

Prayer: Father God, my strength is gone. I am unable—but your Word says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Give me Your strength, not physical strength but the power to move mountains that flows from faith in Jesus. Help me to depend on You to do what I think I cannot do. Let your strength alone sustain me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight for your Lord are my rock and redeemer, Amen.

FAT HOG for Jesus - A Time to Grow”

Today we come to the end of our FAT HOG series. So far, we’ve explored what it means to be Faithful, Available, Teachable, Holy and Obedient. The last stretch of our journey brings us to **Growing** as a FAT HOG for Jesus. As with the other terms we’ve studied, there’s an abundance of material in the Bible when it comes to spiritual growth. Over and over and over we are told that God wants us to grow up. "We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head into Christ." (Eph. 4:15 ESV)

It’s important to grow. It’s important to grow up. Most of us, at different times, are concerned with growing up. I think of the mother who was driving her four-year-old daughter to preschool one morning. She also happened to be a medical doctor and had left her stethoscope on the front seat. Driving along the street, she noticed her four-year-old was quite interested in the stethoscope and was playing with it. This mother and doctor began to think to herself, “Could it be that my daughter will grow up to follow in my footsteps? It would be wonderful if she would be like me.” Just then her thoughts were interrupted as her daughter spoke into the stethoscope and said, “Welcome to McDonalds, may I take your order please.”

Growing up! Our Kids once asked me a thought-provoking question: “Mommy, what are you going to be when you grow up?” What are you going to be when you grow up? Have you thought about growth? I’m not talking about physical growth now, I’m talking about spiritual growth. We hear a lot of talk about church growth, building bigger and bigger churches with more and more people. But even more important than church growth is individual growth, personal, spiritual growth. This is a good time, at the beginning of a new church year with many type ministries beginning again to raise the issue of personal spiritual growth.

The apostle Peter raised the issue, and I call your attention to our text from 1 Peter 2:1-3. Peter is writing to Christians and having told them in chapter one that they had been born again by the power of God’s Word, he then issues a challenge to them. 1 Peter 2:1, “Therefore, because you have been born again by the power of God,” because you’ve been made a new person, because that Word of God is eternal, “therefore,” “putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

Peter issues three commands to believers. He’s not talking to unsaved people right at this point. He’s talking to believers. Born again people. And his challenge is to grow. There are three commands that we want to look at here in our text and I express them in terms of Spurn, Yearn, and Learn. If you are to grow in salvation, if you would have spiritual growth in your life, Spurn, Yearn, and Learn.

Putting aside — Spurning (1 Peter 2:1)

Putting aside denotes the image of taking off a garment in order to put another garment on. And note what believers are to take off. All malice. That’s wickedness. Wickedness has to do with how people live who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. In the Bible the wicked are simply those who do not know God. Whatever the particular sins in their life, that isn’t the emphasis with the wicked. The wicked are simply those who do not know God, who do not know Jesus Christ. Believers are to put off malice, wickedness, the inclination to live like the world lives. God calls believers to a higher standard. God calls believers to not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Are you living just like the world lives? I’m not talking about Sunday, but Monday through Saturday; do you live pretty much like your unbelieving friends and neighbors live? Or is there a difference? Those who are born again are called to be different, to put off all malice, wickedness. To live different lives. To live lives

that take sin seriously. To live lives where repentance is a daily concern. To live lives that seek the honor of Jesus above all else. To live lives that turn away from the world and its allures and instead turn to God with whole hearted devotion and commitment. Putting aside all malice, wickedness, not living like the world lives.

And all guile, deceitfulness. And hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is playing the actor. Going through the role of what it is to be a Christian, but it's only for show; it isn't reality. Playing the hypocrite, not being sincere in one's worship. It's only a facade. You may sing the hymns, you may sit in the church, but there isn't a reality there. Hypocrisy — believers are called to put it aside, to let it go. Envy. Someone has said that envy is the last sin to die. Envy is wanting what someone else has. Jesus' disciples were quite envious of one another. They debated among each other who should have the greatest seat of honor. And then all slander. Slander is literally talking down a person. Talking about a person behind their back in such a way that you put the person down. It's also called gossip. Everyone believes gossip is wrong, but most everyone enjoys it. Peter says that's not the way truly born-again people live.

Spurn malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, slander; spurn it. Cast it off like you do an old piece of clothing. All that stuff belongs to the old life. It doesn't belong to the Christian life. Let me ask you, where do believers so often struggle? Where do so often the hurts and the hindrances to ministry occur? Isn't it in this area of relationships with people. Living like the world. Being deceitful. Being hypocrites, envious, talking about people, putting them down, putting down or speaking negatively of your church. Or even more harmful, not speaking of your church at all! People not knowing that you're a child of God. Oh, when that stuff permeates a congregation, God isn't pleased. And certainly, people aren't growing when these kinds of sins are so prevalent. Spurn, if you would grow, put aside these things that are so deadly to one's spiritual life. These things all have consequences. We're seeing today in Washington the consequences of sin. Sin always has consequences and "be sure your sin will always find you out," the Bible says if you're born again, if you can say that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior then spurn. Are you spurning the world's attractions? Are you living like a believer?

Longing for — Yearning for Spiritual Growth (1 Peter 2:2)

There's another command — Yearn. If you would grow, it's not only to put off or lay aside these sins, that so beset Christians, but it is to yearn. 1 Peter 2:2, the first part, "And like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word." The Word translated long for is the same word found in Psalms 42:1, where the deer pants for the water brooks, "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants after Thee." Are you finding a yearning in your heart for God? To know Him better, to grow closer to Him? This longing for the Word of God is a passion, a passion for the Word of God, a passion for Jesus Christ. That's a challenge for us today because there are so many things in our lives that cry out for attention and take our energy and our passions. The one who is truly born again, Peter says, will long for the presence of the Lord. He or she will long for His Word and will make every attempt to get to know God better through the pages of His Word.

This is a time for growth. Studies are resuming. Opportunities for Bible discussion are once again at hand. What's your interest? Is there a yearning in your soul? If there isn't, my friends, that is a dangerous position to be in. God has to deliver us from a Sunday morning only spectator mentality about the Christian faith. Being a Christian is not dependent upon, nor is it summed up by, simply sitting in a pew and looking bored with the preacher. That isn't the Christian faith. The Christian faith is living dynamically. It's a yearning for God, to know God, to be excited about God.

This is a hard message, but we need hard messages to shake us. There is so much indifference and lukewarmness. And when God just gets the leftovers, if we have time or if it works out or if I've got the money, or if I'm not doing anything else, then God you get your due. You see the time is coming when only those churches that are strong, filled with vibrant and committed people, will endure. Like newborn babes long, yearn, desire. A little baby not only desires its mother's milk, but that baby has a powerful, instinctive urge for that milk and that's what Peter is talking about here. Having an urge, a passion for Jesus Christ, for His Word. If you're a believer, are you yearning for the Lord? Longing for the pure milk of the Word. The Bible is pure. It's unadulterated. It's truth. The Bible will only do you good. It's good food for your soul. The church, you see, is not an organization. The church is a living organism made up of people called out of this world to have a passion for Jesus.

Peter says, “Spurn, put off the old life.” Peter says, “Yearn for the milk, the nourishment of God’s Word.” Set your will that this year you’re going to learn to know God better than you’ve ever known Him before. And if you set your will to do that, He’ll reveal Himself to you in His Word.

That by it you may grow — Learning (1 Peter 2:2)

And then, Peter says, “Learn. Learn.” Last part of 1 Peter 2:2, “That by it ...,” that is, the Word, “that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” Here it is. When you are spurning the wrong things, when you are yearning for the things of God and His presence, when you have a passion for Christ, then comes the learning. You grow in salvation. If you’re not growing in your salvation, you’re dying spiritually. Peter says, “People you were born again by the Word of God. But now, grow in respect to your salvation.” And that’s what this life then becomes, one of growing in the knowledge of God. Seeing Him increasingly as the greatest and highest and most excellent treasure in all the world. Is it too late to learn? No, it’s never too late to learn. No matter how old you are you can still learn something!

I heard about a police officer who stopped a car that was filled with elderly ladies. The car was traveling too slow on a major highway. The officer came up to the car and talked to the driver. The conversation went something like this. The officer asked, “Ma’am, why are you driving so slowly?” She replied, “Well, officer, I’ve seen all these signs along the way that say 20 and that’s what I’ve been doing. I’ve been going 20.” The officer replied, “Ma’am, those are signs indicating the number of the highway. It’s highway 20. You’re going much too slow.” “Thank you, officer,” she responded. “Thank you so much I didn’t realize that.” But then the officer happened to look in the back seat and he noticed three elderly ladies with panic stricken looks on their faces and white knuckles from having held on to one another too tightly. The officer looked back at the driver and said, “Ma’am, what’s wrong with these ladies in the back seat?” Oh, officer, you see, we just got off highway 101 a few miles ago.”

It’s never too late to learn. Never too late. And especially that’s true in terms of the Christian faith and growing in the Lord. And so, my friends, the challenge is to all of us, this is the time to grow. A time to be involved. A great time to be living and serving the Lord. Spurning the sins, Yearning for the things of God, His Word, and then Learning more of Him. It’s good to get to know Him right now.

There is a conclusion here in verse three of our text. The conclusion is also a challenge, Spurn, Yearn, Learn: “if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord ...,” The word translated kindness is literally delicious. If you have tasted how delicious the Lord is, the psalmist said in Psalms 34:8, “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.” Taste and see and Peter says here He’s delicious. He’s good food for the soul. The bread of life for us.

A preacher, used to tell the story of some boys he came upon in Africa during a time when diamonds were plentiful there. He discovered that they were playing marbles, but they were not playing with marbles, they were playing their game using diamonds. Could it be that we trifle with the treasures of God? We play marbles using diamonds. We trifle with the Word of God. We trifle with the holy things of God. We trifle with His treasures. Peter says, “No, no more trifling.” If you’ve been born again, if you’ve really tasted of the Lord and found Him to be delicious, then you will spurn, you will yearn, and you will learn. If these commands do not characterize your life, if there isn’t the spurning, the yearning, or the learning, the question then has to be asked, “Are you really saved? Have you been born anew? Have you really come to Christ and made sure that your sins have been forgiven?” If not, you can do so today right where you’re at. To come to Jesus Christ in repentance. Turning from your sins, inviting Him into your life and beginning to live with Him as the Lord of your life.

To those of you who are believers, whose trust is Christ, this is the time to grow. Let’s make the most of the time that God gives us. In the glorious name of Jesus. Amen.