

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever said to someone, “Will you GROW UP?!!” Or maybe you say something like, “Will you act your age, not your shoe size?!!” Same message. You usually want to say it someone who is acting foolishly.

Jesus told His adult disciples, “I tell you the truth, unless you change (repent) and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3) Little children possess the remarkable ability to express wonder and trust we all need to reclaim in our relationship with God. But there is a great difference between being child-like and being childish! Children also have the tendency to be selfish and pout. They’re messy, too.

One young father in our church told me he and his wife finally put their three kids to bed and when they returned to the den they could hardly walk for all the toys scattered on the floor. As they were picking up the mess he turned to his wife and said in a weary voice, “I finally understand that scripture that says, ‘when I became a man, I put away childish things!’” (I Corinthians 13:11 KJV) Of course, Paul wasn’t speaking of toys there; he was talking about spiritual maturity. The full scripture says, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” (I Corinthians 13:11 NIV) Sadly, there are some people who never seem to grow up, they just grow older. In this passage, Peter is writing to challenge us to grow up!

When you start reading a passage of scripture you should never begin with the word “therefore.” You have to look before it to see what it’s *there for*. Peter concludes chapter one by writing, “the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the Word that was preached to you.” With that background, now we can move into I Peter 2:1-3:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (I Peter 2:1-3)

The biggest problem in the church today is that we have thousands of immature Christians who should be growing. This picture reminds me of many adults who have known the Lord for many years—they are spiritual crybabies because they have never grown in their salvation. They are self-centered, mean, envious, and only care about themselves.

If you are interested in growing up in your salvation there are three important principles you must understand:

1. THE PRESENCE OF JUNK IN YOUR LIFE WILL STUNT YOUR GROWTH

Peter writes there are some things we need to get rid of. Some junky attitudes will stunt your spiritual growth. That word translated “rid yourselves” is the word *apotithemai* which was used to describe someone who removed a filthy garment.

In John 11 we read the amazing story of when Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been dead for four full days. Jesus had them open the tomb and he called, “Lazarus, come out!” What happened next must have made some people run away in terror. Lazarus came stumbling out of the tomb, but he was bound up with strips of cloth binding his hands and feet and covering his face. Jesus said, “Take off the graveclothes and let him go!” (John 11:44).

Lazarus had life, but he was restricted by those old, stinking grave clothes. In the same way, some of you received life from Jesus, but you are still bound by some old habits, old relationships, and old attitudes. Peter mentions four of these filthy attitudes you need to take off like a dirty shirt.

(1) Meanness

The two words in English are “malice” and “deceit.” In the Greek text, they are used in combination to describe someone who was a malicious deceiver. The phrase was used to describe someone who cheated in a game. It carries the idea of cheating with the intent of hurting someone else.

There are some people like this baby who just seem to be born mean. And I wish I could say there are no mean people in the church, but I’d be lying and lying is a sin. Sometimes the meanest folks you’ll ever find are in the church. How can they be mean? It’s because they are spiritual babies who have never grown up in their faith. Grow up and throw away that old attitude!

(2) Pretense

The English word “hypocrisy” in verse one is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *hupokrites*—it’s not a translation. The word was used for an actor who played a part on a stage. Shakespeare had Jacques observe, “All the world’s a stage. And all the men and women merely players.” (As You Like It, 2.7, 39-40) Being an actor is okay when you’re on stage, but it’s important to realize we aren’t here to pretend to be something we’re not. Someone said a hypocrite is someone who complains about all the sex and violence on their VCR.

Jesus reserved His harshest words for the religious Pharisees who acted righteous so people would look at them and think they were good people. He said outwardly they were like whitewashed tombs while inwardly they were full of rotten, stinking, corpses. (Matthew 23:27)

A religious hypocrite is someone who talks about praying but seldom prays. They talk about how the Bible is the Word of God, but they seldom read it or carry it to church. People who don’t go to church often use the presence of hypocrites to keep them away. When someone says to me, “I don’t go to church because it’s full of hypocrites,” I usually respond, “Well, come on anyway, we’ve always got room for one more!”

(3) Envy

This is the attitude of always comparing yourself to others and mentally competing with them. “See him? I make more money than he does. See her? I think I’m thinner than she is. See that big ring? I’ll bet it is cubic zirconium!” Nothing makes your new car depreciate more than having your neighbor buy a newer one!

Envy is quick to see the faults of others. Envy magnifies the faults of others, while love minimizes mistakes. Envy looks at people through a microscope, love looks through a telescope. When you are green with envy, you are ripe for trouble. Get rid of it!

(4) Hurtful talk

Slander means to speak words that hurt others. It is putting someone down, either when you're talking to them or about them. Sadly, many Christians have sharp tongues that wound and injure the feelings and reputations of others. A mature Christian would rather bite his tongue before he says anything harmful or hurtful about another believer.

Have you noticed how all of these sins are relational in nature? You can't be right with God if you're mistreating your brother or sister. These are all childish sins of immaturity. Are they present in your life? That's a sure sign you need to grow up.

Do you want to get rid of them? Let me give you a loving wake-up call. If you have no desire to get rid of these attitudes you are not a true follower of Jesus. The key word is *desire*. We all struggle with them, but if you are content with the presence of those filthy sins in your life, then you need to meet Jesus.

My favorite new music group is called Superchic[k]. They are a collection of young people who are spreading a positive message to today's teenagers. And yes, we have some Superchic[k] CDs in our bookstore. Some of you with gray hair like me may not like the music, but the lyrics are powerful. One of their songs entitled "High School" addresses the idea of growing up. The lyrics say:

High school is like a big competition
Beauty contests, prom court is the mission
There can only be one queen, one king
Everyone voting, everyone competing
But these are the rule,
the way of high school
If someone puts you down
That's so high school
Someone talks behind your back
That's so high school
Thinking you have to get them back
That's also high school
I know I'll be graduating early.

The chorus says:

It's high school Could be
A mini me of the rest of society
There's always a prom queen
There'll always be, always be celebrities

Sadly Some will be Eternally
keeping score of popularity
And just cuz They all do
Doesn't mean we have to
Act like we're in high school.

(Superchic[k] "High School" from Last One Picked, 2002)

Do you still display some spiritual feelings and attitudes that are high school? Excuse, me, but will you please grow up? Next, there must be

2. A PASSIONATE DESIRE FOR GOD'S WORD WILL STIMULATE YOUR GROWTH

When God gives a negative directive, He always gives a positive one to balance it. So, not only does God say there are some attitudes we need to take off like a dirty shirt, there's also something we need to have—a hunger, a craving to read and study God's Word. The word for "crave" means something much stronger than a casual desire. The verb *epipotheo* describes a longing bordering on a compulsive appetite.

I dated a girl in high school who claimed to be chocoholic. That was back in my B.C. days (Before Cindy). Once I gave her a box of chocolates and she offered me one piece and then she proceeded to eat the rest of the box! She said, "I just CRAVE chocolate!" I haven't seen her in years, but a mutual friend told me a few years ago that she is now twice the woman she used to be. Some cravings are bad for you.

An alcoholic craves alcohol so much it becomes a dangerous addiction. A drug addict can develop such an obsessive craving for drugs it seems as if he can't live without them. But the way an addict craves a fix is the way we should crave the Bible. We should have an obsessive addiction to read and study the Word of God.

The word in verse 2 is the same word found in the Septuagint translation of the Psalms 42:1 which says, "As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." Have you ever seen an animal so thirsty that it is panting? Can you honestly claim you have that level of desire in your relationship with God and His Word?

Peter compares spiritual hunger to the way a newborn baby craves milk. If you've ever been around an infant who wants to be fed, he has a powerful way of letting you know he is hungry. The way a baby craves milk is how we should crave God's Word. Milk is a powerful analogy for the Word of God, so pay very close attention. I don't want this truth about milk to go "past your eyes." (pasteurized) We should be craving the Word of God because it will do a body good, but too many people today are content with what I call spiritual junk food.

Here are some of the popular brands of spiritual junk food: Of course, there's McBibles. That's for people who only want to flip the Bible open and gulp down a verse or two on the run. Then they wonder why they end up with spiritual indigestion. It's spiritual fast food, but their motto is: "A verse a day will keep the devil away."

Some people prefer Church Bell. They make a weekly run for the spiritual border, but it’s not a very healthy meal. It’s pre-processed faith with loads of refried blessings. But it must fill these people up because they don’t eat anything else until they make their next run for the border.

Still others prefer the convenience of flamed-broiled Broadcast King. These are the people who sit at home and watch church on television, but never attend in person. They like it because they can “have it their way.” All they have to do is tune in their television in their den. They don’t have to gather with others and study the Bible for themselves.

Finally, some people eat at Peace-less Rut. Some like thin and crispy feel-good books and others like deep dish homemade religion. These are the people who talk about God, or the Good Lord, or the Man upstairs, but they never read the Bible to find out what God is really like or what He requires of them.

If you are going to grow toward maturity, you’re going to have to quit eating this spiritual junk food and start feasting on the Word of God. Do you crave the Word of God? The great British pastor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote: “A true Christian would rather go without a meal than without a sermon. He would sooner miss a meal than lose his daily portion of Scripture or his daily resort to the house of prayer.”

It’s normal to be a spiritual infant for a brief period after you are born again, but then you must grow up. You won’t grow unless you feed on God’s Word on a regular basis. The Apostle Paul was frustrated with the church at Corinth because it was full of spiritual babies who weren’t growing up. He wrote, “I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.” (I Corinthians 3:1-2) If you’ve been a Christian for four years or more, you should be feeding on the meat of the Word, not the milk.

What I serve to you each Sunday morning is milk. These messages are designed to be milk because there is a huge diversity in those who are listening: New Christians, no-Christians, back-slidden Christians, and maturing Christians. My goal is to make my teaching so simple that a nine-year-old can understand it. This is milk.

You want meat? Try attending WEBS. WEBS is Wednesday Evening Bible study. It’s for adults, and I go into a lot more depth in that setting. Are you able to digest meat, yet? Many of you have been followers of Jesus for many years and you should be teaching others instead of being bottle-fed week after week. Babies are cute, but if a baby doesn’t grow up, it has a real problem. Is it time that you stopped sucking on a spiritual milk bottle and started feeding on the meatier portions of God’s Word? We should crave God’s word—first the milk, and then the meat. Finally, if you are going to grow toward spiritual maturity you must understand that

3. A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS LORD WILL SUPPORT YOUR GROWTH

I love Peter’s last line in verse three. He writes, “Grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” The reason we want to keep on growing in our salvation is because

we have had a taste of experiencing God and we know from that personal experience that God is good. A thousand years earlier, King David had offered the first Divine taste test when he wrote, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” (Psalm 34:8) Peter is writing to people like us who have already participated in the taste test.

Can you remember when you tasted something delicious for the first time? I led a pretty sheltered life growing up in L.A. (Lower Alabama). We had plenty of vegetables, beef, and pork. But I had never seen or much less tasted a pomegranate until I was in college. I can remember the first time that someone offered me a pomegranate. They told me to chew the seeds and swallow the nectar and spit out the seeds. I can still recall that first bite - I tossed about a dozen of those luscious red seeds in my mouth and bit down. There was an explosion of flavor that touched taste buds that had lain dormant in my mouth for 18 years! I thought it was the most delicious taste on earth! Before that experience, if you had asked me if a pomegranate was good, I would have said, “I don’t know. I’ve never had a personal encounter with a pomegranate.” But now I can tell you that a pomegranate is not just good—it’s goooooood! I’ve had the personal experience of eating one. That’s what Peter is saying about our relationship with God.

Go ahead, somebody ask me, “Is God good?” I can answer, “God is good—all the time. And all the time, God is good.” It’s not just a song. It’s something I have personally experienced! Have you? If you’ve tasted the goodness of the Lord you’ll never be satisfied with anything less! You’ll have a craving to continually grow to keep on experiencing more and more of the goodness of God.

Our spiritual growth is a never ending quest. While you are living in this body, you’ll never reach the place or time when you can say, “I’ve arrived! I’ve learned all there is to know about God. I’ve become as mature as I can ever be.” You and I are works in progress, and Jesus is the One who is working on us and in us, in you to create this growth. Paul wrote, “... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6) I used to sing a children’s song that says, “He’s still working on me. To make me all I ought to be. It took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars; The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient He must be. ‘Cause He’s still workin’ on me!”

Do you want to grow as a Christian? Are you tired of being an immature Christian who feeds on junk food? In order to keep growing you must want to grow up and you must believe you can grow.

Some Christians get into a rut and think they can never grow beyond where they are at the moment. They are guilty of something John Piper calls, “Spiritual Fatalism.” He writes: Spiritual fatalism is a great threat to spiritual growth. It is the belief or feeling that you are stuck with the way you are. It is a feeling that genetic forces and family forces and the forces of my past experiences are just too strong to allow me to ever change and become more zealous, more fervent, more joyful, or more hopeful in God.”

It’s like saying to a gawky little girl who feels like her body is all out of proportion: “Well that’s the way you are, and you will always be that way!” When, in fact, she is meant to grow and

change. It would be tragic to convince her that her growth is stopped right there at age 13. So it is with the spirit, except spiritual fatalism is much worse because we never do get to a point where we've arrived at the final stature like we do in our physical bodies. So thousands of people live year after year without much passion for God or zeal for His name or joy in his presence. They think, "Well, that's just the way I am." And they just settle in. They are like an adolescent who stops growing and lives with pimples till he's eighty. (From a message January 30, 1994, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania)

CONCLUSION

By now, I hope you're thinking, "Okay, Pastor, you've convinced me I need to grow. I *want* to grow up spiritually, will you please tell me *how* to grow!" A man walked up to a coffee vending machine and put his coin into the slot. He pressed the button that said, "coffee, double cream, sugar." No cup appeared, but there was a "whir" and nozzles went into action sending down a flow of coffee, cream, and sugar. After it had all gone down the drain the machine turned off. The man said, "Now, that's automation! Not only does this machine make your coffee, it drinks it for you!"

It would be nice if spiritual growth was automatic, but it's not. Not only does spiritual growth involve a desire, it also includes discipline. There are some things you need to know and do to start growing and keep growing. The Christian life is like riding a bicycle, if you stop pedaling, you'll fall over. There are four things you must do every day, and you can remember them by the four letters in the word "G.R.O.W."

Get on my knees!

"G" stands for get on my knees. If you will make a commitment to spend time in prayer every day, you'll grow. I'm not talking about repeating memorized prayers; I'm talking about praying—talking to God and listening as much as you talk.

Read God's Word!

Second, "R" stands for read God's Word. Every single day, open the Bible and read a portion of it. It takes more than showing up for Bible Study and Worship once a week. It must be a personal discipline. It's important to have a quiet time of prayer and Bible Study so you can stay connected to God. But it's a lifestyle, too. Carry a copy of God's Word with you, or load it into your PDA or cell phone and whenever you have a spare moment, read God's Word.

If you're interested in obtaining a tool to help you be more consistent with your daily quiet time, I suggest you get a copy of *The Spiritual Powerbook* I've written. It's a DIY journal of how to improve your personal prayer life and Bible Study.

Others need me!

The letter "O" stands for others need me. That's just a reminder that everyday, you relate to people. There are only two kinds of people: Those who are believers and those who are pre-

believers. The believers around you need you and you need them for fellowship. Those who are not yet believers need you to show them the love of Jesus.

Work for Jesus!

The letter "W" is to remind you to work for Jesus. A great way to grow is to get involved in some kind of ministry. Most immature Christians are pew potatoes who only come and sit and soak and sour. They are only spectators; they aren't participators in the work of God. If you're a pew potato, get up and get involved in some kind of ministry. We only have about 400 different ministries here, and there is a job that is perfect for you.

That's *how* you grow—I guarantee if you'll consistently work on those four areas you will move toward spiritual maturity. You'll never reach a point where you stop growing. But knowing what to do is the easiest part. But having a burning passion to grow toward maturity is the key. So, will you grow up? Only you can answer that.

OUTLINE

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- (1) Meanness
- (2) Pretense
- (3) Envy
- (4) Hurtful talk

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes