

Growing into Who We Are

As some of you know I grew up being the oldest of six children in my family. I have a younger brother and four sisters, the last two were a surprise because they were unexpected and turned out to be identical twins. But of all my siblings I know my brother and oldest sister the best. We were the original three and closest in age.

A funny thing happened to my sister. As I recall, and you have to allow that it was a long time ago, and my recall may be somewhat fuzzy; but, as I recall, my oldest sister, as a child and especially as a teen, didn't care much for household chores. She gave our mother a hard time when she was asked to help with the cooking, baking, cleaning, sewing, gardening, etc. The way she acted then, one might have thought she should have married a stay-at-home husband, to take responsibility for running the household.

The funny thing that happened, however, is that when my sister came of age and was married, she was almost miraculously transformed into a homemaker extraordinaire. From the beginning she kept her house clean and well-ordered. She did all the household chores with excellence and without complaint. I still count it a joy to eat at her table every chance I get because she's great in the kitchen.

The secret to her transformation, though, is really no secret. My sister caught what our mother taught. All the time she was protesting and resisting our mother's commands, our mother's example was being indelibly imprinted on my sister's mind and woven into her character. Add to that the fact that she then married into a Church of the Brethren culture, that affirmed and expanded what she had given as a child, and you can understand how she became the wife, mother, grandmother and homemaker she is today.

As parents, what we model for our children is far more important than what we try to tell them. The most important things are better caught than taught. And, when it comes to passing on our Christian faith to the next generation, it works the same way. Our children and grandchildren, our children in Sunday School and in Junior Church, will learn from our example, whether good or bad. Ideally, what we teach and what we model will match up well, but if they don't, what we model will have the day. Our verbal teaching may not be perfect, but if our lives reflect Christ's character accurately that is what our children and

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students will catch. If our verbal teaching is without flaw but our actions are contrary to what we teach, our flawed actions will be the things remembered and used of the enemy to kill the future of the church.

Thus, Peter says in I Peter 2:2 & 3: *“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.”*

The question this raises for us is this: “Have we tasted that the Lord is good?” This is important because the truth is that we cannot pass on what we do not possess. The Psalmist says in Psalm 34:8, *“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”* This is the equivalent to the challenge, “Try it; you'll like it!”

We are invited to search our hearts in this matter. Have we ever really tried Christianity? Have we ever sincerely asked Jesus to come into our hearts as Savior and as Lord. Have we asked for the Holy Spirit? Have we tried living to please Him in our words and in our deeds? Even if we aren't living that way at the present moment, can we look back and truly say that we have tasted that the Lord is good? That's our starting point, and we can't go any further until we each can say: **“I have tasted that the Lord is good!”**

This is stage one in becoming who we are meant to be in Christ and to becoming fruitful for Him. The second stage of becoming Christians who are able to pass on the faith to those around us and to the next generation, is to nourish ourselves with what Peter calls “pure spiritual milk.” This raises the question: What is “pure spiritual milk?”

Isaiah 55:1 begins to answer this question; Isaiah says: *“Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”* In verse 2 Isaiah says, *“Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good.”* Verse 3 says, *“Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.”* Verse 11 says, *“my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

“Pure spiritual milk” is the word of God, spoken into our hearts by the Spirit of God. It comes from spending time with the Lord in His word and in prayer. It's not just an intellectual endeavor; it is a spiritual

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endeavor in which we seek the Lord and learn by experience to recognize His voice and His leading.

But the most important thing to happen here is for us to catch what C. S. Lewis calls “the good infection.” The most important thing is for the heart & Spirit of Jesus to be etched on our souls, so that we, in fact, become more and more like Him. This is the heart and soul of true Christianity; there is nothing more than this. **We must taste and see that the Lord is good. Then we must set our hearts to grow up, to become like Him.**

Peter says further that we are to crave this just as newborn babies crave their mothers' milk. We must allow our spiritual hunger and thirst to motivate us to find spiritual fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is *“the way and the truth and the life.”* He says, *“No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). We need to get in touch with our spiritual hunger and thirst and ask God to magnify it to the point that we crave nothing so much as we crave Him.

The third stage to Christian maturity and fruitfulness is to embrace our new identity in Jesus Christ. There is an interesting thing that happens in the life of very young children. At first little babies will go to anyone who will cuddle them; but, then, typically beginning around their fourth month, babies begin to shy away from strangers. In fact, they have begun the process of studying other people to determine who among them can be trusted. On the positive side, the young child now knows to whom he or she belongs. Babies at this stage recognize that they belong to a certain family and not another.

Likewise, every Christian needs to come to that place where he knows who he is in Christ, come to that place where she knows she belongs to Christ's family and not another. John 10:5 says, *“But they will never follow a stranger; in fact they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.”* Skipping ahead to I Peter 2:9-10, Peter says, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

We notice clearly here a strong sense of family and of belonging to

that family. Everyone who belongs to Christ is chosen. Jesus said, “*You didn’t choose me but I chose you*” (John 15:16). Everyone who belongs to Christ is a part of a royal priesthood and citizen of a holy nation. Everyone who belongs to Christ is God’s special possession and a part of the people of God.

Now I know that what I’m going to ask you to do now may feel a bit awkward, but I’m basing it on the authority of this word of God. Would you look in the mirror and say to yourself: “**On the authority**” “**of the word of God**” “**As a follower of Jesus Christ**” “**I am**” “**chosen of God.**” “**I am**” “**part of a royal priesthood**” “**I am**” “**a citizen of a holy nation.**” “**I am**” “**God’s special possession,**” “**a part of**” “**the people of God.**” “**That’s who I am.**”

We begin by tasting that the Lord is good, then we spend time with Him to let His goodness soak into us. After a time we come to realize our identity among the people of God. Then, in the fourth and final stage of Christian maturity, we are prepared to reproduce.

I Peter 2:4-5 say: “*As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*”

This takes me back to something I said earlier about my sister. I said that she married into a Church of the Brethren culture where her homemaking interest and skills absorbed from our mother, were affirmed and expanded. It’s wonderful when we come to know Jesus as our personal savior and wonderful to have that one on one relationship with Jesus. It’s wonderful to have that “In the Garden” experience, where “He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am His own.”

But something even more special happens when we realize that we are not alone in that experience. I can still remember my first day in seminary at Winebrenner. Everything seemed so cold and academic. It was the beginning of the semester when all the professors were trying to convince us that their class was going to be the most demanding and that we were going to have to study and work very hard to get a passing grade. Some were also endeavoring to make it clear that whatever we thought we knew about the Bible and about God was

certainly wrong and that they were going to set us straight. I can remember feeling very lonely in that moment and quite intimidated.

Then I met a fellow student named Steve. The Holy Spirit in Steve and the Holy Spirit in me recognized each other and we suddenly knew that we were not alone. We each knew that whatever the professors or the devil should throw at us, our faith would not be defeated.

Peter says we are “*like living stones, being built (being built together) into a spiritual house.*” There is strength in numbers and great strength in the family of God. Furthermore, there is strength in knowing that we have a common purpose. All true believers have a common Lord, a common baptism, a common Spirit, belong to the same family, and have a common purpose. Peter says we are “*built into a spiritual house to be a spiritual priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*”

A priest is one who represents God on behalf of other people. His purpose is to remind people about God, to show them God’s heart, to pray for them and to make disciples. As priests, we are to offer “*spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.*” But, what does this mean? What are “*spiritual sacrifices?*” Paul helps us answer this question in Romans 12:1, where he says, “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*”

As priests in God’s temple, which we are building together, we are to offer our bodies in obedience to God. We are to offer our bodies in praying for those in need and in showing mercy to those who offend us. We are to offer our bodies in service to the poor, to the lonely and to the oppressed.

The aim of this is to showcase Christ. The result of this will be to bring people to decision, some to receive Him and others to reject Him. But whatever their decision, **Our job is to model Christ, thereby giving others the chance to taste for themselves that the Lord is good.** Beloved, let us nourish ourselves with pure spiritual milk in order to grow up into everything that our Living Lord calls us to be.

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I Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14

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