

Growing Up

In my limited year and a bit of experience of raising a small human being, there are a few things that I've learnt and noticed that I think we can apply to our own spiritual lives. God, being our Father in heaven, wants us to grow spiritually. He doesn't want us to stay the same, to remain immature, but His desire is that we would keep growing until we meet Him face to face. So this morning, I want to cover just three areas that will help us grow spiritually. Food, Falling, and Faithfulness.

When my son Miles was born, he was tiny. I used to be able to carry him in one arm. But within a single year, he's huge. Picking him up is a lot of effort. I can't hold him for that long anymore. The craziest thing though, is that he's still growing. Like one day, he's going to be adult sized. One day, he's, hopefully, going to be 6'2. One day, he's going to be stronger than me. And it's crazy to think that every single human being on the planet started off as this tiny little human that could be carried in one arm.

Just as there are many stages in growing up physically, there are also stages in growing up spiritually. The difference is that physical growth is really noticeable. With our spiritual growth though, we can actually get by without anyone noticing or saying anything. The state of our spiritual growth isn't immediately obvious.

But the truth is that our relationship with God, our intimacy with God, the plans of God for our life, depend on our spiritual growth. And there's always room to grow. There's always more in God for us to reach. So my question for us this morning is, "how do we grow up spiritually"?

1. Food

1 Cor 3:1 (NIV)

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.

When babies are born, they drink milk. Milk is super easy to drink. In fact, it's so easy to drink, that when they're born, they don't even need a utensil to drink it. No cups required. They just drink straight from the source. Drinking milk for a baby is so easy that the baby can stay asleep while drinking it. They don't even need to wake up and they can get all the nutrition that they need.

When it comes to our spiritual nutrition, the milk is really easy to take. And for those who are maybe new to Christ or you're still thinking about whether you want to follow Him, you need more milk, that's a good thing! Milk isn't bad, milk is super nutritious, but it's only meant to be your sole intake of food for a short period of time.

Spiritual milk are the things that we can take in and receive in our sleep. Now remember, I'm not saying these are bad, these are still good things, and I'll come back around to this a bit later, but what's easy to take in spiritually?

Testimonies make it easy for people to hear and receive Jesus. You can do it in your sleep, it's spoon fed, no effort required.

When you hear a new worship song for the first time and it just resonates with you, you step into the presence of God, and you have this incredible moment with Him – that's spiritual milk. All you had to do was to come in and listen and you're in.

When you're scrolling on social media and a 1 minute and 30 second clip comes on of a preacher sharing a single powerful point, something that speaks to you and your situation and it shifts your thinking and you see God's goodness in it. Spiritual milk.

When you come to church and there's an altar call and you have a need, you come to God, you encounter God, and God meets you where you're at, He answers your prayer, He gives you the word that you need, and you leave set free. Spiritual milk.

When you first come to Christ or you're thinking about it, these are all the things you 100% need, nothing else. You need more powerful testimonies to encourage your faith. You need more worship songs where you can encounter God. You need more scriptures and messages and biblical content to inspire you. You need more answers to prayer to see the power and reality of God.

But as a child gets older, and even as adults, it's not that we don't consume milk, we just don't depend on milk.

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

²Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation

Spiritual milk is a good thing, it helps us grow, but as we grow, we mature, we need to start including solid food.

As adults, we have milk all the time. Just in coffees maybe, or as cheese, or yoghurt, or with cereal or oats, or in cakes, as cream, in lasagne, moussaka, or maiale al latte, which is an Italian milk braised pork dish that you braise for about 3 hours and it's delicious. We still drink milk, we just don't depend on it. All those ways that we can encounter God are still necessary, they're still all part of our spiritual growth and we still need them, but we can't depend on them. We can't live off them.

1 Cor 3:2-3 (NIV)

²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?

Paul talks about the difference between milk and solid food. Spiritual milk is for everyone, and it's good to have spiritual milk. Easy to take, no preparation required, just open your mouth and it's yours. So how do you know that you're ready for solid food? Paul tells us that if we're still worldly, then we need milk. What's worldly mean? He says, "For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?"

This probably isn't the definition of worldly that we usually think of. We think of all the evil wrong things out there, and while there are certainly things out there that are wrong and to be avoided, the actual worldliness that we need to be careful of are things like jealousy and quarrelling. When we read the scripture, what we're realising is that if we're still there, if we're still being jealous and

quarrelling with one another, we haven't grown up yet. We're still infants. We need to go back to milk because we haven't even gotten past this part.

See what spiritual milk does for us is that it helps us grow up, but it also helps us to grow beyond ourselves. So that we're not so obsessed with our own egos, so that we're not self-centred, so that we can actually be aware of those around us.

Heb 5:12 (NIV)

²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

So what is this solid food, that helps us distinguish good from evil? Eating solid food actually takes effort. See spiritual milk, you essentially just need to be in the right place at the right time, and you'll get what you need. But solid food takes effort. Nobody just spoon feeds it to you, you need to pick it up yourself. You need to use your own hands to grab it, you need to bring it to yourself, you need to engage with it, and sometimes, you need to chew on it for a bit before you get anything out of it.

Solid food is when you take the bible and decide to actually read scripture to understand it, in context. It's when you choose to commit to spending time in prayer and talking to God and listening to God on purpose. It takes effort. Nobody is going to force you to do it. You actually have to pick up the bible and set apart some time to read it. Not just that one scripture out of context that makes you feel good, but reading scripture to understand who God is, who Jesus is, to understand what makes Jesus worthy of our worship and our lives. You can hear all the testimonies in the world about who Jesus is to them, but who is Jesus to you?

And the only way we can know is by spending time with God and eating the word of God and everything He tells us.

Matt 4:4 (NIV)

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Eating the word sounds strange at first, but it makes sense when we think about the process of it. You need to break it apart, you need to chew on it, you need to fully digest and understand what the scripture is saying. We need to wait on God, hear what He's saying and spend the time chewing on it.

1 Cor 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

And I used to think, “wow, so much mystery in God.” And whatever God tells us or says to us or wants for us, we just accept it and go, “yes Lord, whatever it may be, whatever it means, who knows, because we couldn’t possibly know what you have prepared for us.”

1 Cor 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

We can know the deep things of God. We can have them revealed to us, we can understand them, we have the Holy Spirit in us so that they aren’t a mystery.

But that’s not going to happen unless I spend time asking God for revelation.

The thing about solid food versus milk is that solid food takes time to prepare, you need to chop things and simmer things and let things rest, it’s more complex, sometimes you need to go to recipe tin eats to figure out how to cook it, you might need to ask someone for help who’s made it before, but ultimately, it’s more nutritious. It has what you actually need to grow. Milk is simple, quick, easy, and while it’s nutritious, it just makes you full.

Milk is easy because it’s all about how it makes you feel, but solid food is all about how it makes you grow. The actual nutritional values of what you eat matters. God doesn’t just want us to feel good, He actually wants us to be healthy and to grow.

We need to put in the effort to prepare and the patience to wait for the right timing, but when we do, we’ll continue to grow spiritually.

2. Falling

When my son started walking at just over a year old, he fell over a lot. It’s like two steps, fall over. Then eventually, four or five steps, then fall over. Even now, after walking for a few months, he still falls over. I’m not sure if it’s because he’s getting used to it, or maybe his limbs keep growing so it’s throwing him off balance, or maybe it’s his centre of gravity, but he is falling over a lot. Less over time, but he still falls over. We’ve kind of gotten so used to it that when he falls, unless he crashes into the corner of a table or slams his head into the ground, even if he cries a bit, we just say, “It’s ok, all better, you can get up and keep going.” And we won’t even pick him up anymore.

Now it’s not that we’re uncaring parents, sometimes it’s because he’s a bit far away and we’re lazy, but mostly it’s because we understand that falling is a part of learning.

Part of growing up spiritually is going through suffering. At first, that seems like terrible news. But let me explain. As children, suffering and going through pain is just a matter of fact. They will fall, think that it’s a big deal, but when we say, “hey, it’s ok, just get back up, you’ll be fine, mum and dad are

here,” they just get back up. Sure, it hurt, but he’s safe, he’ll be ok, and he has more important things to do than to stay on the ground crying. There are power points to play with and food to throw on the ground, and vacuum cleaners to take.

Now just to be clear, I’m not saying that things like sickness and disease or poverty or any other terrible circumstances are of God, they are not, we pray against them and rebuke them in Jesus’ name, they are not of God or from God.

But there is a type of suffering that comes just by following God. The devil attacks you, you’re standing on the principles of God that are often contrary to the principles of those around you, you’re putting in the effort to love and serve others.

Our natural instinct as adults is to avoid all kinds of suffering, get out of the situation, don’t let it happen. But we all go through hard times and we all face struggles, it’s going to happen no matter what we do.

When we go through suffering, we can either run away or we can glory in it.

Romans 5:3 (NIV)

³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

When we glory in our sufferings, we start trusting God. We believe God that when He says that we’ll be ok, that His plan for you is still good, that there are bigger and better things to go about doing, that we don’t need to just sit and wallow in our sufferings, but we can grow for them. We start to see suffering as just an opportunity to persevere, knowing that our heavenly Father is right there, telling us that we’re ok, He’ll make it all better, and then we can get up again. And as we persevere, we grow our character, we grow our strength, we become more resilient, and as our character grows, our hope grows.

Just because you’ve fallen down a couple of times, it doesn’t mean it’s time to give up. Just because it hurt a bit, just because it cost you some skin off your knees, it doesn’t mean that you can’t do it. Get up, go again. Don’t let your heart get calloused or bitter, don’t let that negative experience, that offense, that disagreement, get in the way of the purpose of God for your life.

3. Faithfulness

Heb 12:2 (NKJV)

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith

Gal 6:7-10

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Ultimately, God is faithful. What He started, He will finish. He started your journey of faith, and He will finish your journey of faith. You can trust God, that when you put these things into practice and spiritually grow, you will see God's faithfulness. It's worth it. The growth and the maturity are worth it. Whatever we sow, we will reap. If we want to grow spiritually, and reap a spiritual harvest, we need to sow spiritually.

Don't give up! Get up and go again. Don't put your spiritual life on the back burner because it's difficult, put it at the forefront and see the truth in what Jesus said:

Matt 6:33 (NIV)

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

When we feed ourselves the right spiritual food, when we persevere when we fall, we will see God's faithfulness. Set a goal this year to be healthy spiritually, to mature, to go to the next level, move on from depending just on spiritual milk and start trying solid food.

If I've learnt anything from becoming a dad, it's that kids grow up quick. And time goes faster than you think. "The days are long, but the years are short." But it's in those long days when you do the tedious and boring things that are the most important. And we can do nothing and look back at our spiritual lives and go, "wow, this year, nothing changed. I'm still here, quarrelling and being jealous." Or we can start taking steps and look back at the end of this year and see that when we're faithful in sowing, God is faithful in producing, and we'll see a harvest, we'll see growth, we'll see change.