritual growth and development, enabling us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Without understanding and applying them to our lives, our spiritual growth will be hindered, preventing us from reaching the maturity necessary to fulfill the divine purpose and calling that God has ordained for each of us.

1. Making God your Priority

When you surrender your life to God, you are telling him that you will have no other gods before him. In other words, you are making him your

priority in your life. He is before everything else. One of the gauges whether you are doing this is seen in your church attendance. It's one of the 10 Commandments: keeping the Sabbath Day holy. It is impossible to be a mature Christian if you are lax in your attendance to the House of God.

Matthew 6:33

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

2. Reading the Word of God

The reading of the Scriptures is oftentimes compared to food for our bodies. For this reason, daily reading of the Word is vital for growth and development in our Christian Walk.

Matthew 4:4

“But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

Psalms 119:103

“How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

Jeremiah 15:16

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.”

3. Obedience to the Word of God

Once we understand the Scriptures, it is vital that we do not avoid putting them to practice in our lives. That's why the Bible says to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. In other words, make it a practice to apply the Scriptures to your everyday life. There is no greater joy than to see new Christians making changes in their lives and following after their God-given purpose. The results of being obedient to the Word of

God will be evident to all. God always blesses those that put his Word into action.

James 1:21-23

“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror.”

The man sees himself in the mirror and notices that his hair or face is unkempt but goes away without making any changes. God wants his believers to be ready and willing to make changes in their lives.

4. Prayer

Prayer is vital for the developmental growth of all Christians. It empowers us to avoid temptation and to live an overcoming walk with God. It also provides a protective barrier around us. We should be praying daily for God to protect us from evil. Jesus tells us how to ask for protection in the Lord's prayer.

Matthew 6:13

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

5. Endurance

Last of all, we need to have perseverance and not be so easily swayed away from the path that God put us on. There are too many people that quit. God did not make us quitters. He made us “more than conquerors.” Endurance is essential to becoming a mature Christian.

Matthew 13:20-21

“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in

himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.”

The Bible depicts a mature believer to be one that flourishes in life with stability, strength, and endurance. This ought to be everyone’s goal in our walk with God.

Psalms 92:12-14

“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord Shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing,”

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