

Title: Grow  
Date: January 21, 2024  
Subject: Seeing Life Clearly: Four Resolutions for Christian Living -- Grow  
Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1 - 3

When toddlers begin to verbalize, one of the first words is “more.” At least it is for our grandkids, especially Josie. If she wants more to eat, she’ll pick up her plate, hold it arm’s length and say “more.” If she’s asked if she wants more, her head nods and her whole body nods. It’s easy to understand she wants more.

The desire for more food is to mark the Christian. More food is necessary to grow.

READ 1 Peter 2:1 – 3

Tasted. Had experience.

This only applies to those who’ve come to Christ and accepted him as their Savior. God the Father has “given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade... your faith—of greater worth than gold... redeemed from the empty way of life... have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1:3, 4, 7, 18, 23).

Did you hear the connection between the word of God and being born again? As it says in another Scripture: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17).

The person who has placed his or her trust in Christ has tasted. They've gotten a little bit of what Christ has for us, but there's so much more to enjoy.

This past week I was part of the DS Search Committee. After the interviews we went out to eat with the candidates. At a particular restaurant, the waitress asked if everyone had been there before. One of the guys hadn't. No, it wasn't che Taco Bell. The waitress asked if he'd like a complementary deep-fried sauerkraut ball. He accepted as he was curious. When she delivered, with the typical “Enjoy!”, he hesitantly took a bite and...quickly consumed the rest. He said it was very good. It whetted his appetite for the rest of the meal.

Come to the key word --

Grow

Followers of Christ are to grow up in their salvation. They're saved from their sins. They have forgiveness of sins. They have the promise of eternal life. They're in a right relationship with God. They've been pronounced justified, declared not guilty. God no longer holds their sins against them.

But, however, therefore, since that is true - they are to grow and keep growing. Christianity isn't to be an initial spasm followed by chronic inertia.

I. Obstacles to growth

A. Spiritual stagnation and complacency

Jesus talked about a man who had worked hard but got to the point where he just wanted to kick back, put it in neutral and coast through life. “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.” Then he said, “This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; Eat, drink and be merry.””

God spoke to the man and called him a fool because that night his life would be demanded of him. He wouldn't get the chance to enjoy his things. Jesus employed the story to warn people who are rich in the things of the world to wake up and be rich toward God.

The guy just wanted to coast. There's no coasting in the Christian life. Need to keep growing.

Timanthes was a young Greek artist three centuries before Christ. He created a masterful portrait. He was so enamored with it he spent day after day doing nothing else but look intently at the painting. One morning he was horrified to discover that his mentor had deliberately ruined it. The young artist was understandably angry. He approached his teacher and asked why he had destroyed his incredible work of art. The wise man replied, "I did it for your own good. That painting was retarding your progress. It was an excellent piece of art, but it wasn't perfect. Start again and see if you can do even better." Timanthes took his teacher's advice. He produced a masterpiece regarded by some as one of the finest paintings of antiquity.

We can't think we've arrived as Christians. Paul, though a godly man who'd accomplished a tremendous amount for Christ, admitted he still needed to grow.

B. Hurry sickness.

On the opposite side is hurry sickness. The person is always in a rush. Running here, running there. Feel the need to grow exceptionally fast. Cram in so much food. Don't take time to chew or swallow.

In his book "Overcomers Through The Cross," Paul Billheimer points out that God takes time to make an oak tree and also takes time to turn a Christian into a saint. He writes, "An unripe apple is not fit to eat, but we should not therefore condemn it. It is not yet ready for eating because God is not done making it. It is a phase of its career and good in its place." A might oak from an acorn, a Honeycrisp apple ready to eat and Christian growth all involve development. The difference is Christians are useful to God at all stages.

II. How to grow

A. Don't eat the bad stuff

V. 1 initiates a contrast of what shouldn't be in our lives with what should be. The things of v. 1 are often the “go to” for people of the world system opposed to God. They use malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander to achieve their goals. They're straight out of the devil's instruction manual.

That's the reason we shouldn't anything to do with them. TobyMac said this: “The longer I live on this earth the more I become aware that this earth is coming against the way I want to live. It's pushing against who I've determined I want to be. It pushes up against being a believer in this world” ([guideposts.org/positive-living/entertainment/music/tobymac-on-christian-music-and-raising-a-son-with-a-disability](http://guideposts.org/positive-living/entertainment/music/tobymac-on-christian-music-and-raising-a-son-with-a-disability)).

Christ followers are to rid themselves of attitudinal and verbal sinful habits from the old life. There are times when leftovers taste better than when first served. The extra time allows the seasonings, spices and ingredients to intermingle and infuse the chili or lasagna with extra flavor. While that may be true for some foods we eat, it doesn't mean we should keep leftovers in the fridge for three to four months and then eat them. Maybe it's something that was accidentally shoved to the back of the fridge and it's finally discovered. Some of you are gagging, at least inwardly, because you know how revoltingly disgusting the insides of the Tupperware can be if it's opened. Need I describe it? Just throw the stuff away, maybe the container and all.

The same is true with the leftovers of the old sinful life. Just throw them away. Give the boot to malice which is mean-spiritedness and unkindness. Ditch deceit, lies and half-truths. Take off the mask of hypocrisy, pretending to be something we aren't. Throw away envy of other people and their stuff. Chuck slander of trashing other people. There's no room for that garbage in our lives.

What should replace those five things? We can think of the opposite - be kindhearted, truthful, authentic, celebratory and build up others. To have those things produced in our lives, we need the right kind of food.

B. Eat the good stuff.

Babies cry because they need their diaper to be changed, are tired, scared by someone's face or want to eat. The desire to eat can strike at any moment. Everything's fine and then they let loose with a cry: "I want to eat and I want to eat now and I mean now, not three minutes from now, not one minute from now, but now, if not sooner. Do you hear me?" At that moment it's their only interest and desire. Newborn babies instinctively want food.

We're to copy the example of babies - crave pure spiritual milk – even though it isn't always instinctive. We're to crave the nutrition from God's word. Crave. Desire. Yearn. Long for.

Crave is a command. How do we crave spiritual things? Part of it comes from the connection we have with God. But the way the command is stated there's more to it. It's not all automatic, otherwise we wouldn't need to be told to crave pure spiritual milk since you've tasted that the Lord is good.

I repeat: how do we crave? How do we get an appetite? Exposure. We teach children what foods to eat, broaden their palette, by exposing them to new foods. Otherwise, they might stick with apple cinnamon Cheerios – one of Josie's favorites. After trying new foods, they find they really do like \_\_\_\_\_

Christians need to be exposed to God's Word. They need to avail themselves of the opportunity to read and hear it taught.

Henry Bosch wrote of a younger woman who admitted to an older woman, "I just can't get interested in missions." The older woman answered, "Well dear, it's just like getting interest in a bank. You have to put in a little something first or you'll never have any. The more you put in, the more you'll get out of it. Try it."

Bosch applied that story to craving God's word: "You say you can find no pleasure in Bible study, but have you ever sat down with a concordance and looked up the scripture references on a given subject? Have

you ever read the Psalms until you came to some promise that comforted you, and then meditated on that truth until you overflowed with praise? Have you ever read a book of the Bible at one sitting so you could get the sense of its message? If not, no wonder you have no interest! You gain interest only in what you invest” (Our Daily Bread).

What do we crave? The pure spiritual milk of the Word. The NIV doesn't have “of the word” but most other versions do so it should be understood as the pure spiritual milk of the Word. It's the Gospel, the story of and about Jesus Christ. It's the Bible. We don't need to look for a smidgeon more of truth some other place. We don't need to be like a squirrel skittering around trying to find an acorn in our attempts to find a missing nut of truth. We don't have to spend our lives in a fruitless quest to find a place, a source of what's needed for life and godliness. God has made it readily available for us. The invitation is: “Come and eat.”

The food is pure. Some versions use the word “guile.” There's no hidden meaning, no subterfuge, no deceit in it. It's not like what the world system offers. It's unadulterated. It's the good stuff and nothing but the good stuff. It nourishes and strengthens. It's nutritious.

Stow God's Word in our hearts, minds and lives. It will help us to say “no” to the devil and the sin nature.

### III. Models

The Olympic motto's origins stem from an opening ceremony for a school sports event in 1881. The man who became the founder of the modern Olympics in 1894 was present. He adopted the three Latin words to motivate athletes to give their best.

In 2021 the International Olympic Committee added a fourth word to recognize “the unifying power of sport and the importance of solidarity” and to express “the aspirations of the Olympic Movement not only in its athletic and technical sense but also from a moral and educational perspective.” The four words: “Citius, Altius, Fortius, Communiter” mean “Faster, Higher, Stronger, Together.” They remind participants, officials and those watching the games that athletes should strive for improvement, giving one's best, giving more.

The words are a fitting challenge for believers - Faster, Higher, Stronger, Together. Grow in what God has for us, coming alongside and participating with others to do so.

Hymn Higher Ground speaks to our growth until we get to heaven: “I'm pressing on the upward way, New heights I'm gaining ev'ry day; Still praying as I'm onward bound, “Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.” Lord, lift me up, and let me stand By faith, on heaven's tableland; A higher plane than I have found, Lord, plant my feet on higher ground. 2 My heart has no desire to stay Where doubts arise and fears dismay; Though some may dwell where these abound, My prayer, my aim, is higher ground. [Refrain] 3 I want to live above the world, Though Satan's darts at me are hurled; For faith has caught a joyful sound, The song of saints on higher ground. [Refrain] 4 I want to scale the utmost height, And catch a gleam of glory bright; But still I'll pray till heav'n I've found, “Lord, lead me on to higher ground.”

Not exactly the Olympic hymn... tons better.

I hadn't had my driver's license for very long when it happened. I was taking my younger brother to his freshman basketball game. It had snowed and the plows hadn't made it to county road C. I wasn't driving that fast... when it happened. The car started doing what it wanted and the next thing we knew we were nose first in the ditch on the opposite side of the road. We couldn't get out by ourselves. I sent Denny to the neighboring farmer, a half mile away, to ask him to bring his tractor to pull us out. While he was gone, a guy who'd graduated from high school, who had a bad reputation, stopped and offered to help. Mr. Garbrecht came with his tractor and pulled us out.

Winter driving is... interesting. At times, more like for the brave of heart. Can slip slide away.

Controlled sliding downhill, when you want it, like on a sledding, tubing, snowboard or ski hill is fun and exhilarating. But in a car, going backwards, when you should be going uphill, not so much. It's not what's intended.

Followers of Jesus Christ aren't to be sliding downhill but are to be moving uphill.

Christian life assignment: 2 Peter 1:1 – 11. It speaks of God's provision for those who've placed their faith in Jesus Christ. It gives a challenge to grow as the initial experience of salvation isn't the goal of the Christian life but the starting point. It tells what happens if we do or don't. Study the characteristics and ponder how to incorporate them.

One man said of this passage: "Because of our new birth and the precious promises and the divine power offered us in Christ, we cannot sit back and rest content with faith (cf. James 2:20). The grace of God demands, as it enables, diligence or "effort" in man. Not the unaided product of human effort, but the fruit of our being partakers of the divine nature....Human effort is indispensable, even though it is inadequate" (Michael Green, Tyndale Commentary, p. 66).

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the poems "Paul Revere's Ride", "The Song of Hiawatha", "The Children's Hour" and "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." He remained vigorous even when he was old and his hair was white which caused someone to ask his secret. Longfellow pointed to an apple tree in bloom and said, "That tree is very old, but I never saw prettier blossoms on it than it now bears. That tree grows new wood each year. Like that apple tree, I try to grow a little new wood each year."

Even though our bodies can shrink and lose their vitality, God has designed our souls and spirits with capacity to continue to grow "new wood." In the words of last week, we can know Christ better and more (Philippians 3:8, 10). "New wood" is formed through reading and studying God's Word, spending time with God in prayer, putting his commands and principles into practice, worshipping, and trusting Him.

Choose your word picture – adding new wood, an Olympic athlete or child..... to think about growing.