

## Hebrews 6:1-3 “It’s Time to Stop Living on Milk” part two\*\*

Series: “*Rest in the Son – An Exposition of Hebrews 3-6*”<sup>1</sup>

Main Idea: Christians living on milk need to face two realities, according to Hebrews 5:11-6:3. We addressed the first last week, and after a brief review, we’ll consider the second.

- I. We need to face the problem of spiritual immaturity (5:11-14).
  - A. We are given some indicators of immaturity (11-13).
  - B. We are given some evidences of maturity (14).
- II. We need to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (6:1-3).
  - A. We need a good doctrinal foundation.
    1. It’s vital to understand repentance and faith.
    2. It’s vital to understand about baptism and laying on of hands.
    3. It’s vital to understand about the coming resurrection and judgment.
  - B. We need more than a good foundation.
    1. Do you know Christ?
    2. Do you have a good grasp of the basic doctrines?
    3. Are you taking steps to build on that foundation?
  - C. We need to be moving towards maturity.
    1. Spiritual growth doesn’t happen automatically.
    2. Spiritual growth requires intentionality.
    3. Spiritual growth occurs by God’s grace and for God’s glory.

The Bottom Line: God intends for His children to grow up and resemble His Son!

1. Are there things in our lives that are hindering our spiritual growth?
2. Are there things missing from our lives that are necessary for spiritual growth?
3. Are we serious about God’s agenda for our lives?

This past Lord’s Day I invited you to put on your steel-toed boots. You might want to keep them on today as we open our Bibles to Hebrews 6. The Holy Spirit led the writer of Hebrews to address a serious problem with a firm admonition. In a sentence. *It’s time to stop living on milk.* We’re taking two weeks to unpack this charge. Let’s read the text, starting with last week’s section and then break new ground.

*Scripture Reading: Hebrews 5:11-6:3*

When I bought the black and white creatures, they were just a couple of days old and hadn’t had any lessons, that’s for sure. But, of course, baby calves don’t need lessons when it comes to milk. As soon as those Holstein calves entered the world, they hit the ground (literally) with an insatiable thirst for milk. That their mothers’ milk was to be sold for human consumption meant the dairy farmer needed to sell their offspring. And that’s where I entered the picture.

I was in high school the day I became a surrogate mama to four baby calves. I can still remember putting my hand up to their noses, watching them curiously latch hold of my fingers with their soft mouths, feeling the sucking action as they pulled my fingers, searching and hoping to find the substance they craved. I quickly learned that little calves are serious about milk.

*Fighting* serious, to be precise. Since I had only two hands, I couldn’t feed all four of them at once which created a challenge. As soon as I placed the bottle before them, all four would lunge for it, as if to say, “Out of my way! That’s mine!” As they got bigger, the bottle gave way to a gallon bucket with an attached nipple, and more than once the head-butting of a greedy calf resulted in the bucket spilling its precious milk.

Yet the day came when the calves stopped drinking milk. It wasn’t their choice, for sure, but mine. And it wasn’t because I was uncaring that I took away their milk, but because I knew their growth and development depended on it. While baby calves need milk, if they are going to mature they need to leave the milk and start eating solid food.

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Hebrews series preached at WBC in 2008.

The process is called *weaning*. I had to take them off the milk and transition them to a new diet of nutritious foods like corn and hay.

Were my Holstein friends pleased with the change? Not at first. Weaned calves do their share of bawling once you take the milk away. But it doesn't last long. They soon learn to love their new diet, and then it's not long before you stop referring to them as *baby* calves.

It's a fact of life. Babies yearn for milk. Babies need milk. And in time babies leave the milk and transition to a fuller diet. That's not just for calves either. It was true for every litter of kittens I ever saw, the pigs we raised, the horses, and more. As you well know, it's also true for humans. By God's wonderful design, babies need milk. And also by God's design, babies eventually go on to maturity, and one of the evidences of maturity is when they stop living on milk.

What happens if they *don't*? What happens if a calf refuses to move from milk to solids? We understand what happens. It's what would have happened to our two daughters if they had failed to make the transition. They would have been sickly, would never have matured physically, and eventually would have died.

This is basic common sense reality. We all know that moving from milk to solids is essential for physical growth.

What about for *spiritual* growth? Is it essential that we move from milk to meat in order for spiritual maturity to occur? We know we should say *yes*, but the evidence in church after church might call our affirmation into question. Edward Farley asks an important set of questions in an article entitled, *Educated Clergy: Uneducated Laity*:

“Why do bankers, lawyers, farmers, physicians, homemakers, scientists, salespeople, managers of all sorts, people who carry out all kinds of complicated tasks in their work and home, remain at a literalist, elementary school level in their religious understanding? How is it that high school age church members move easily and quickly into the complex world of computers, foreign languages, DNA, calculus, and cannot even make a beginning in historical-critical interpretation of a single text of Scripture? How is it possible one can attend or even teach in a Sunday School for decades and at the end of that time lack the interpretive skills of someone who has taken three or four weeks in an introductory course in Bible at a university or seminary?”<sup>2</sup>

Those are some good questions. How *is* it possible? In part, it's possible because far too many church-goers aren't really convinced that spiritual growth is all that important. “As long as I'm going to heaven, that's the important thing. Growing in this life, well, sure it's good but it's sort of the icing on the cake. Isn't it?”

And if church-goers aren't convinced, it's ultimately because many church-leaders aren't convinced. For many pastors (and I speak as a pastor), it's far easier to “run the church program” than it is to give serious attention to our God-given job description, “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12) *so that* the body of Christ may be built up...*and become mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13).”

The writer of Hebrews was not a “run the program, don't make waves” kind of church leader. That's why he said what he said in the text we began to unpack last week. He made it clear in Hebrews 5:11-6:3 that Christians living on milk need to face two realities. We looked at the first reality last time. Let's quickly review it and then dive in to the second.

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<sup>2</sup> In his article, “Educated Clergy, Uneducated Laity,” taken from *Teaching the First Principles*, by Jeff Reed, p. 4.

## I. We need to face the problem of spiritual immaturity (11-14).

We read in verse 11 (NIV), “We have much to say about this, *but*.” The writer has more to say about the subject of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, a subject he’s been addressing since chapter four. But he says he can’t. The problem isn’t that there isn’t more to say. There’s always more to say about Christ! The problem is the inability of his readers to handle more, and it’s that problem that the writer lovingly and courageously confronts in this passage.

**A. We are given some indicators of immaturity (11-13).** The writer identifies for us five indicators of spiritually immature people. Allow me to restate them.

1. *They don’t listen well to God’s Word (11).* That’s seen in verse 11, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.”

2. *They ought to be teachers, but still need to be taught (12a).* That’s verse 12, “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you.”

3. *They are stuck on the ABCs of God’s Word (12b).* Verse 12 again, “...you need someone to teach you the *elementary truths of God’s word* all over again.” As I mentioned last time, the Greek word is *stoicheia*, here translated “elementary truths,” “first principles” in the KJV, and “basic principles” in the ESV. It has to do with *first things*, the ABCs which are essential building blocks for *later* things. Keep that thought in mind, for we’ll return to it shortly.

4. *They can’t handle solid food (12c).* Verse 12 concludes, “You need milk, not solid food!”

5. *They don’t connect the Word to right living (13).* That’s verse 13, “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.” There’s the goal of learning our spiritual ABCs. It’s not merely academic. It’s all about *righteousness*. We receive the gift of righteousness when we come to know the Righteous One as our Savior. We also receive the potential for a righteous life. Because we have the Holy Spirit, we begin to *live rightly*. And if we don’t live rightly, it’s an evidence of immaturity.

So these are some indicators of spiritual *immaturity*. Not all, but some. The ones that were present in the lives of the readers of this epistle. What about spiritual *maturity*?

**B. We are given some evidences of maturity (14).** Here are three.

1. *They can handle solid food.* “Solid food is for the mature,” says the text.

2. *They use what they learn.* Don’t underestimate the significance of the words “constant practice” (ESV; in the NIV “constant use”) in verse 14. By *constant practice* they have trained themselves. People who are maturing don’t just *hear* God’s Word, but *practice* it. And they practice it *constantly*.

3. *They have learned to discern what pleases God and what doesn’t.* The writer says they have been “trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

As I reflect on these verses, it dawns on me that the writer of Hebrews operated by some assumptions that many *don’t* hold today. First, he operated by the assumption that *God’s children are supposed to grow*. Second, based on this text, God’s children should be *held accountable to grow*. That’s why he’s writing this. A third assumption is that God’s children should be *confronted if they aren’t growing*. And fourth, this kind of confrontation is an expression of *love*.

Love? Yes. Notice the first words that come from the writer’s pen right after he delivers this confrontation. He says in Hebrews 6:9, “Even though we speak like this, *dear friends*.” That’s the NIV. The AV and ESV say, “Beloved.” This is the *loving* thing to do. This is what true friends do with each other. They do all they can to facilitate growth unto Christlikeness. When it’s being hindered, they confront the hindrances. Yet even as they confront, they offer the kind of encouragement that we see in the rest of verse 9.

“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.”

This is what brothers and sisters do. We help each other grow which means at times we confront each other. Proverbs 27:6 (KJV) says it well, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

This is the first reality. We need to *face the problem of spiritual immaturity*.

Now notice the very next word in the text. It’s the first word of 6:1. “Therefore.” In light of the problem of spiritual immaturity, the writer is now going to address what needs to happen. And what is that? Listen again to verses 1-3.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.”

As mentioned last time, that’s *not* what we expect the writer to say. He just told his readers they couldn’t handle solid food and still needed milk. We now expect him to say, “So here’s some *milk* for you.” That’s what Paul did with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:2. “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.”

That’s *not* the approach the writer of Hebrews takes. Though his readers need milk, he tells them to *leave* the elementary doctrine of Christ and *go on* to maturity. In other words, he says, you’re not ready for solid food yet and what you need is milk, but I’m not going to give you milk. I’m calling for you to leave the milk and get busy growing!<sup>3</sup>

This brings us to the second reality that we must face. The problem. The *process*.

## II. We need to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (1-3).

Let me reemphasize something. If you are a new Christian, this counsel isn’t for you. If you are a baby in Christ, you do need milk and ought not feel bad for wanting milk. But if you’re *not* a spiritual baby, if you’ve identified yourself as a Christian for more than a year or two or three (the time for spiritual weaning varies just as it does in the physical realm) and yet you’re still living on milk, this charge is for you. It’s time to leave the milk. It’s time to get involved in the *process* of maturity.

And spiritual maturity involves just that, a *process*. It doesn’t happen quickly nor automatically. We all enter the family of God the same way, by being born again. That’s not a process, but an instantaneous work of the Spirit. And when the Spirit’s work of regeneration occurs, the immediate evidence is repentance and faith.

Do you remember when you were born again? One moment you were dead in your sins. The next moment you were crying out to God (just like a baby does when it enters this world) and saying, “O God, save me! I believe in You and in Your Son whom You sent to save me, an unworthy sinner! I don’t want to live the way I’ve lived anymore!”

What a wonderful moment it was! You were justified by faith alone on the merit of Christ’s work alone, and you entered God’s family as a newborn baby. And then the growing process began.

In verses 1-3, we discover three insights into this maturing process.

**A. We need a good doctrinal foundation.** Ponder again the command in verse 1 (NIV), “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.” The writer urges his readers to *leave the elementary doctrine*. Of course, in order to leave it, that assumes something, right? If I told you to *leave your Bible here and go into the next room*, that command assumes that you have a Bible. You can’t *leave* what you don’t *have*.

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<sup>3</sup> I’m indebted to F. F. Bruce for this observation; p. 111.

Here the writer tells his readers to *leave* the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. That assumes they had been taught and grasped *the elementary doctrine of Christ*. And as Hebrews makes clear, we *can't* make that assumption about every person who professes Christ. Many can't leave the elementary doctrine because they never really learned it in the first place.

J. I. Packer is a well known name in Christian circles. He wrote the important book *Knowing God*, a must read for all of us. Listen to his assessment. "Our great need today is a renewal of systematic Christian instruction—catechetical teaching—for adults. It need not be called that, nor need it take the form of rigid drilling in present formulae, which is how old-time Protestants taught their children; but somehow or other, opportunities must be given for folk in and just outside the churches to examine the Christian essentials, because there are so many for whom this is a prime need."<sup>4</sup>

The problem isn't new. In the 1500s Martin Luther did an inspection of the churches and was appalled at what he found. Consequently, he wrote his little catechism with these words in the introduction:

"Grace, mercy, and peace in Jesus Christ, our Lord, from Martin Luther, to all faithful, godly pastors and preachers. The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and quite unfitted for teaching."<sup>5</sup>

One of my treasured possessions is my grandfather's catechism book. He wrote his name in the front when he went through it as a young teen around the year 1918. What did he learn? Allow me to read a sampling:

*Question 1: What should be the chief concern of man? Answer: Man's chief concern should be the eternal salvation of his soul.*

*Question 2: How can you secure the eternal salvation of your soul? Answer: We secure the eternal salvation of our soul through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the pages that followed he learned the meaning and significance of the Ten Commandments, as well as the answers (with Scriptural support) to dozens of fundamental questions like these.

*Question 40: What do the Scriptures teach concerning God? Question 41: What is the meaning of: God is eternal? Question 43: What is the meaning of: God is omnipresent? With subsequent questions asking what it means to say that God is true, omniscient, all-wise, holy, and so on.*

*Question 65: What is now the natural state of man? Answer: Since the fall man is corrupt, therefore unfit for anything good, but prepared for and inclined to evil. This inherited corruption is called original sin.*

*Question 69: Did God leave mankind to perish in this state of sin and misery? Answer: No; God in His mercy resolved from all eternity to redeem fallen mankind by His only begotten Son.*

Now answer this. Does learning these elementary teachings about Christ guarantee that a person will truly know Christ as Savior? No. My grandfather went through catechism as a child, but never came to know Christ personally until he was around fifty years of age.

But here *is* a guarantee. A person who *does not learn* the elementary doctrine of Christ will *not mature* spiritually. We cannot go on to maturity, according to Hebrews 6:1, unless

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<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, taken from *Teaching the First Principles*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Quote taken from Jeff Reed, *Teaching the First Principles*, p. 5.

we have first put a foundation in place, a foundation referred to in Hebrews as the “elementary doctrine of Christ” (NIV “elementary teachings about Christ”).

What is this “elementary doctrine”? The writer actually lists six foundational doctrines. There are three categories with a pair of doctrines in each; the first two pertain to salvation, the next two to initial church experience, and the final two to future things.<sup>6</sup> This is the doctrinal foundation he says his readers received and by implication *we need*.

1. *It’s vital to understand repentance and faith.* Specifically, he mentions first, “Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God (ESV)”. The NIV says, “the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.” This is the same message that Paul said he preached wherever he went. According to Acts 20:21, “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

It doesn’t get any more basic than this. To be saved a person must hear the message of Christ and then *repent* and place their *faith* in Christ.

By the way, in some churches that’s *all* a person ever hears, salvation messages week after week. And the result? If unbelievers are present, they may be saved. But what about the believers? On that steady diet, they’ll remain spiritual toddlers and begin to do what toddlers do. Fight over toys. Pout when they don’t get their way. Again, this is *elementary* doctrine. It’s vital, yes. But it must lead to something else.

2. *It’s vital to understand about baptism and laying on of hands.* Verse 2 mentions “instruction about baptisms.” The Greek is plural, *baptismon*, “baptisms.” The same word appears in Hebrews 9:10, there translated “washings” (ESV; “ceremonial washings” in the NIV). There were many “washings” prescribed by the Mosaic Law (see Mark 7:4) and for centuries the Jewish people practiced those washings.

Then Christ came, and He of course fulfilled the Law, and the readers of this epistle learned that He fulfilled the law. They learned it early in their Christian life. They learned that they didn’t need to keep those “washings” any longer, for they’d been “washed” by the blood of Christ, and had made that public by the “washing” of baptism.

This is basic, milk instruction. Believe in Christ, let go of the ceremonial laws, make your faith public by believer’s baptism. In a few weeks we’ll be observing a baptismal service. Have you followed the Lord into the waters of baptism?

They had also learned about “the laying on of hands.” Under the Mosaic law, the Jews were instructed to place their hands on the head of the burnt offering (Lev. 1:4). The high priest put his hands on the animal he sacrificed (Lev. 16:21). Laying on of hands signified identification with, and devotion, and commitment.

In the new covenant, we too use our hands. We lay hands on a person at times for prayer, at other times for ordination to ministry, etc.

These readers knew all about baptism and laying on of hands. These are important matters. Elementary matters. Milk matters.

3. *It’s vital to understand about the coming resurrection and judgment.* The Hebrews had learned about “the resurrection of the dead.” That refers to Christ’s resurrection which is a past tense historical event, and our resurrection which is a coming future event.

“And eternal judgment.” They learned that judgment is coming. We will all stand before the Judge, God Himself, for accounting. It’s appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment (as they’ll hear again in 9:27).

I remember hearing about that sobering reality. I was eleven years old, and every week I felt like the pastor up front was talking to me. He said I was a sinner (and I knew he was

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<sup>6</sup> Observation by Robert Gromacki, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> See also Acts 26:20

right), and He said that God who is holy was going to judge my sin. The thought petrified me. Thankfully, he told me the good news as well. The Judge would forgive me if I repented and believed in His Son who had taken the punishment for me.

These are the elementary doctrines, and they are wonderful and vital. This is where the process of spiritual maturity begins. We need a good doctrinal foundation. But does it end there? No, it must not end there.

**B. We need more than a good foundation.** Take another look at verse 1. “Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ *and go on.*” We’ll talk specifically about the destination of this journey in a moment, but for now please notice it’s necessity. The loving writer says to *go on*. Is a foundation good? Absolutely, but every contractor knows it’s not the end but just the beginning.

In light of this exhortation, three questions are in order. Personal questions.

1. *Do you know Christ?* This is the bedrock foundational issue. Knowing Christ. “This is eternal life,” said Jesus, “that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:4).”

2. *Do you have a good grasp of the basic doctrines?* We’ve just taken a quick survey of six basic doctrinal truths. Could you teach those truths to your children this afternoon? Could you open your Bible and teach them what repentance is, and faith, and why baptism is important, and what resurrection means, and why they need to prepare for the coming judgment?

If you can’t, or if you’re a little rusty on these matters, let us help you. Our privilege as a church is to aid you in the process of developing a solid theological foundation. That’s one of the primary objectives of our Sunday School classes, and our community groups, as well as our Wednesday evening Bible study.

Think about it. What happens in this room on Sunday mornings when you hear me say something you don’t understand? You could interrupt me, but that would distract others. You might ask me your question at the door, but again the crowd makes it hard to hear. But if you’re in Sunday School, or community groups, or attending Wednesday evening, you have the perfect opportunity to ask your question, and to interact with your brothers and sisters, and work through the implications of the truth you’re pondering.

3. *Are you taking steps to build on that foundation?* Notice I said *build on*, not leave, not outgrow a need for, not abandon. Philip Hughes explains, “To leave the elementary doctrines does not mean to despise or abandon them any more than a pupil who has learned the ABCs can then dispense with the alphabet... The first principles of Christian truth are basic to every stage of development and are no less essential at the end than they are at the beginning. The point is that the beginning is not a stopping-place; it is the door to progress and the springboard to achievement.”<sup>8</sup>

Peter Jeffery wrote a helpful book that everyone should read called *Bitesize Theology*. Towards the beginning Jeffery offers this important perspective:

“There are not two sets of doctrines in the Bible, one called milk and the other called meat, one for new believers and the other for more mature saints. There is only one body of truth and all believers, young or old in the faith, need it all. The ABC is doctrine presented in a more basic and easy-to-understand way. Every Christian needs to understand the difference between justification and sanctification, and such biblical doctrines can be taught with understanding to Christian teenagers. Indeed there is no doctrine in the Bible that Christian youngsters do not need to know and love. But there is a difference in teaching doctrine to a young people’s fellowship and to a ministers’ conference. The difference is not in subject matter but in depth and application. It is

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 195.

not a matter of watering down the doctrine to make it more acceptable but of explaining it in a way that makes it understandable to young believers.”<sup>9</sup>

Well said! Let me say a word to those who teach children and youth (that would start with parents and grandparents, and include those who work with our young people at church). *Teach them theology*. Can twelve-year-olds understand the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement? Sure, they can and have for centuries! Our kids (and adults for that matter) can handle a lot more than we often give them credit for. For sure, we need to know it before we can teach it. And we need to use basic language and illustrations they can grasp. But stretch them with good theology.

Why are so many young people chucking the faith when they hit the college age? Here’s part of the reason. We’ve given them a “dumbed down” version of God in their upbringing. Oh, they learned the Bible stories and maybe even Bible verses, but they never were introduced to the God of the Bible, the great, omnipotent, sovereign, gracious Triune God! Let’s give our kids a *Big God* they can *grow into* rather than *grow out of*!

Last week I invited you to consider the Two:Two program for men and the Titus 2 program for women. Again, if you’re interested in a basic discipleship course, this *isn’t* it. This is a highly intensive three-year program that’s designed to produce reproducing reproducers. *Teaching willing others to win others*. Check out year one on the table.

One, we need a good doctrinal foundation. Two, we need more than a foundation.

**C. We need to be moving towards maturity.** “Let us *go on to maturity*,” is the charge in verse 1. How do we do that? First, we must grasp that moving isn’t automatic.

1. *Spiritual growth doesn’t happen automatically*. Barclay offers this sobering charge, “There are Christians in whose faith there has been no development for thirty or forty or fifty or sixty years...They are grown men and women and yet insist on remaining content with the religious development of a child.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus said that to enter the kingdom one must be *childlike* (Matt. 18:1ff.). But there’s a difference between being *childlike* and *childish*. As Barclay wisely put it, “Peter Pan makes a charming play on the stage; but the man who will not grow up make a tragedy in real life.”<sup>11</sup>

2. *Spiritual growth requires intentionality*. Ponder that word carefully. We need to be *intentional*. David Breese offers this helpful insight, “Strong sons of God are not perfected by childish pursuits.”<sup>12</sup>

What are childish pursuits? It’s not complicated. Do you remember the Mother Goose rhyme that goes like this?

PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?  
I’VE BEEN TO LONDON TO VISIT THE QUEEN.  
PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT, WHAT DID YOU THERE?  
I FRIGHTENED A LITTLE MOUSE UNDER THE CHAIR.

Like that cat, we too at times can settle for petty involvements, trivial pursuits, chasing mice, when we could be enjoying time with the King Himself! How do you begin your day? How do you end your day? I’m not ready to begin or end my day without hearing the voice of my Savior. And He has given us a way that we can hear His voice every morning and evening and throughout the day if we desire to hear it. How? By opening up the Bible. He will not force you to read His Word my friend. And there will always be a host of competing voices and attractions.

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> William Barclay, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> William Barclay, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> David Breese, *Living For Eternity*, Moody Press, 1988, p. 78.

But if we're going to deepen our relationship with Him and grow into maturity, we need to be intentional about opening the Book.<sup>13</sup>

Take inventory, beloved. Ask yourself, "What activities am I engaging in for the purpose of maturing in Christ?"

Amy Carmichael once penned these thoughts: "Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent. I feel that I shall never be like that. But they won through step by step by little bits of wills, little denials of self, little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things. They became what they are. No one sees these little hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph, no spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment."<sup>14</sup>

I have good news for you. If we know Christ, we *can* mature. But it requires *intentionality*. We must not be passive. We must roll up our sleeves and take steps to *go on to maturity*.

Please listen carefully to the following quote. I'm not going to mention the author's name for reasons I'll explain after I read:

"Human beings grow by striving, working, stretching; and in a sense, human nature needs problems more than solutions. Why are not all prayers answered magically and instantly? Why must every convert travel the same tedious path of spiritual discipline? Because persistent prayer, and fasting, and study, and meditation are designed primarily for our sakes, not for God's. Kierkegaard said that Christians reminded him of schoolboys who want to look up the answers to their math problems in the back of the book rather than work them through... We yearn for shortcuts. But shortcuts usually lead away from growth, not toward it."<sup>15</sup>

That's a very insightful quote. No shortcuts to growth. And frankly, a very sobering quote too, for the person who penned those words is a well-known Christian leader, a man that the Lord used for decades to help other people understand and apply God's Word. But just a few months ago, this same brother, now 76 years old and married for 55 years, issued this public statement:

"To my great shame, I confess that for eight years I willfully engaged in a sinful affair with a married woman. My conduct defied everything that I believe about marriage. It was also totally inconsistent with my faith and my writings and caused deep pain for her husband and both of our families."

Then after announcing that he's retiring from ministry and seeking to restore trust with his wife, he penned these words: "I need to spend my remaining years living up to the words I have already written. I pray for God's grace and forgiveness—as well as yours—and for healing in the lives of those I've wounded."

I'm grieved by this. Not shocked. Not surprised. I understand how this could happen to this brother in Christ. It could happen to me and you. It's a glaring reminder that intentionality must be in the present tense. Past evidences of spiritual growth do not guarantee that we're growing today. We cannot coast and move forward.

"Then it's all up to us?" you say. "Our effort is the key to spiritual growth." Thankfully, not so. Notice verse 3. "And this we will do if God permits." The NIV says, "And God permitting, we will do so." What does that tell us?

3. *Spiritual growth occurs by God's grace and for God's glory.* Ponder those words, "And this we will do." Do what? Leave the milk and go on to maturity. We will do this! How? "If God permits."

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<sup>13</sup> Source Unknown, found on sermonillustrations.com

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *Holy Sweat*, Tim Hansel, 1987, Word Books Publisher, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God*, Zondervan, pp. 207-8.

“Salvation is of the Lord,” says Jonah 2:9. Salvation is by His grace, says Ephesians 2:8. “It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure,” says Philippians 2:13.

If today you are no longer an infant but are a growing, maturing Christian, then realize why. He who began a good work in you is completing it, to borrow the language of Philippians 1:6. Let us never conclude, “Yea, I’m growing. I’ve moved from infancy to spiritual adulthood. And I’m really proud of myself too.” Never. Take heed, lest you fall. When growth occurs it’s always by God’s grace and thus for His glory!

Listen to Romans 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” This is why He chose us and saved us and is growing us. Christlikeness.

### The Bottom Line: God intends for His children to grow up and resemble His Son!

So let’s ask ourselves these three questions.

1. *Are there things in our lives that are hindering our spiritual growth?* Here’s one, “I don’t have time.” In reality, the truth is we don’t have time *if* we keep doing everything we’re currently doing. So take inventory. How much television do you watch in a week’s time? How much time scrolling videos and checking out social media? Nothing necessarily wrong with these activities, but there’s *a lot* wrong when they are robbing us of time that could help us get to know God better.

2. *Are there things missing from our lives that are necessary for spiritual growth?* For some of us, the Bible is confusing and boring. The problem is we don’t understand its vocabulary. Peter Jeffery explains, “Just about every activity of men and women has its own peculiar vocabulary. A man would not be much of a musician if he did not understand the difference between a crochet and a quaver. And youngsters with their computers all know what a mega-bite and CD-ROM are. Even sport has its special vocabulary—soccer has its back-four, golf its birdies and pars, cricket its maiden over and tennis its 15-love. The followers of these activities all know the vocabulary because they love what they are doing and constant use of words make them familiar. Surely it is not unreasonable to expect Christians to know the vocabulary of what they believe.”<sup>16</sup>

If you’re interested in getting a better handle on the Bible’s vocabulary, I encourage you to read Peter Jeffery’s helpful book, *Bitesize Theology*.

3. *Are we serious about God’s agenda for our lives?* I say “our” because that’s the language of Hebrews 6. It’s not just *my* maturity that should matter to me, but *ours*. God’s agenda is that *we* grow up as a body and accurately reflect His Son. Let’s make sure His agenda is ours.

### **Closing Song: #388 “I Would Be Like Jesus” (all four verses)**

#### Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we finished a two-part message from Hebrews 5:11-6:3, “*It’s Time to Stop Living on the Milk*.” After reading the passage again, discuss what was happening in the lives of the people who first read this letter we call Hebrews. What does the writer mean when he refers to “milk”? To “solid food”?

2. In Hebrews 6:1 the writer gives an interesting command. He says, “Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ.” What does he mean by “elementary doctrine”? What examples does he give?

3. Also in verse 1, the writer identifies a second responsibility. He says we are to “go on to maturity”. What does it take for a Christian to mature? What happens if a Christian doesn’t mature?

4. In this morning’s message we considered the statement, “Spiritual growth doesn’t happen automatically but requires intentionality.” What does the word “intentionality” mean? What has God used in your life to help you grow in your relationship with Christ?

5. Prayer is vital at all times including when we study God’s Word. Redeemed people *pray the Word*. Before we close our Bibles and move on with life, let’s have a purposeful, unrushed season of prayer as a community group. Have someone offer a prayer of thanksgiving for what we’ve learned today. Have others bring petitions to the Lord regarding needed application.

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Jeffery, pp. 13-14.