

Watching Your Spiritual Diet

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:23–2:3

Code: B170515

The following blog post was originally published in May, 2017. —ed.

Most of us have known people whose bodies have not grown or matured properly. It's sad to encounter people with cognitive handicaps, brain damage, or other developmental obstacles that have hindered their growth. Many of them remain locked in a child-like state—others tragically don't progress even that far.

In a similar way, some Christians remain locked in a perpetual state of spiritual infancy. However, unlike those suffering with mental handicaps, Christians struggling with arrested spiritual development have no one to blame but themselves.

All Christians are supposed to be growing in Christlikeness: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). But there is often a disconnect between Romans 8:29 and what we see happening in the church. Some Christians simply don't grow. Spiritually they remain stunted, never becoming what God has called them to be.

Worse still, if you challenge these believers, they may deny culpability for their stunted growth and indignantly argue that they are growing—albeit at their own pace! Everybody wants to grow; it's just that some people want to grow with no effort, and that's where the problem lies.

While I was in college, I wasted my time and experienced little, if any, growth as a Christian. But when I began seminary I tasted God's Word in a life-transforming way. During those seminary days I learned to study the Bible systematically, and that's when I began to grow. Ever since that time I have found that my spiritual growth is directly proportionate to the amount of time and effort I put into the study of Scripture. And all of my experiences ministering to other Christians have only reinforced that conviction.

When believers aren't growing, it's almost always symptomatic of a failure to be in God's Word. They may attend church regularly, but what they learn dissipates rapidly once they exit the building. They often complain that they're not getting much out of church or the Christian life. They are weak and rundown when it comes to facing temptations, trials, problems, and challenges. They lack the vigor to do much of anything for the Lord.

The root cause of their arrested development is spiritual malnourishment—their souls are starved for wholesome spiritual food. The Bible refers to itself as milk, bread, and meat, but spiritually a lot of Christians are trying to survive and thrive on candy, Cokes, and fries. They aren't growing because their diet is tragically deficient. Ironically, the solution to their problems is in the very thing they refuse to feed upon—God's Word.

How to Eat Right and Grow Spiritually

There are several excellent biblical passages that talk about spiritual growth. One of the best, and certainly the most basic, is in Peter's first epistle. Both of his New Testament letters were written to Christians under intense persecution. They had become the scapegoats of a vulnerable Roman empire, and the target of national angst and rage. On virtually every front—theologically, socially, politically—they were under attack. But the thrust of Peter's message to them is clear: Don't worry. Put your hope in Christ and learn to live in the light of His kingdom, not your present circumstances.

The Christian believers who read Peter's letters probably weren't too concerned about their spiritual growth. They were merely trying to survive. Yet, early in his first letter, Peter tells them that part of the reason they can have hope is because of the living Word of Christ:

For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Peter 1:23–2:3)

Whether believers are recent converts or more mature in the faith, craving the Word of God is always essential to spiritual nourishment and growth (Job 23:12). Jesus affirmed this when He told Satan in the wilderness, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

Postmodern culture churns out an endless supply of distractions from God's Word. Radio, television, films, the Internet, computer games, books, and magazines—all of which dull our appetites for genuine spiritual food. Christians must not allow themselves to be distracted from the nourishment that only God's Word can provide.

Likewise, they must not be satisfied with the spiritual status quo. Peter's exhortation strongly implies the necessity of discontentment with the present condition of spiritual development—that anyone who is growing spiritually must yearn to keep growing. Motivation for genuine spiritual growth flows out of a righteous discontentment, coupled with a sincere desire to be satisfied with nothing but the Word of God.

We'll talk more about spiritual malnourishment and the dangers of spiritual junk food later in this series. For now, we want to focus on the character and nature of God's Word as our only life-giving source of spiritual sustenance.

One of the many statements that the Bible makes concerning itself is that it is a "living Word." In Philippians 2:16, Paul calls it the "word of life." Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active." Here in 1 Peter 1:23, it is "the living and enduring word of God." There are no more significant or more important statements that refer to the Bible than these. It is through this living Word that we are born again and made alive spiritually. And it is through the living Word that we grow up into Christ.

In the days ahead, we'll take a closer look at the vitality of God's Word and what it means to feed on its life-giving power.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [*Why Believe the Bible*](#).)

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