

My name is Barry Keldie. I'm the lead pastor at Providence Church in Frisco. We were planted from the Village about four years ago, and every once and a while I get to come home and spend some time with you guys. Matt is not here obviously. He will be back. I'm on vacation from my church, so this is what preachers do on their vacations. So here I am. I spent some time on staff here so my wife and I know some of you. And when you come into this type of setting where you know people but you haven't seen them in a long time, you get the same question over and over and over again. You walk up and say, "How are you?" or "How are things going?" And there are some physical cues you can take. Like if they have bags under their eyes and 62 lbs of baby stuff, you know they've had a baby. So it's, "Congratulations. Can I babysit for you?" You know how to kind of engage, but other than that, we're asking questions to figure out, "What has changed since the last time I saw you? How are you different?" Most of the time, we're speaking of a job change, a life change, a major thing that we can talk about, some ways that I can continue keep up with your life. It's more of an update. But that is a loaded question. How are you doing? How are things different with you now from the last time I've seen you? This is one of the most dominant questions in the New Testament. How are you doing? How are you different? How have you grown since the last time I've seen you?

It doesn't get asked in those words per se. You don't read it like that, but that's what's going on. When the apostle Paul writes the churches, what he's saying is, "How have you changed? How much deeper is your walk with God? How much more victory have you seen over sin? How much more well rounded is your leadership in your home, of your kids? How are you doing?" Peter says it explicitly like this in 1 Peter 2. Peter is, of course, the patriarch of the church. He is one of the forefathers. He says it like this, "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 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." He compares our spiritual life, the trajectory of walking with God for a long time, to being an infant and growing up.

Now that's a pretty easy picture for us to see. I mean, we can look around and see that a baby is different than an adult in certain ways. So how am I spiritually growing up? Is there substantive change in my spiritual maturity? There are things that a baby can do that adults cannot, right? In my office, I have a picture of my two-year-old in a shark costume for Halloween, and he is pitching a fit. He is screaming, crying and it is adorable. We took pictures, we framed the pictures and we put them in my office. Because when kids do it, it's adorable. Well this week I had a similar instance with a seventy-six year old great-grandmother pitching an absolute fit. Now she wasn't wearing a shark costume, or I would have taken a picture. That would have been adorable. But she wasn't. She was just screaming and hitting herself. It was not adorable. I did not take a picture. It was sad. Because she's not an infant, right? When my two-year-old gets upset, he's decided the way to handle it (because pitching a fit obviously didn't work) by taking all of his clothes off. "I'm mad. I'm stripping naked." The other day he was just taking his pants off and I was like, "What are you doing, buddy?" And he said, "I am frustrated." So while that may work for him, you can't do it. You can't be standing in the check-out line at Kroger and go, "This is taking too long. You should not be looking at coupons. I'm taking my clothes off." You'll go to jail. How many parents in here have picked up your children to smell their bottom? Don't lie. Before you had kids, you judged people who did this. You can't do that to a grown-up. If it's a teenager, you're going to jail. If it's a grown-up, you're not going to have any friends. Babies are different. You can do things with babies and babies can do things and they're okay because they're babies. Babies get away with things. That's why people judge you when you take your baby into a movie. Because we know they're going to throw things and cry. They're babies. That's why if you take your kids on to an airplane,

everyone looks at you like you have leprosy. Because they know babies are different. And we absolutely say babies are adorable. It's funny when they do all of these things. But if they do them for twenty more years, thirty more years, it's not funny anymore, is it? It's not cute anymore. You go, "We need to figure out what's wrong and what's broken."

Well throughout the Scriptures, the dominant theme is "Grow up." We have to grow up. Our faith is such that it grows. There is no such thing as a faith that doesn't grow. It doesn't exist. Our faith is absolutely organic. It's fluid. You have to mature. You have to stop spiritually doing infantile things. Now the good news is the reason we put up with things that babies do is because we know that one day they won't do them anymore. I agree to change my kid's diapers because I know I won't have to do it forever. If I did, I don't know that I would have gotten into this game. So you have this idea that this is temporary. So it's okay. "You can pitch a fit. It's okay that you can't spell. It's okay that you don't want to eat your dinner. It's okay that you want to watch Little Einstein over and over again. It won't last forever." And so infancy is okay. The Scriptures say the same things about us. Jesus looks upon our infancy as Christians and says, "You are justified. Be encouraged, child. I have paid for your sins. When you fall, when you stumble, when you don't know, when you mess up, I have absolutely paid the price. Be encouraged." And He does so with such authority because He knows that if He has redeemed you, if you have tasted that He is good as Peter says, you will grow. Paul says it like this in Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" So God says, "I started it. I made you an infant. I will grow you up. It will happen." So you don't have to be shamed for being an infant. You don't have to be shamed for not knowing, for struggling, for striving, for craving. God does not condemn infancy, but He does warn us against stagnation. It is okay to be young; it is not okay to be stagnant. And the overwhelming majority of the modern church is just above infancy and just below maturity. That's where you find yourself sitting in a church, especially in a church like this one, and you hear these wonderful things about life with God and you hear about joy and fullness and vibrancy and victory and life and you go, "I want that. Well if you are stagnant, if you're just mature enough to be a baby, if you know just enough to stay away childish things spiritually but you're not willing to take the next level of maturity on, you're going to find yourself increasingly frustrated. Because you're going to hear things that you hear from this stage and you're going to say, "Not me. Why do I not have those things? Why do I not feel that way?"

So my goal with you this morning is just to help stir in you enough to move forward. I don't care about pace and how quickly you move. Every child learns things at different paces. They walk at different times, they crawl at different times and they learn to spell at different times. I know every parent in here quietly competes, every dad especially. Pacing is not the issue, movement is. So my hope is that we could look at the nature of spiritual maturity, discipleship, spiritual formation (whatever you want to call it) and that you and I would realize how essential this is. Discipleship is not a program. Being disciplined, being a mentor, growing in our faith is no something super Christians do. It's something every Christian does. It's not optional. If a kid doesn't grow, we go, "Something is wrong." It's the same thing spiritually.

So what does Peter tell us? He says a couple of things, and I want to talk a little bit about the nature of growth here. The first thing we see that might help, he puts it like this, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk..." In some of your translations, it's going to say, "crave pure spiritual milk..." It is this idea that we would struggle, that we would strive, that we would pursue, that we would chase, that we would do something to grow. He says, "You've got to understand, spiritually there is a discipline component that is put on you to grow." On the other side of that verse, he says, "...that by it you may grow up into salvation." So there is also a salvation, a grace, a mercy component to your growth. So we find that our spiritual maturity is this symphony of grace and works, of mercy and discipline. Some things you have to strive for. With painstaking repetition, you work at it, you crave it, you struggle and little by little you mature. Some things God speaks into your heart in a moment and changes you. Our maturity is a symphony of both of those things, not one or the other. Our kids grow like this. There are some things with your kids that you have to teach them over and over and over again. "Don't hit your sister...don't hit your sister...don't hit your sister..." And you show flash cards and pictures and it is

painstaking repetition. And some things they just get. Will came home the other day and knew John 3:16. He quoted it to me. "Daddy, do you know that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." He quoted the whole thing to me. And I said to my wife, "Babe, good job. Way to teach the kids some Scripture." And she said, "I didn't do it. I don't know where he heard that." I was like, "Well, you probably should have taken credit for that one, but we'll just tell people it was me." But apparently he just overheard it. He learned his ABC's the same way. He walks in one day singing the ABC's. "Hey buddy, where did you hear that?" Well, we were in Target walking past a toy with a "try me" button, it sings the ABC's, he heard it and now he knows it. Some things are instant, miraculous, and some things take discipline.

And we as Christians tend to camp out on one extreme or the other. We tend to be those people who are all grace. "When are you going to stop looking at porn?" "When God changes my heart. When He takes away the desire." Really? Jesus said cut your arm off or pluck out your eye. Really? You're just going to claim grace? Some of us camp out all with discipline. There is no supernatural change or dependence on the spirit. It's "I will do better...I will do better...I will do better...you should do better...we should all do better..." It's all accountability, it's all discipline, it's all work. We have to realize it's a symphony of both. There are moments of supernatural change. We hope for them, we sing for them and we beg for them. And then we also, with painstaking repetition, work and we take those things out of our life. Paul uses the picture of being an athlete, of shedding everything that would hinder you. So there's grace, and there's discipline. There's both. So hopefully you're going, "While God will not judge my infancy, He will judge my stagnation. I need to make sure I am begging God for miraculous change and having regular, righteous disciplines. I am reading the Scriptures, I am in accountability, I am in a group. I am doing those things."

Our spiritual growth, our development is different than every other kind of growth in a very unique way. When we raise children, we raise them to self-reliance. We hope they are stronger than we are, we hope they can fend for themselves, we hope they need us less and less. That is what good parenting is. So when we read in the Scriptures that we are like infants and we need to grow up to our salvation, we need to as Hebrews 6:1 says, "leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity." So we have this language that we're like children turning into adults over and over and over again. Well, if our spiritual life is like our physical life, then we're going to have a great, great problem. Because our spiritual growth is not into self-reliance, is it? We don't want to grow spiritually into independence. We want to grow spiritually into dependence on God.

A couple of years ago, Charity and I were in Colorado. I was doing a camp, and I got to take the whole family. Charity decided that we wanted to hike. So she bought this thing where you can strap a baby to yourself and do almost anything. You can play football, basketball, juggle, it doesn't matter, the baby hangs right there. I strap Will to me and we hike up the mountain. All along the way, Will is grabbing and eating leaves and chewing on sticks. We put him down to take a picture next to the river. He starts eating rocks. He's a baby. Not only that, but he's a baby boy. So you put those two things together and he's going to eat whatever he can put his hands on. When we get back down, Charity makes this statement. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could come back in twenty years when the kids are old and we could do it again? We could say, 'Do you see this picture? You were just a baby. And we sat in front of that very waterfall. Do you see that dead tree? It's dead because you ate it when you were a baby.'" Now imagine if my two-year-old son was twenty years bigger, but I still had to strap him to my chest and he's eating leaves and chewing on rocks. I probably wouldn't want to go on that vacation. I would probably skip that one...or at least make Charity carry him. It wouldn't be good. Because we want our kids to be self-reliant. He needs to be able to hike the hill himself at a certain age.

We tend to think of our spiritual walk in the same kind of way. In the beginning, as spiritual infants, God straps us to Him and hikes life. He handles it, He carries us. But He's not going to do it forever. God doesn't want to have to carry you for ever. One day you're going to have to grow up and be self-reliant. Well, the Scriptures paint the opposite picture. Look at the apostle Paul. This is a great illustration because we have Paul's whole life. The apostle Paul was Saul, he killed

Christians, he was a very bad person, Jesus saved him personally, Jesus comes down from heaven, saves Saul and turns him into the apostle Paul. Now within the Scriptures, that allows us to see Paul as an infant Christian all the way to the mature man who wrote most of the New Testament. So we can watch his pattern of growth, and this is what we see. Flip over to 1 Corinthians 15:9. This is a very early writing by Paul. He probably writes this in 54A.D. Very early in his ministry, he describes himself like this, "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." The apostles were an elite group of people who had seen Jesus physically. So he goes, "Of this small group of leadership, I'm the least." If you flip over to Ephesians 3:8, it's about six years later, around 60A.D. He's a bit more mature, he's learned more, he's seen more and we see him describe himself again. So we get to see what growth and maturity looks like. He says this, "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." So six years later, he's more mature and has moved from the least of the apostles (a very small group) to the least of all the Christians (a large group). If you look at 1 Timothy 1:15, we find ourselves about eight years later, around 68A.D. He's a bit more mature, a bit more down the road and here's how he describes himself. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." He's at the end of his career, he's going to die. As a mature, older man, Paul is writing to a young man, handing off his ministry. And as the pinnacle of maturity, Paul describes himself as the worst of all the sinners. So he moves from the worst of the apostles to the worst of the Christians to the worst person in the world. So his arc of maturity doesn't lead to self-reliance; it leads to a better understanding of his reliance on God. So our spiritual maturity doesn't mean that we begin to repent less; it means we repent more. It doesn't mean we confess less; it means we begin to confess more. We are more aware of our sin the more mature we get.

So answer me this. Why in the world would discipleship, accountability, group be more important for infant believers than mature believers? Why is it that so many so-called mature believers have the least amount of accountability, the least amount of support, the least level of confession and repentance. Is it because we think we don't need it? Because according to Paul, we need it more. Heaven isn't a place for people who no longer need God. He's not working on you to get you to the point where you're reliant enough to go and live in heaven and not bother anybody. Heaven is a place for those who are fully enthralled with Him, those who love that they're dependent on Him. That's our maturity.

The last thing I'll tell you about growth is this. It's sustained or sparked by what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:3, by tasting and seeing that the Lord is good. When we talk about maturation or growing up, we tend to think about the fruit of our lives. We tend to think of what we're doing. "I should do more Bible studies...I should know more..." We tend to think of all of these things that are apparent and invisible. Peter says, "You will grow like an infant into an adult if you tasted and saw that the Lord is good." So you may be going, "How do I move past this moment of being stagnant or spiritually dry? How do I get out of it? What do I do?" Well, it happens by tasting the Lord. Now tasting is a very strange word for us. Because spiritually our faith isn't very tactile. We don't see God, we don't taste God, we don't smell God, we're not around God. Everything is spiritual. So to put a sensual phrase like taste next to God almost makes this unrealistic for us. But here's what we have to realize. The pictures that we use in helping analogize our faith are most of the time based on humans and people. We need to stop being babies, we need to grow up. It's mostly centered around us. Well in the 1st century, their culture was completely different. Our culture is people-centered. What's the most important commodity in the West? People. It's not machines, it's not agriculture, it's people. We are a people-driven economy. So that's how we talk. But in the 1st century, they were not a people-driven economy. They were an agricultural, field kind of people. They were just moving into these cities, but even in the cities, agriculture was the economy.

So most of the pictures you read about in the New Testament have to do with planting and growing plants. So it's better for us to understand this phrase in those terms than in human terms. So instead of you thinking, "I'm going to taste the Lord physically as a person," you've got to see how Jesus and Paul uses these phrases. You've got to see your life as a plant, as a tree. There's basically three parts: there's roots, there's a stalk or trunk and then there's fruit. If you wanted

to water a Peach Tree, you can spray water at the peaches all day. But it's not going to do any good. The water hitting the fruit does nothing. The water running down the trunk does nothing. The water is not going to do anything until it seeps into the roots. That's where the Lord is tasted, the root.

So rather than dealing with fruit in your life (what you do), you need to deal with roots (why you do it). Don't just say, "I need to stop looking at porn." That's good. You do need to stop, but you need to ask the question, "Why am I looking at porn?" We can't just make blanket statements like, "I need to improve my marriage." You have to ask the root question, "Why is my marriage broken?" You can't just deal with the fruit; you have to deal with the root. Every action has a belief under it. Jesus says the root of our faith is the heart. We find that starting in Deuteronomy 6, all the way into the Ten Commandments, all the way into Jesus' teachings, all the way through the Epistles. It says Jesus changes the heart, and the heart will change the actions. Ezekiel 36 says it like this, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh...and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

So here's what I want to show you quickly. In 1 John, this idea is tackled. In 1 John, John is an old man, kind of a grandpa, writing to a young church. He keeps calling them "little children." And in chapter 2, verse 3, he addresses this issue. He says, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." In other words, if I know God, I'm going to grow and mature. I'm going to obey Him. He goes on to say this, "Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." He basically says, "If you know God, you will grow to be more like Him." If you say you know God and are not growing to be more like Him, John says you are a liar.

So then the question is: What does it mean to know Him, to taste Him? We find that answer one page over in 1 John 4:16. He says this, "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us." He's saying this, "We have come to two things: to know and to believe the love that God has for us." Our growth, tasting the Lord, moving forward comes from knowing the love that God has for you and believing the love that God has for you. The better word than "believe" in our context is trusting. When he says "believe," he doesn't mean cognitively; he means "I trust." That's more the biblical phraseology. He says, "I know the love that God has for me, and I trust it." Most of the time, a child doesn't quite understand why you're telling him to do what you're telling him to do. Will doesn't understand why we make him eat vegetables. "Daddy, you are being so mean to me. I can't believe that you would make me eat okra. It's slimy." I get it. At the end of the day, his obedience is going to be either, "I trust that my daddy loves me and knows more than I do" or "I don't." If he trusts that his daddy loves him and knows more than him, he'll obey. If he doesn't, he won't. As we mature, we know more, therefore we trust more. How many adults have you apologized to as you turned into one? How many times, since you had kids, have you told your mom or dad, "I'm sorry?" Because now we know. He's saying, "You have to taste the Lord. You have to know and trust the love that He has for you. That is maturity. That is pressing on."

So the question I'll close you with is simple. How are you doing? How are you different than last time I saw you? Let me pray for you, then we'll close. "God, we are so thankful for Your grace. We're so thankful for Your love for us in that You are so patient with us. Our prayer as we go through our day, as we continue on, is that we would be able to correctly assess where we are. And if we're stagnant or apathetic, we pray that You would give us the grace to move forward, that You would miraculously give us the motivation, the hunger, the craving to do the things we need to do. So God, in this moment we ask You to move please. In Christ's name we pray. Amen."