



## A Spiritual Encouragement Message February 19, 2021

### Grow

By Andrew Lemus

*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1Peter 2:2*

I can't believe that today we are giving my youngest child, Asher Timothy, his first bite of real food. We took him in for his checkup and let the doctor know that he keeps reaching for the food that we are eating. To our surprise she encouraged us to give him some! It feels like the little guy was just born yesterday and he is already ready to eat something other than milk? So tonight, a couple weeks before he turns 6 months, Asher is going to try out some sweet potatoes.

What would be more concerning is if the little guy didn't grow, stayed the size of a baby, and remained on breastmilk for years. Or can you imagine a three-year-old that was walking and talking but his diet only consisted of breastmilk?! That would be sad, bizarre, and very concerning. It is a blessing to see babies grow (although a little sad to watch them leave such a cute stage).

As Christians we too are called to grow. Sure that newborn babe stage is cute as we stumble along, amazed and astonished at the overload of blessings showered upon us in Christ, and insecurely walk along as our spiritual joints form and grow (Hebrews 12:12). We too, when we are born again are a new creation redeemed to fulfill God's purpose but like a newborn child, growth is to be expected of all newborn babes. Just like we can see that the failure to grow physically is contrary to the laws of nature, the failure to grow spiritually is contrary to the law of God. Paul even speaks of how "our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (1Cor. 4:16).

What are some of the conditions that need to be in place for us to have healthy spiritual growth?

1. **Birth:** In order to grow you need to first be born. The spiritual rebirth of one who previously was dead in their sins is essential to grow spiritually (John 3:3). Jesus taught that in order to see the kingdom of God one must be born again. Paul also taught that those that are in Christ are a new creation, that the old has passed away and the new has come (2Cor. 5:17).
2. **Freedom:** Just like disease can stunt and even kill a child, a newborn babe must strive to keep themselves free from the sin. Want to remain in spiritual infancy or perhaps even perish in it then practice sin, it surely will stunt your growth. To grow we must put away sin, not live in bondage to sin, and offer the members of our bodies as instruments of righteousness and not sin (1Peter 2:1;

- Romans 6:6; Romans 6:16). Sin is able to hold us back and restrain us from growing properly, we must have freedom from it to grow spiritually (2Peter 2:20).
3. **Food:** Without food you simply will not grow. Peter admonishes the church to desire, long for, and thirst for the spiritual milk which can help us to grow in our salvation (1Peter 2:2). Continuing with this picture, the Hebrew writer states that as we grow, we should move from the elementary teachings to the weightier teachings, from the milk to the meat (Hebrews 5:14). How sad is it to see talented Christians remaining on a consistent diet of milk after decades of being in Christ. No, it's not that cute! As Christians we need to be getting our daily consumption of the word of God so that we can give ourselves the spiritual nutrients needed to grow.
  4. **Exercise:** Is spiritual obesity a problem in the church? It is one thing to eat a lot of food and another to use the energy from the food you are eating to build up your body. God calls us to not merely consume His word but to use the energy, enlightenment, and knowledge to grow strong. You are not going to build up those spiritual muscles by just hearing the word of God, you have to do what it says (James 1:22). To grow in Christ, we must "exercise thyself unto godliness" (1Timothy 4:7 KJV).
  5. **Environment:** "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'." (1Corinthians 15:33). Throughout the book of Proverbs, we see Solomon warn his children about the negative influence of those that pursue sin and the positive encouragement of those who love God. We have all witnessed the rapid spiritual growth of those that surround themselves with godly influences and see the importance of it. Unfortunately, we have also seen children of God surround themselves with slaves to sin, conforming to their ways. Don't be deceived, if you want to grow spiritually you need to have a spiritually healthy environment to do so (1Corinthians 5:6-7).
  6. **Time:** Just like physical growth, spiritual growth takes time. As a youth minister I have seen young men in the eighth grade shoot up to be over six feet tall and others not hit their growth spurt until they are in tenth grade. Spiritual growth takes time, and it isn't the same rate for us all, but it is happening if we are born again, free from sin, eating the right food, exercising, and living in a godly environment. The inspired pen of the Hebrew writer speaks of "time" when it comes to our spiritual growth.

*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:11-14*

Let us grow. Imagine walking into a church and seeing it filled with a bunch of babies and children with no adults present. I can imagine the crying, complaining, fighting, selfishness, and immaturity that place would be filled with! In order for us to be the active, vibrant, and godly people we have been called to be we must grow in Christ. Let us choose to not settle with spiritual infancy or complacency but grow in Christ to a mature spiritual adult.