

# Christian Growth

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 June 2024

Preacher: McDonald Nzua

[ 0 : 00 ] This morning I want to invite you to turn with me to the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter.

1 Peter chapter 2 and I'll read from verse 1 through to verse 3. I'll be reading from the New International Version and this is the word of the Lord.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. I'll read again. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[ 1 : 25 ] Please will you bow with me in a word of prayer. Father, we do give thanks for the gift of your word.

We thank you so much that we can open it, we can read it, and we can listen to it being explained. Lord, this morning we pray that you will open our eyes so that we will see wonderful things in your word.

Lord, we pray that you will make Christ real to us. We pray that you will make the gospel real to us this morning. We pray, Lord, that as your word is being explained, that we will taste and experience your goodness to us.

Lord, we pray, I particularly pray for myself as I speak to your people, your people whom you love, your people who you died for and you care for deeply. I pray that you will give me utterance. And I pray that only your name will be exalted this morning. We humbly ask all these things through the wonderful name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 37 ] Amen and amen. Amen. There is no denying the fact that growth is an important part of life. Growth or growing is something that we all long for.

It's something that we seek. We seek and hopefully seize opportunities to grow. We do this in day-to-day life.

We do what we do mostly because we want to grow. We want to grow in our careers. We want to grow in our professions. For those of you who are parents here, it is my hope that you want to grow in your ability to love and to take care of your families.

If you're an employee, you want to grow in your career. And from time to time, you hear people handing their resignations and they say this, I feel like I'm not growing anymore.

I want to look for new opportunities where I can grow. Growth is essential. And in the same way or in the similar way, the Bible recognizes that we are to be growing.

[ 3 : 49 ] Actually, the Bible commands us to be growing. The Bible gives this picture, particularly or specifically the verses we have read, that no one is born a mature believer.

All of us, when we are born again, when we experience the new birth, we are spiritual babes and we are to grow in our faith.

To make or to underscore this point, a preacher by the name of H.B. Charles makes a point or tells a story of a group of tourists who visited a very small village, a small and humble village.

And as they were walking around, as they were exploring this village, one woman with an attitude turned to an old man from the village.

And asked this man, were there any great men who came out of this village? Were there any great people who came out of this village?

[ 4 : 53 ] The old man paused for a second and then responded to the lady by saying, Ma'am, no great men were born in this village.

All people who are born in this village are born babies. You see, the point is this. We all start from somewhere. And it is with that mindset that Peter is writing to the believers here.

We told in chapter 1 to God's elect, exiled, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

He is writing to these believers who were scattered as a result of persecution. Some who were very young in their faith, were infants in their faith. But he is also writing to people who were perhaps mature in their faith.

You see, even if you are a Christian and have been a Christian for quite some time, you never reach a point where you're too big or too mature to grow.

[ 6 : 01 ] So in other words, the message that is before us today, the message or the call to grow is applicable to everyone. In the passage that we have read, if we look at verse 2, Peter is very specific in the area that believers were to grow.

The latter part or the second part of verse 2 says this, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. In other words, when Peter tells these people to grow, he has got a very specific idea or something very specific in mind that they were to excel in.

He says you have to grow up in your salvation. The word used, the salvation, speaks to the idea of having been saved from great danger.

He's writing to people who, he says, once you were not a people, once you were seen, once you were in sin and in darkness, alienated from the promises of God, but now you are the people of God.

So now he says, grow up in that reality. That is what Peter means by the word salvation. And what Peter means or what we are told elsewhere in the Bible, what the Bible tells us about what salvation is, is God's stages to it.

[ 7 : 35 ] There is a sense in which salvation speaks to what has been accomplished already for us in Christ Jesus. Salvation is what has been done for us.

There is a past aspect to our salvation. And that is referring to the point or the time in history when we were delivered or when we were saved from the penalty of sin.

But that is not the only thing. There is also a future component or aspect to our salvation. That is the day when Christ comes back and will be delivered or be saved from the presence of sin.

So, in other words, what Peter and Paul and the New Testament writers imply or mean when they use the word salvation, they're talking about this process, the process whereby sinners are made right by God and with God.

It is a process where we are saved from the penalty of sin. Sin has got disastrous consequences.

[ 8 : 56 ] And God, through Christ Jesus, saves us from the penalty of sin. Instead of getting what was rightfully ours, instead of getting justice, God saves us from the penalty.

God will save us from the presence of sin one day. But here, what Peter has in mind when he says, grow up in your salvation, he's mostly talking about the now.

It's another thing to know that you have been saved from the penalty of sin. It's another thing to know that one day you'll be taken away from the presence of sin when we will be with our Savior.

But what about the now? So, when Peter says, grow up in your salvation, what he has in mind is to encourage believers who are going through various trials, who were tempted to turn away from their faith.

He's writing to them and saying, grow up in your salvation. In other words, it's grow up in your understanding of what Christ is doing in the now. So, it's not just about the penalty and the presence of sin.

[ 10 : 13 ] It's also about the current power of sin. And Peter writes here and he says, brothers, grow up in your salvation.

If you have got another vision that is not the NIV, it will probably say, grow into your salvation. Keep growing in this reality of what has been accomplished for you.

In other words, another way to understand it is maybe a way of adoption. When one is adopted, you legally and truly become a child.

When you are adopted, not only do you legally and truly become a child, but you become entitled or you are entitled to the privileges and even the inheritance of that family.

You are now an heir together with the other children. Amen. But you see, there is that.

[ 11 : 20 ] What has been accomplished for you, there is what you receive, but there is also the now. You are to grow in that reality because you are a child. You are to grow in believing that you are a child.

You are to grow in appreciating and accepting and leaning in on the love of the parents. And that is also what Peter here is calling the believers to do.

And the same is applicable to us. For all who profess faith in Christ Jesus, for all who claim to be children of God, for all who have turned away from their sin and turned to Christ, you are no longer condemned.

There is now no condemnation to all those who are in Christ. The old has passed and the new has begun. In other words, if you are here and if you are a believer, be of good cheer.

Your sins of the past have been forgiven. No matter how grave, no matter how serious, no matter how real the way, your sins have been forgiven.

[ 12 : 29 ] You have been forgiven. But that's not all of it. There's a very real sense in which this world is not our home.

One day Christ will return and you will make all things new. That is your reality. That is my reality. And praise God for that.

But having said those two things, I think that understanding or those things are also to inform how we live our lives in the now.

Grow up in your salvation. Grow into your salvation. This is not just good news for the believer.

It's also good news for the unbeliever. If maybe you are sitting here, you're seated here, and you know in your heart of hearts that you don't have a relationship with God, if you know that you are alienated from God, if you know that all these things that we keep on talking about, that Christians keep on saying, you haven't experienced it for yourself, this is good news.

[ 13 : 57 ] It is good news because the Lord doesn't condemn you today. He calls you and invites you to throw yourself and cast yourself upon him because he cares for you and because he wants to give you a new heart.

So, in other words, inasmuch as the message of growing doesn't apply to you because you don't have new life in you, a dead thing cannot grow, there is hope for you because God is committed to giving you new life.

You see, what I like about the Apostle Peter and what I like about the Bible is that it just doesn't tell us what we are to do and leave us there.

It just doesn't pass on good advice. It just doesn't tell us what to do, what we are incapable of doing and leave us there. It does so much more. Here, there is a very clear command to grow up in your salvation.

There is a clear command to excel, to be moving from glory to glory. But tied to that, there is also an explanation of how it is to happen.

[ 15 : 25 ] This is what makes the Bible, this is what makes Scripture the good news, not good advice. You are just not told what to do, you are told how to do it.

And you are also told that you can do it not on account of your own ability, but on account of what Christ has done for you.

That is good news. If you are anything like me, I am a very limited person. I am a very limited individual and I know it and sometimes when I forget it, my wife is very kind to remind me.

We are limited. We are fickle. We change. We are finite. So our salvation cannot rest upon us.

Guess what? We will change. We get tired. And we do not have the power. But praise be to God. In chapter 1 of 1 Peter, we told that he is the one who has given us new birth.

[ 16 : 39 ] So now, because of what Christ has done for us, we are empowered to grow.

Peter doesn't leave it to chance. There isn't any fog of vagueness surrounding how we are to grow. Look with me at verse 1.

Verse 1 begins by saying, Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

You see, Peter makes it clear here that if you are to grow, this is how you grow. You grow by fighting sin. One of the requirements or one of the conditions for one to grow is a war that is to be waged against sin.

Peter here says and makes it clear that rid yourselves, take off, get rid of sin. It is a very intentional and decisive action each and every believer is to do so that you grow.

[ 17 : 56 ] it says, rid yourselves of sin. Brothers and sisters, sin is a dangerous thing.

Sin destroys our faith. Sin stuns our growth. And we're living in a time, we're living in an era where we tend to downplay these things.

It's like, it's just mistakes. The Bible here makes it clear that sin is a direct assault on God's character.

It's disobedience. It's going against what the creator of the heavens and earth has decided is good, is deviating from the path. We don't appreciate it when our kids go against our word.

What more about our father in heaven? Who knows the end from the beginning? Who knows what is good for us? Peter here says therefore read yourselves not of some but of all malice.

[ 19 : 23 ] Actually, he lists five things that are disastrous to our faith that stuns our growth as Christians. He says take them off like we take off dirty clothes. Put them aside.

Move away from these things. Make a conscious, decisive action. It doesn't happen by chance.

Uprooting sin in our lives is not something that we are to live to chance.

No, it's something that we are to do. We are to make conscious efforts to uproot sin, relying and depending on the power that Christ gives through his Holy Spirit.

Here he lists five things. He says rid yourselves of malice. Not some, all of it.

and this word here speaks to the idea of wickedness, general wickedness or harm that you wish upon others. He says get rid of that. Move away from wanting and desiring harm to before others.

[ 20 : 30 ] He doesn't stop there. He says and all deceit. Move away from falsehood. Move away from manipulating and baiting people.

The idea here of deceit is that of what a fisherman does. You bait the ship. You deceive the fish. He says don't do that. Get rid of that. And now I don't have to get into detail because I think if you see you probably know when you do it.

He says don't do it. He says get rid of hypocrisy. Stop being an actor. Stop faking it. Stop having double standards.

Stop having double lives. He says read yourself. If you want to grow, if you want to excel, if you want to experience the goodness and kindness of God in a refreshing way, in a daily basis, stop these things.

[ 21 : 37 ] Now there's a sense in which we make a once-off commitment to stopping this thing, but there's a sense in which daily we are to go back to Christ and rely on him and depend on him to get rid of these things.

He doesn't stop there. He says rid yourselves of envy. And the word envy here speaks to the idea of desiring what others have and even resenting them for what they have that you don't have.

One of the things that threatens our growth is envy. Sometimes it's difficult to notice, but here it's being presented as something that threatens our faith where you resent others or you wish you had what others have.

You can't celebrate with others for what they have that you don't have. You constantly, when you see someone wearing something nice, when you see someone driving a car that you think is nice, when you see someone with kids who seem to be behaved, you're like, I wish those were my kids. That's envy and you resent them for what they have that you don't have. Brothers and sisters, envy is a serious thing. In Psalm 73, we told of a saying of the old by the name of Asaph.

[ 23 : 21 ] Psalm 73 gives us a picture into his life. He begins by saying surely the Lord is good to Israel, the Lord is good to those who are pure. But as for me, I'd almost slipped, I'd almost stumbled, I'd almost lost my faith.

Why? Because I envied the wicked. Brothers and sisters, envy has that potential to destroy our faith, to feast upon our faith.

Let us rid ourselves of envy. all the first four sins that he talks about are sins that seem to be internal.

And the last one he says slander of every kind. He says get rid of slander of every kind. In other words, don't speak badly about others.

Don't talk badly about, don't be involved in defamation of character. Don't judge others harshly and go behind their backs and say things that are nasty.

[ 24 : 37 ] You see, all the sins that are listed here that we are to rid ourselves of, withstand our Christian growth, are things that seem to be very small.

These are not the, it's really not a big deal. But here we're told you that it's these very small foxes, it's these very small sins, the sins that so easily entangles, that destroys our faith. It is the small foxes that have destroyed the vineyard. It is things like talking about others, bringing other people down, saying evil about others, and sometimes things that are not even true. So, brothers and sisters, if we're to grow in our faith, if we're to grow as Christians, we're to rid ourselves of these things, depending, relying on the power that Christ gives. You see, the first bit of what we are to do is in the negative, we are to get rid of sin, but Peter doesn't stop there.

[ 26 : 04 ] It's one thing to get rid of something, but it's also another thing to take up new things. In verse 2, we read, after getting rid of these terrible things, like newborn babies, you have to crave pure spiritual milk.

As we put off falsehood and deceit and everything, we are to take up new things. You see, it's not just about what you don't do.

It's not just about, I don't do this, I'm not like those, I'm not like, that's exactly what we see in Luke chapter 15, the parable of the prodigal son.

The other one, say, didn't ask for his thing, didn't squander his wealth. He did everything that he was supposed to do, he did everything that he had to do, yet he was still lost.

He was in the presence of the father, but didn't have a relationship with the father. So, it's not just about the things that we don't do. sometimes we have a narrow understanding or a narrow view of what it means to be Christian.

[ 27 : 25 ] Like, I'm a Christian because I don't do this, I don't do this. No. There's more to it. Here we're told, like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk.

In other words, all the terrible things are to be replaced with the good stuff. the good stuff we told is the pure spiritual milk, which is the word of God.

And we know this from the preceding verses. We know this from also in the Bible where the pure spiritual milk or where the word of God, the Bible, is likened to food.

In other words, we're to get rid of sin and we have to develop an appetite for the word. if you want to grow some muscles, this I know, you probably have to stop eating certain types of food.

Rid yourself of a terrible diet. But much more than that, you probably have to lift some weights. So it's not just about what you don't do, it's also about what you do.

[ 28 : 51 ] There are requirements that are necessary for growth to take place and that's fighting sin but also feasting in the word.

If you grow your own plants, this, your own food or vegetables or if you're like me, you're trying to grow them, this you'd know that it takes more than one thing for plants to grow and to be healthy. it's not just about the nutrients in the soil, it's not just about the fertilizers, the certain conditions that need to be available for plants to grow to become healthy plants.

So it is with being a Christian, growing in our Christian faith, we are to fight sin but we are also to be eating and drinking the pure spiritual milk and we to have and develop an appetite like a newborn baby who craves pure spiritual milk.

You see, I've seen one or two babies, I'm generally scared of them because they're so fragile and tiny but the ones that I see, they crave, they cry for pure spiritual milk.

[ 30 : 14 ] They cry for mother's milk and by it they feed and they grow. In the same way we are to develop an appetite for the word.

One might ask or even say, I hear what you're saying but I just don't feel like it.

I just don't have the appetite. I'm glad you say that. If we ought to be honest with ourselves there are many times when we don't crave, when we don't long what we know to be good for us.

But here's the thing, the Bible doesn't make it optional. It commands us to do that. So how are we to do that? We are to do it as we trust in God, as we ask God to help us, as we ask Christ to create in us the desire to do his will, as we ask God to help us.

You see, if you read Psalm 103, David says something, he says, bless the Lord all my soul, praise him with all that, all my inmost being, praise the Lord.

[ 31 : 43 ] I would like to understand or to even believe that there are times we will not feel like it, but we have to tell ourselves. There are a lot of things that we don't feel like it, but we have to tell ourselves, we have to preach the gospel to ourselves, we have to remind ourselves the importance and the need for us to eat and to feast on this pure spiritual milk.

Why? You see, I have spoken about the importance of growing or why growing is a necessary thing in life, I have spoken about how we grow, but maybe the why will help us to develop an appetite. In verse 3, we're told, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. In other words, the reason why we are to do these things is not so that we'll be loved, not so that we'll be accepted by God. No, God has accepted us. While we're yet seen that Christ died for us, he has forgiven us, he's committed to us in a way we can never understand or comprehend, that is the amazingness of grace, amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.

So we don't do all of this, we don't grow so that we can be loved, no, we grow because we are loved. We grow because we have tasted that the Lord is good.

[ 33 : 13 ] Brothers and sisters, the Lord is good. The Lord is truly good and for some of us who are believers, we probably have had a taste of his goodness.

We have experienced and tasted something of his kindness when he made vile sinners like you and me, his children, when he redeemed us from the empty life that was handed down to us by our forefathers, when we were lost and he found us, when he drew us in by his saving grace. Brothers and sisters, the Lord is good and I want to encourage someone to be going to be in the fire.

Maybe you started out the year with growth as a priority. You were pursuing growth. You were giving yourself to scripture. You were giving yourself to reading or getting rid of sin.

But along the way you probably encountered stuff. Along the way went through things.

[ 34 : 34 ] You went through hardships. Along the way the pressures of life stifled you and are choking you. And maybe you are even here you seated and people see you smile but deep down in your heart you know that things are not well.

You're still just keeping up appearances but you know that inside you not growing. You know that inside you have lost the appetite.

I want to encourage you. I want to remind you that the Lord is good. That the Lord is really good.

That the Lord cares for you deeply. I want to encourage you not to interpret or not to try and understand and see God in light of your circumstances but to see your circumstances in light of God's gracious hand.

God loves and cares for you. And God does not sleep nor slumber. God is so faithful that he hasn't forgotten about you.

[ 35 : 50 ] You see that's the same thing here. These Christians were being persecuted for their faith. they were just trying to do the right thing but things were not going well for them.

In chapter 4 Peter says dear friends do not be surprised that the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

They were going through things. They were suffering for being Christians. Yet Peter still had the audacity to tell them to grow. I want to encourage you let us grow.

As Christians let us grow together. Let us grow in our salvation. Why? Because the Lord is good. And maybe you're seated here.

You're saying I hear what you're saying but I haven't tasted this Lord. I want to tell you I want to invite you to come home. He's waiting for you.

[ 37 : 02 ] He wants you to taste him. He wants you to experience him. This is more than just head knowledge. This is a very real experience that you can encounter today.

Brothers and sisters see come and taste that the Lord is good. Because he is good.

Amen. Father we thank you so much for this time we could learn from your word.

Particularly want to thank you for my brothers and sisters. I want to thank you for their lives. I want to thank you that it has pleased you for each and every one of us to be here this morning and to hear your word.

Lord we want to confess that we many a times we have lost sight of our need to grow in the faith. Many a times we have been comfortable with just being nominal Christians.

[ 38 : 15 ] Lord I want to pray and humbly ask that you administer forgiveness to us. Minister forgiveness to us when we haven't prioritized growing.

Minister forgiveness to us when we have felt so comfortable in sin. When we have slandered others.

When we have lived double lives. When we when envy has consumed us and we have even justified it the times why we ought to feel the ways in which we have felt.

Forgive us. Forgive us Lord. Lord I want to pray that you would also encourage us. Keep on encouraging us through your Holy Spirit.  
Keep on reminding us how much you love us and how much you care for us. Lord create in us a desire, hunger and thirst and appetite for the pure spiritual milk so that by it we may grow.  
[ 39 : 28 ] Lord we ask all these things through the wonderful name of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Amen.