

How to Overcome Spiritual Childishness

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 21, 2022

Good morning, we are continuing our studies in the book of Hebrews today. So if you would take your Bibles out and turn there with me. Hebrews chapter five says this

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men and things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you"; just as He says also in another passage, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying, and tears to the One able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.

Concerning him, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.

We're going to end the reading there. I don't know about you, but as I read that, it's kind of hard for me not to get a general feeling of disappointment coming out of the text. The author seems upset with the audience here, because he starts off saying, or at least he says in verse 11, concerning Him, Jesus, I have much to tell you, and I'd like to go on, but I can't because you can't handle it because you are dull of hearing. I've told you before that the book of Hebrews can be outlined this way the theme is that of Christ, or the greatness of Christ over everything the Old Testament has to offer. And in order to express that in chapter one, he tells us that Jesus is God. In chapter two, he tells us that Christ is man. Then in chapter three and following he tells you what the God man did. This is what Jesus behaved in his dual nature. In chapter five, he became a high priest for you, which is the turning point of the book. Because from this point onwards, he's going to spend the bulk of his time explaining this concept of Jesus' high priesthood, but as soon as he mentions it here, he stops for a moment, takes a look at his audience and scratches his head and says, "Before I get into that, I've got to be honest. I don't think you can take it because you're so immature." Not the most encouraging thing to say, right? Later on in this passage, as you just read, he'll call them children for this reason. They need someone to give them milk and teach them the elementary things or

the ABCs. That's what the Greek word means, they need someone to go to them, sit down and say, "A, B, C, D," but it all stems from the fact that they won't grow up as a church. It reminds me of a sermon that Jonathan Edwards preached to his congregation in the 18th century, right before they fired him where he called them as stupid as stones. Makes you wonder why they fired him, right? It's not hard to figure out, but the reason he said that is because it's so easy to come to church and act that way as Christians sometimes because we all have a tendency to come here and struggle with the same things over and over and over again like a stone. We're anxious today. We're anxious tomorrow. Proud today, proud tomorrow. And not only do we do that, but we also neglect our Bible study when we know we shouldn't. We don't prioritize the Word like we are supposed; we don't pray either or fall on our knees before the Lord even though our soul depends on it; we don't share our faith. We could go on and on. Why? Because we are acting like children.

We know we're supposed to do these things, but we don't do them. We understand God has called us to that. And we forget, which was a major problem for Israel too, by the way. It's one reason the author mentions this here, I told you last time this book was written to the Jews, it was given to a group of Israelites who had gotten saved, joined the church, who came out of the Old Covenant, so in order to understand the context of this, we always have to go back to that to see how they would have looked at this. Because as these people heard that admonition, they would have recalled that their ancestors did the same thing, right? The Jews had a nasty reputation for being stubborn, dull people. The apple didn't fall too far from the tree here. He says, You guys should have learned better than this by now.

In fact, this is even made worse when you remember the fact that under the Old Covenant, the Lord had developed a very sophisticated way of reaching the Jews, and that should have gotten their attention because it was so amazing, there was nothing in the world like it at the time. And I said a few words about this last week, but I look around the room, and I see a lot of you weren't able to be with us, so I want to review some of this again. The first thing God gave Israel to reach them under the Old Covenant was the priesthood which refers to the man who represented God to them. Earlier in chapter five, verse one, it says, "For every high priest taken from among men," and that word in Hebrew comes from the root word to stand, because a priest is the one who stood in the gap between God and man for you. He put himself right in the middle between the two parties because you can't come to God on your own, you are way too sinful. So the Lord gave Israel priests to help them. We also mentioned last time that He gave them sacrifices as well. That was another thing the Lord used to reach the Jews. Because the Old Testament made it clear that when you sin, there's a rift in the relationship with God. So you can't just say, "I'm sorry" to fix it, blood had to be spilled a price had to be paid, something had to die. And that was the point of the offerings. And I walked you through this last time and told you there were five main sacrifices and offerings that were made. There was the burn offering that had to be burned whole. There was the sin offering, guilt offering, peace offering, which was burnt in part. There was the grain offering, which consisted only of grain.

The one thing I didn't get into last week, and I wanted to bring it up here is that there were other times when the Jews brought sacrifices as well. If you look inside your bulletin, there's a handout there that talks about this, because they would also do it in what is known as the pilgrim feasts. This refers to the time when the Jews from all over the world would come to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage in order to bring an animal and kill it there. Exodus 23 says, "Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me, when all your male shall appear before the Lord your God. You shall do it at the feast of unleavened bread or the Passover, you shall do it at the feast of harvest or Pentecost. And you shall do it at the feast of in gathering or Tabernacles." And the other passages say that at each

of those feasts, the Jews had to give an offering. At Passover, they would bring a lamb for their family. At Pentecost, they would give a set of peace offerings and grain offerings, whatever the LORD laid on your heart to give, and at tabernacles it would be a series of bulls, rams, lambs and goats offered by the whole nation. So on the first day of Tabernacles, Numbers 29 says they gave 13 bulls. On the second day of Tabernacles, they gave 12 bulls. The third day they gave 11, bulls and so forth and so on.

And in order to do that, they would take their animal from their home out of the barn, march it all the way up to the priests at the temple, sometimes traveling a long way, and he would slaughter it next to the altar, collect the blood in a bowl, sprinkle it back on the altar before skinning it, cutting it up spreading the pieces on top of that and burning it in a fire, which has a lot of bloodshed in it. It's a tremendous amount of carnage. But just to give you perspective on that, Numbers two, verse 32, says that there were more than half a million fighting men who left Egypt during the time of the Exodus. And if you include all the old men and children, that would it take it way beyond that, which means that whatever the number was, during these feasts, it would have been an incredible amount of killing going on. Three times a year. There was so much bloodshed that one historian named Josephus said the priests' legs would have sunk knee deep and blood as they offered it. And that's probably an exaggeration. A lot of scholars don't think that was true. But another one said it would have made the Kidron Brook run red with blood. And that probably was true. Because after the priests killed the animals, and cut them up, they would take the bodies or the parts that were not burned that the fat and entrails and innards and drag them away from the temple, drop them off in a valley called the Valley of Gehenna, which was located in the southeastern corner of the temple, where the Kidron Brook flowed through. And it would cause that Brook to fill up with all the gore and blood and devastation and smell because they would light it on fire. They've done excavations down there and studied the bones in that valley and found that many of them come from hundreds of miles away. So they would have been killed at the pilgrim feasts, not the normal sacrifices that went that took place.

Seeing all that took place in the Old Covenant is a staggering way of how the Lord looked at sin: He hated it, couldn't stand it. And it happened for one reason, and one reason only, and that was to teach the Jews a lesson. And the lesson was that God loved them. And the reminder is that He cared. Because as the animals were killed over and over and over again, it was a fitting picture of the fact that their sins were forgiven, and God was restoring them back into His presence. And the question that God asked Israel all throughout the Old Testament is, how could you ignore such a thing? How could you see it happen over and over again, every day, every pilgrim priest, every Passover, every Pentecost, every burnt offering, every sin offering, guilt offering peace offering grain offering, how could you not get the point?

And with that in mind, the author says this to a Jewish audience, in the first century, who are familiar with all that background in verse 11, he says, "Concerning Him, Jesus Christ, your great high priest, I have much to say. But it's hard to explain, since you were so dull of hearing." You get the connection. He says basically, you guys are acting like your parents did. You're doing the same thing that Jews of old did to the Lord, they were dull and you're dull.

Earlier in chapter five, he shows you that Jesus fulfilled all the sacrifices for you. And he took the place of the offering, because he became your high priest, he stood in the gap between you and God. And you're forgetting it too as those who have come to faith in Christ. The passage says, you should know that when you sin, you don't offer an animal anymore, you offer Christ. And that's enough. And as those who have trusted in Him, you should

understand that when you fail God, you don't bring a bunch of sacrifices, you give one sacrifice through Him, that takes care of it all. Which should make you so much more grateful now.

We don't often look at it this way, but when you fail to grow as a Christian, and act childish, like this audience was doing, it's not just sinful, it's ungrateful. It shows you don't appreciate what God has done. Tyler just illustrated that so well, with parents and children, because just think of the blood your Saviour shed for you, just think of the wrath He swallowed. Think of the fact that it should be you dying at the temple, it should be you being killed on the altar, it should be you being slain by the priest, but it's not. So all God is asking us to do now is grow in response. He doesn't want you to pay Him back. He doesn't want you to earn it. He just wants you to change and repent of your sin. So we need to take that to heart this morning. This is something we all need to hear today. Because some of us have bought into the lie that you can sin all you want to now that you're saved, and God will just ignore it because nobody cares. Let me tell you something. Jesus Christ cares because He died for your sins and matters to Him. He went to the cross for it. And so we need to make the effort to grow.

That leads to the question, well, how do we do that this morning? All right, Pastor Jeremy, you said I need to grow in my relationship to Christ and I agree I get that, but it's hard. Growing is difficult because I try and try and try and fail. Can anybody identify with that? I work at it, work at it work at it. But I still go back to the same sins all the time. It's so discouraging. I take one step forward, two steps back and that's what we're going to talk about this morning, because this passage was written to address that sort of thing. The Jews were failing in that department. So the writer puts his discussion of Jesus' high priesthood on hold for a moment to deal with it. And that's what we're going to look at with six tips for how to grow as a Christian. So if you're taking notes this morning, that's our outline for today. And we're going to make it very practical. Because the author does that, he just talked about a very high and lofty thing. Now he's going to take things back down to Earth for a moment.

In Hebrews Five, Verse 11, and following, he's going to give you six tips for how to grow as a Christian and they're all just found right here in the passage. The first one is to stop being so dull of hearing. I already said a little bit about this, but I am going to explain a little more. So the first tip for how to grow as a Christian is to stop being so dull of hearing, which means, don't be so slow to pay attention to the Bible. Don't be so sluggish to take it to heart. If you look in verse eight, backing up a little bit here, he says,

Although He was a Son, Jesus learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became the all those who obey Him, the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

When the author starts off verse 11 saying, "Concerning him," you can tell he's talking about Jesus, the one he's been referring to all throughout this chapter. Chapter five, verse one says that every high priest taken among men, which means that that's what Christ is for you. Now He is your high priest, the one who stands in the gap. And as such, this is what he does. Verse two says he deals gently with you. Verse six, says Christ came from the line of Melchizedek. Verse eight says that he suffered, verse nine says He became the source of eternal salvation. And if you missed all that, you can go back and listen to the sermon last week, I walked you through each of those. But with all that laid out for you, now verse 11, starts off saying, "Concerning him we have much to say." In other

words, I want to keep going and what I've said about Christ, I want to tell you more, but there's a problem. And that is the issue of dullness.

The word *dull* here, is the Greek word *nothros*, meaning dull or slow, or lethargic or something lazy. In the spiritual realm, it's the concept of not making any progress, because you have the opportunity to grow, but you don't take it. You have the Bible sitting in front of you, but you don't study it, because you're busy, I'm busy, we're all so busy, right? You're tired, I'm tired, we're all so tired. And this term indicates that it wasn't always this way. For the Jews, that was probably the saddest part of the passage. It says, "You have become this way" which means you didn't start out this way. It happened gradually. In the beginning, you were fired up about the things of God. When you started off, you were hungry for the truth, you wanted to know more. But unfortunately, all that began to fade with the passing of time. Made a little compromise here, little compromise there. Let your love for the Lord grow cold. And the worries and troubles and cares of this life began to choke it away. It's also interesting that he says, "this is hard to explain." And he doesn't say that it is his fault, because he is a bad teacher and he doesn't use enough PowerPoint illustrations, or his pulpit is not modern enough, or he doesn't wear the right clothes. He says this is hard to explain because of you guys. It's rather blunt thing to say. And this is the thing you say when you're a visiting preacher. You don't say this when you're here every week. But he's doing it to point out the fact that if you don't listen to the Word of God, it's your problem first and not someone else's. Hearing is a one-way street. There's only one person who can hear something and that's you, the one with the ears. Nobody else can hear for you.

The first way that he gives you to grow in the Christian life is to understand that you have to own that. You're never going to grow as a Christian if you keep telling yourself that it is the preacher's fault, the people's fault, the church's fault every time I struggle with something. You're never going to make any progress that way. You'll never learn how to make strides and move forward if you keep saying it's the elders fault, the deacons fault and the music's team's fault every time you fail. You have to take some responsibility on yourself. Now, this thing reminds me of what the Lord said to the Prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 33 when he said, "If I bring a sword upon a land and the watchman sounds the trumpet, and the people don't listen, the blood will be on their head," not on your head as the watchman but on their head, not on your back as the messenger on their back. Why? Because you told them the truth, and they didn't listen. It also reminds me of what Christ said to the disciples in Matthew 10, verse 14, "Whoever does not receive you nor heed your words, as you go out of that city, shake the dust off your feet." Why? Because you did your job. You gave them the gospel, they're unwilling to receive it, so be it.

And as I read this and reflected on it, it really struck me that this is the most tragic verse, I think, in this whole passage, because it's the place where we fail the most. I mean, how many people came to church and were doing well spiritually, until they got a promotion at work. Happens all the time. It's a very common thing. They got a raise, started making some extra money, and before you know it, they began to backslide because they threw their Bible out the window. Or how many people joined us and they became part of Grace and were very involved until they started fixing up their yard and doing a few things around the house, and that took them away. How many people were passionate about the Lord and excited about Him until they got married, and started a family and began to live the life of their dreams, and then poof, the zeal is gone. That's the sort of thing he's talking about here. I mean, all that stuff is fine. There's nothing wrong getting married, you need to get married if the Lord is calling you to that. There is nothing wrong working extra hours. But there is something wrong if it takes your heart away from God. Remember, dullness is a slow process here. It doesn't happen right away. It happens moment by moment, decision by decision. So you have to watch out for it constantly.

This phrase “dull of hearing,” could be used to refer to a lot of things, like they were dulled to hearing sermons. I told you last week back then when you would read a letter like this, you would actually read it out loud, because a lot of the people couldn't read him in the congregation. So you couldn't just pass the scroll among the people, you would have someone designated to stand up on a Sunday morning, and actually say it out loud. And it's almost like in his mind's eye, the author can see the people listening to this. And he says some of this is hard to explain, because I can see you drifting off as I say it to you. And watch you fall asleep during the sermon.

Or it can refer to the fact that they were dull hearing the word at home, because they would read it in their quiet time. And it would have the same effect. Or it meant they were dull in their prayer life, or dull in their worship, or dull in taking counsel from other Christians, which we've all been guilty of before. So this is an area that we really have to work on, give our hearts and our attention to. Because you hear the word of God a lot here. We get to hear it a lot through wonderful things like the internet. There's a lot of availability for that now books. But you don't ever, ever want to get to the point where you're sluggish to it. And you take it for granted.

That brings up another tip for how to grow as a Christian in the passage, and that is to stop neglecting the elementary things. First one is to stop being dull of hearing. But secondly, you need to stop neglecting the elementary things. Which means that when you struggle with growing, one reason could be because you're forgetting to keep the main things the main things that you learned at first. If you read on in verse 11, he says, “Concerning him, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.” Verse 12 shows you that the author is continuing the rebuke here. Because after reproaching them for their slowness, he doesn't stop, but it gives them more. It's bad enough to hear someone say you're being lazy. Now he starts to expound upon it. And in verse 12, he says, “For though by this time,” and if you have a pen, you might want to underline the word *time*. Because what he's saying is that he wouldn't say this to a brand new Christian, and he wouldn't tell it to someone who just got saved because they haven't had time to learn all this, but you have. He says, “You guys have been to Bible school, Bible College and Bible seminary. You've read theology books, doctrine books and biblical counseling books. You have been to Shepherd's Conference, G3 Conference, Together for the Gospel Conference, some of you have met John MacArthur and shaken his hand. So he says you need to be much further along than this. He says, For though by this time, you ought to be teachers. And that doesn't mean teachers in front of the church, it could mean that, but it more significantly means teachers behind the scenes, because by this time, I should be seeing old men teaching younger men in the church. And I should be watching the older women teaching the younger women as Titus two talks about, to love their husbands, love their children, be sensible, pure and workers in the home. I should be watching husbands teach their wives, parents teach their children, young adults teaching the teenagers but I'm not. He says instead, this is what I'm seeing. You have need again for someone to instruct you in the elementary principals. That word *elementary principals* is translated several different ways, but it's a Greek word that refers to your ABCs. It actually refers to a series of small wooden blocks that parents in the first century would carve the ABCs into, so the kids would play with them and learn them. And this passage says you guys are like that, instead of being teachers, you are like school kids playing with blocks, learning their letters. Because he says here, you need someone to teach them to you again. It has already happened once. Now we need to do it again. We'll talk about this in a minute. But in verse 12, it says, “You have come to need milk, and not solid food” at the end of it. And if you notice, again, it tells you that you have come to need this, which implies it was a gradual thing as well. When

you first got saved, you wanted to know more. And when you originally came to Christ, there was this passion, but it has dissipated.

The phrase, oracles of God, refers to the Word of God or the Bible in general, the basic things you learn when you first get saved. And you guys have heard these things before, so I won't say too much about it. But anytime someone is saved, or they want to be saved, we tell them the same thing. And that is that you need to see yourself as a sinner who has broken the law of God, and you deserve to go to hell. If it were not for the fact that Christ died for you, suffered in your place, became your high priests, and took the place of the offerings, if you will just believe He did that for you, if you will call out on His name. And as you do that, you'll begin to grow and start the process of sanctification by reading your Bible praying and sharing your faith. And you'll begin to change as you repent of sin, spend time with other Christians, go to church, and stay away from things that tempt you. All that's wrapped up in this phrase, oracles of God, you could even elaborate on it more. But the author brings it up here to say all those things are good, they're necessary. They're important, but they don't do you any good if you neglect them. They don't help you if you have to keep hearing the same things over and over again, because you carelessly forgot them.

I used to play tennis growing up and they would always tell you that when you are losing, the answer is always the same. You have to go back to the basics. Any athlete in here could tell you that. And I remember if I was hitting the ball incorrectly, they would say the same thing to me, I could I could repeat this stuff in my sleep. But bend your knees, take your racket back quickly. Keep your eye on the ball, keep your head down, follow through, get back in your position, and stop getting so angry. That last one was probably just personally for me. But the point is you do the things you did at first. And the Christian life is like that.

To apply this to our lives, I don't know where everyone is at today, but I can promise you, if you are struggling with something this morning, you can solve it by asking one question or several questions. But when is the last time you reflected on the gospel? When is the last time you remember the simple truth that Jesus died for you? That will cure your issue of dullness. That will stop the problem of sluggishness. Several of you told me the sermon last week really hit you in the face because it was on that subject. We talked about the sacrifice of Jesus. So if you're struggling to grow, let me ask you this, when is the last time you shared your faith with someone? When is the last time you told a lost sinner about Jesus? When is the last time you went up to a stranger and you said, "Are you a good person? Have you compared yourself to the 10 commandments? Let me tell you what God did to save a sinner like you." That will help if you find yourself getting lazy. When is the last time you had your quiet time and spend time with the Lord and prayed? If you find yourself being lethargic, when is the last time you opened your Bible? This isn't rocket science. If you have a problem, the answer is always the same. You go back to the things you did at the start.

Martin Luther used to tell the story of the time a lady in his congregation came up to him and said, "Pastor Luther, why do you keep telling us the gospel every Sunday?" To which Martin Luther said, "Because, dear woman, you keep forgetting it. If you would remember it the first time, I wouldn't have to say it again." That's what we're learning here in this text.

And it brings us to another tip for how to grow as a Christian and that is to show some discernment. The third tip for how to grow as a Christian is to learn how to show some discernment, which means you have to learn right from wrong. Because after the author tells you to stop being lazy, and go back to the basics, the next thing he says

here is that as you do that, you need to put the basics into practice. They will help you to express proper judgment. And when you come to this point in the chapter, you can tell what the author's doing here because he's giving you another illustration to describe the issue of childishness because in verse 11, he tells them that they're dull. And in verse 12, he tells him that they're acting like ignorant children who need to learn their ABCs. And now he's going to call them babies. You can see the progression here. I want to feed all this good hearty stuff to you, he says, but you can't stomach it, like an infant. If you look in verse 12, he says, "For though by this time, you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." And in that passage alone, right there, he says that the problem is not only do you need someone to pull out the wooden blocks in front of you, and go over your ABCs, but you also need someone to put on a bottle, put the bib around your neck, hold your head back and do baby talk while you drink it. It's a pretty funny picture. He says in verse 13, "for everyone who partakes only of milk," and that means there is nothing wrong drinking milk. Adults drink milk. But the issue is that you are at a place where you are only drinking, that's the problem. There's nothing else going into your system. And then entire verse there he says, for everyone who partakes only of milk, he is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. In other words, when someone acts this way, and they never go past the basic stages of the Christian life, it shows they probably don't even know the Bible at all, because the Bible was given to help you grow and not stay in the same place forever. If you have to keep taking a person aside and say, "Did you read your Bible today? Don't you know you need to read your Bible? You should read your Bible, it's important to read your Bible," there's a problem. They should get that on their own. And if you have to take a person aside and say, "Did you go to church today? Don't you know it's important to go to church? When's the last time you went to church? We all need to go to church." There is an issue there too.

In fact, these people who go through their entire lives calling themselves baby Christians have a real problem in this passage, because it shows they may not be Christians at all, because nobody is supposed to stay a baby forever. If you went out to church today and you saw a 22-year-old man walking down the street dressed like a baby, you would say that's not normal. Even in British Columbia, that's not normal. Maybe some cities to the west, but not here in Chilliwack. And if you saw a 22-year-old Christian doing the same thing, you would say the same thing.

If you want to write this verse down in your notes, First Peter two, verse two says, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." And the idea there is that babies longed for milk so they can grow and they don't want to drink milk so they can stay in the infant stage forever. Verse 14 goes on to explain this. And it says, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil." And the meaning there is that as you learn the word of God, and you put it into practice, and you apply these basic things of reading your Bible and praying and witnessing to your neighbour, this is what it does, it helps you exercise good judgment. It trains you up to discern good from evil. Because it gives you the skills that are necessary to move past the baby stage. The reason this one is important is because there are hundreds of decisions you have to make on a daily basis that are not spelled out directly in Scripture. And there are 1000s of choices you have to make day by day that are not found in chapter and verse, because they're made as you apply the principles of the Bible. And we could give an endless list of these but things like what to watch on TV, or even to whether to watch TV or not. What investments to make with your money, what insurance to buy, what kind of car to drive, what to wear, what to eat, what to drink, where to go on vacation, where to go for work, where to go for school, who to marry, how many kids to have, how big of a house. The answer to it is found when you take the overarching themes of wisdom and discretion and discernment

in the pages of Scripture and live them out. They're not found when you turn to the Book of second Corinthians chapter three, and look at a verse. A number of those things aren't even mentioned in the Bible, because they are modern things. And a mature person gets that; they see the bigger picture. They have come to the place where they have dug in deep into the word, they have eaten the solid food of it, and it has paid dividends in this area. Anytime someone comes to me and asked what kind of car does God want me to drive, automatically there is a breakdown in their thinking on this. Because God doesn't tell you that in the Bible. No one had cars in the Bible. He gives you freedom in that area, as long as you're applying the teachings in scripture on stewardship, and avoiding greed and practicing biblical money management. But it all goes back to the issue of growth.

One mark of adulthood is you learn how to process things like that on your own. Kids can't do that. You don't want to take your child down to the car dealership and have them pick out a car for you. That will go bad, they'll probably get one with no engine in it anyway, or no tires on it, they have no sense of right and wrong. Adults do. That's what makes them different. Kids also put anything in their mouth, rocks, scissors, dirt, it all goes in there, there's no filter, adults should have a filter for these things and it brings us to another tip for how to grow as a Christian.

Another tip to grow as a Christian is to press on to maturity, which means to keep going if you find yourself struggling in one of these areas, and this is why I wanted to get into chapter six with you. If you find yourself battling with these things, it gives you the solution. And that is, don't dwell on it. Don't get discouraged. Just make some changes and move on. And I won't spend as much time on this one because it's pretty short. But if you look in chapter six, verse one, he says, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity." Now when I first read that I kind of wondered why the chapter division was there, you could actually put the chapter division down in chapter six, verse four, if you wanted to. The chapters in the Bible and the verses were added in the 1200s. Because in chapter six, verse four, he gets into the famous passage that says, "For in the case of those who have been enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and have fallen away, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance." And that kind of starts a new thought in the passage. Because here and we'll get into that in a moment, but here, he continues to the same train of thought that he was holding to earlier, when he says, "Therefore, leaving the elementary things about the Christ, let us press on." The word *leaving* here doesn't mean that you abandon the elementary things. And it doesn't mean You come to a time when you forget the fundamentals completely, you should never do that as a Christian. It just means you need to use them as a catalyst to advance on to other things.

There are two commands in this verse, *leave it* and *press on*. Stop looking that way, but look this way. Instead, don't get emotional about it. Don't get sentimental, don't say, "What about if I find myself still failing?" He says, "You know what to do, take the Bible and apply it." Don't make it harder than it is. The word *press on* here in some translations is written as *go on* or *push ahead*. We could render it, *excel still more, plug away, show some tenacity, give it some pluck, put in a little sweat equity*. Because there's no other way to grow as a Christian. You have to put your hand to the tractor and plow. The word *maturity* means completion. Press on to the point where you're complete in Christ, which means you never stop pressing on, you keep going until the day you die. That's how growth happens. If you are in your 20s, as a Christian, you need to be growing. If you're in your 30s, as a Christian, you need to be growing. If you're in your 80s, as a Christian, you need to be growing, there's never a time when you don't grow. We've seen people in this church get saved in their 60s and 70s and start growing.

When I read this, I was actually almost a little bit let down because it seems so simple. I thought the author was going to give me something really elaborate, and say that in order to grow as a Christian, I had to go on a spiritual retreat, leave everything else behind, go into the mountains and rest, but that's not in here. I shook my Bible, it didn't even fall out of there. I thought he might tell me I should go on to one of those big crusades on TV and pay \$100 to hear a famous person speak and tell me how to fix my life in four easy steps. That's what I want, four easy steps. It's not in here either. I thought he might tell me to go to Bible college, it doesn't say that. Read 100 books, he doesn't say that. Learn Greek and Hebrew, he doesn't say that. He tells you to persevere. Which means if you're battling with lust, you need to persevere with that. History struggling with pride, you need to persevere, don't quit. If you're wrestling with being a godly parent, keep going. If you're wrestling with being a godly spouse, keep going. If you're wrestling with being a man of God, woman of God, young person. Press on. And I wish I could say more. But the passage does. He goes on to give you another tip for how to grow as a believer.

Another tip for how to grow as a Christian is to stand on your foundation, which means to know the truth, and put your foot down on it and stop messing around. If you look in verse one, he says, "Therefore, leaving the elementary teachings about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment." Now, what is that part of the passage about? Well, the author uses another illustration when he says to press on to maturity, not laying again, a foundation. The picture there is that of a builder who keeps laying a foundation and getting dissatisfied with it. So he tears it up and builds another one. And he tears it up and builds another one. And he tears it up and builds another one, which is a silly thing to do. We have a lot of contractors in Chilliwack right now because the town is growing. And I've seen them do some wild things like build a house on a mountain. Some of those excavators actually can go on three wheels, did you know that it's pretty incredible, but I've never seen one, tear up the groundwork after putting it in place and tear it up again and again. That's the picture here. And the author mentions it because this is what these people were doing in the church, they would trust in Christ, lay a foundation with Him, leave their Jewish ways behind, only to go back to them and start all over again. Then they would trust in Christ, lay a foundation with Him, leave the old covenant behind and then go back to it again, over and over and over again.

And in order to explain this, the passage gives you six things these people laid aside when they first came to faith in Christ, and they are all Jewish by nature, which is why you might not catch them when you first read them. But this is a Jewish audience. These are Jewish things. But it says they should not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works. And that means dead Jewish works, or dead works of the law that could save no one. Things like the sacrifices and offerings and ceremonies, that doesn't get you to heaven anymore. Christ does. This could also refer to the dead works of sin in general. Because in order to be saved, you have to repent of that. And it mentions faith towards God, as opposed to faith in those works. That's another basic principle of Christianity. In order to be saved, you have to realize you're saved by faith alone, and nothing else, not even sacrifices, not even in the works of the law. It talks about the instructions about washings. And that doesn't refer to baptism. There are some commentators that take it that way. But it says washings, plural and baptism is never described in a plural sense. In the New Testament, instead, it refers to all the Jewish cleansing rituals that they would have to do before they ate a meal and made sacrifices. The passage refers to the laying on of hands, because before a sacrifice was killed, the sinner had to bring the animal to the priest lay their hands on it, and say that in a sense the animal is dying for me, he's taking my place. Verse two mentions the resurrection of the dead because the Jews had some strange ideas about that, and mentions the eternal judgment of the dead, it was the same way there.

But the reason the author brings all this up here is to ask the question, why do you guys want to keep going back to that now? As those who have trusted in Christ, why are you making such a big deal about these things? I'm trying to teach you about grace. I'm trying to teach you about Christ. I'm trying to get your eyes fixed on Him. Why are you fixing your eyes on that other stuff? And it's hard to explain what all these things meant to the Jews, but every one of them would have struck a chord with them.

You can take this issue of washings here. Today, if you were to visit the city of Jerusalem, and go below the Temple Mount, you would see a series of old caves at the bottom that the Jews would use to wash themselves off before sacrificing in the temple. They weren't actually baptizing themselves, they would take the clothes off, go down one side of the cave, in order to immerse themselves in the water, come out the other side, put on fresh clothes to symbolize that they were clean, now they're ready for worship, and they are going to go into the presence of God. It was kind of a symbolic way of the way they looked at religion in general, because they thought you had to clean yourself off before coming to God. So that's what they did.

Or you can take this issue of the resurrection of the dead. If you would go to the city of Jerusalem today, in the 21st century, you would see that on the Mount of Olives, they have hundreds, maybe 1000s of grave sites, because the Jews believe that when the Messiah returns, He will do it on that mountain. And they want a front row seat. So many of them even now pay a million dollars or more for a burial plot there, so they can be the first in line when He comes back. They thought religion is like real estate. It's about location, location, location. And if I want to be close to God, spiritually, I have to be close to him physically. And what the passage is saying is that while that's impressive, it's useless without Christ. Without Him, you are not going to rise and go to heaven anyway.

Without the Lord, you are going to rise and go to hell. So he's telling them, you need to get your priorities straight. And the way this relates to us is that it needs to serve as a warning. Because if you keep being lazy in the Christian life, and you keep acting like a baby, and you keep showing no signs of progress, never growing and never changing, and never repenting of sin, do you know what will happen to you? You might end up leaving the faith like these Jews were in danger of doing. There is a progression of thought here in the passage. If you look, if you start out being dull in verse 11, and you don't repent, and then you move on to being childish in verse 12, and you don't repent. Then you act like an infant in verse 13, and don't repent. Then you walk off the foundation in chapter six and don't repent. Then you might come to a place where you apostatize and you walk away from Christ altogether.

This is what we are going to talk about next week when we get into all this frightening stuff in chapter six. And I won't go into all the details of this, but to give you a sample when he says in verse four that, for in the case of those who have tasted the heavenly gift, and then later on, they fall away. I don't believe that refers to people who lose their salvation. Because you can't do that. I mean, once saved, always saved. Eternal life is eternal. And if you have it, you always have it here, but instead, this refers to those who hung around the church or hung around the things of God. And they tasted the gift that way. Kind of like the person who tastes a free sample at Costco, and then moves on because they don't want it anymore. This is the kind of person who prays a prayer or walks an aisle or goes to confirmation class, gets sprinkled as a baby, sings in the choir, goes to the youth camps, attends VBS every year. And then at the end of it all, they say it doesn't mean anything to me. It was just my parent's faith. And the lesson he's given you here, putting all this material together, is that you don't want to do that; that's

a terrible place to be. You want to grow instead, I know I keep saying that this morning. But it's true. You want to let your love for Christ deepen with the passing of time.

John Newton said, "I'm not the person I ought to be or the person I should be. But I'm not who I once was, by the grace of God." I heard one pastor describe it this way, when he said that he remembers when an old drunk came up to him on the street one day, and he said, "Hello, preacher. I'm one of your converts. But I fell away several years ago, because I went back to the bottle." And so the preacher said to him, "Well, sir, you may be one of my converts, but you're not one of Christ's because Christ's converts don't act that way. They never fall away from Him." And it brings us to one more tip for how to grow as a Christian.

By the way, if you're wondering about some of that stuff in verse four and following, we will get into that next time. But for now, let me give you one more tip for how to grow as a Christian. And we'll round it off with this one. Just to review these other ones. The first one is to stop being so dull of hearing. Second, you need to stop forgetting the elementary things. Then in order to grow, you need to learn discernment. Press on. And fifthly, stand on your foundation instead of waffling back and forth like these guys were doing. If the Church has any problem today, it's in the area of waffling. And it's a wishy washy church in 21st century Canada, you can't be that way if you want to please the Lord.

This brings us to one more tip and that is that you need to throw yourself on the mercy of God. A sixth and final tip for how to grow as a believer is to throw yourself on the mercy of God, which means if you want to grow, then you have to realize that there's only one way it's going to happen and one way alone. And that's through the power of God. It's good news, if I've been going as I've been going through this list, if you hear yourself saying this is hard passage, Jeremy, how am I going to do this? I do want to change, but how's it going to happen? Then he answers it for you. If you look in verse two, right above that, he says, "Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits." And that's a beautiful way to end the passage here. Because after talking about you and I for so long, and our responsibility and growing, he now turns to God. And he says "this we will do" which implies that he is confident in the church's response to this. He knows they're going to accomplish it, but only if God permits.

And that phrase *God permits* has caused confusion to some but he's not saying that God will permit this as if He's a willy-nilly kind of God and fickle and we never know what he's going to do. He's just making a general statement about his sovereignty. Because while it's true that sometimes we don't know what God has permitted, sometimes we do. There are times in the Bible where it tells you what God wants. For example, if you want to write this verse down, First Thessalonians four, verse three, says, "This is the will of God, your sanctification," which means if you're trying to find the will of God today, and you're wondering about what it looks like, and you are going to seminars and all that kind of stuff, you can stop. It tells you what the will of God is here. This is His purpose for your life. You need to be sanctified, growing holy every day and the implication here in verse three is if you do that, He'll help you. If you're making an effort to change, God will be by your side. He permits what He wants for your life. The word *this* here is an important thing because it means all of this. All the things we've been talking about this morning you can do if God permits. So if you need God's help to stop being dull, He can give you help for that. He can put it right in your hands. If you need His grace to remember the basics. You can have His grace for that. Just talk to Him and He'll give you all the grace you need. If you want His power to guide you in discernment, that's available.

The verse also says, “This we will do if God permits,” not, “This we *might* do; this we *could* do; this we *may* do.” No, “This we *will* do.” It’s a sure and certain thing. And this verse is so short, there’s not a lot you can draw out of it unless you tie it back into the previous verses. So let’s do this. But if you take the issue of sluggishness, I know some of you are struggling with dullness today. Because it happens in every church. You come to church, and all this stuff just bounces off. You show up on a Sunday, and everything feels flat, the sermon feels flat, the music feels flat, the prayers feel flat, because your heart feels as heavy as lead. I get that, I understand. You need to call out to the Lord for help in that. You need to ask him to give you the grace to repent and he’ll do it. He’s that kind of guy. We can look at the issue of childishness and having to go back to the basics over and over again. For some of you, that’s a problem too, because you can’t even remember the last time you read the Bible on your own. You can’t even recall the last time you prayed if it wasn’t before a meal, or the last time you shared Christ with a stranger. And you know what’s wrong? You know what the answer to that is? It’s the same thing. Ask God to help you turn it around. He’ll light a fire under you; He’ll give you a newfound passion. Or take the subject of persevering. I bet some of you don’t know how to persevere right now because you want to quit today. You’ve come to church this morning saying “Okay, Pastor Jeremy, you give me one more sermon about Melchizedek. I’m out of here. I need something practical. I have bills to pay. I have mouths to feed. I have a to-do list that’s a mile long. Don’t just tell me to grow. Show me how.” Okay, fair enough. You need to pray. That’s how you grow. There’s no other way. By yourself, you can do none of these things. With God you can do all of them. Because growth is hard. It’s frustrating at times. There’s so much going against you. But you can do it with the Lord’s help.

I read a message online the other day that summed it up well. It said that some people say they need God’s help to make it through the day. I need God’s help to go to the mall. You guys don’t relate to that. I do. That place is crazy over there. It’s true. You can’t go to work without His help. You can’t raise your kids without His help. It all points back to Him. And speaking of God’s help, I’d appreciate your prayers as I prepare to preach on the rest of this chapter next week. I’m just saying this as your pastor, this will be an interesting text to work through. One commentator called Hebrews six verse four, one of the fiercest battlegrounds in Scripture. There’s so many different ideas about what to do with this, which is why some people read it, and it frightens them because they think it says you can lose your salvation. But my goal next week is to show you that it doesn’t. That’s not the idea. But if you can pray for me, that would be great.

But this week, I started out this morning talking about sacrifices. But one thing I forgot to mention when I was doing that is that there was a time when those sacrifices stopped in Israel for a season. It was known as the years of the uprising when the Jews rebelled against Rome. It happened in the second century BC about 200 years before Hebrews was written when the Roman ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes decided he wanted to Romanize the Jews and abolish their traditions and stop the sacrifices. He made them eat pork, he outlawed circumcision in the Sabbath and the Torah. And as a result, the Jews threw them out. It’s pretty incredible story. A man named Mattathias and his five sons waged war against him and won. You can read about that in the books of First and Second Maccabees. And as it happened on 164 BC, they marched into the temple, cleansed it, tore down the statue of Zeus, cleansed all the pig carcasses out of it, killed the false priests and re-lit the candles again. It’s today celebrated in a Jewish holiday called Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. Because that was when they started worshipping the Lord the proper way again with sacrifices. The saddest part of the story, though, is that about a century after that, in A.D. 70, the Romans had the last laugh, because they came into the temple and raised it to the ground. So the Jews could never offer sacrifice again; it was completely over for them. But I mentioned that because what the book of Hebrews is telling you is that even so, even when that happens, it’s okay because you

still have a sacrifice in Jesus. As those who are in the New Covenant, you don't have to have a temple anymore, or a place to give an offering, you have an offering in Him. And your response to that in this passage is to grow. And tell Him thank you. Will you do that today? Let me pray that you would.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the sacrifice we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. And if there is any incentive to make changes, it's found in remembering Him. When we look at our sin, we have nothing but hopelessness because we just fail over and over again. But with our beautiful Saviour and our glorious Lord, there is no failure. Every sin was paid for, every debt was cleansed. And, Lord, we thank you for that this morning. God, I do pray for our congregation and the things we've talked about today. We all need to grow. There's not a single one of us that can't think of areas in their life that need to change. Lord, would you give them grace in that and give us all mercy? Because we really can't do this by ourselves. Lord, I pray that this message would not have discouraged us. But it would encourage us to glorify You in these areas of our lives. Father, we thank you for our salvation. We never want to look at it as a cheap grace. It's not cheap. It cost Your Son's life. And it needs to cost us something too as we turn away from sin. I know you'll give us aid to this, Lord. You are a God who helps sinners who come to you in faith. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.