

Make Ready for the Future

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- [0 : 0 0] If you turn to Hebrews chapter 5, Peter wrote there in 2 Peter that we should grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the goal that we should have, every one of us.
- And that's where we're going to be centering is what it is to mature as a Christian, what it is that we need to mature, why we ought to mature. And the book of Hebrews gives lots of warnings throughout its pages.
- And one of the things, if you read the book of Hebrews, you'll notice it is very, very thick with lots of Old Testament references. And the idea is that there were a group of Jewish Christians who were seeking to go back to their Jewish roots.
- They were going to go back into Judaism. Perhaps it's because they loved the ritual. Perhaps it's because they loved the symbolism of the old ways.
- And so they were going to go back into that. And the writer of Hebrews, which is disputed as to who it is, although I think a good case could be made for the Apostle Paul, or at least someone close to him.
- [1 : 1 1] He writes this to them to help them understand that you shouldn't go back into where you came from, that that was the seedbed out of which Christianity grew, and that Christ is better than the angels.
- Christ is better than Moses. Christ is better than Joshua. Christ is better than Aaron, the high priest. Christ is better than all. And in this, he has several places where he gives them a few warnings, and this is one of them.
- And I think it's a good place for us to read as we head into the new year, thinking about how we ought to live before the Lord. And here's Hebrews chapter 5, verse 11 through 14.
- About this, 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 need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.
- You need milk and not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.
- [2 : 2 9] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. And as we come to it this morning, we pray that your spirit would give us illumination to help us understand what it says, and that you would empower us that we might live out the truths that are there.
- We pray that you would help us in Christ's name. Amen. Now I run the risk of confusing you in this moment because I want to read to you another passage from a completely different book.
- We're not going to talk about it there, but I'm using it to illustrate a particular point. And it's from the book of Revelation. And it's Revelation chapter 2, verse 1 through 5.
- And in this particular passage, John, by the Lord, is writing to the church at Ephesus. You will remember the first three chapters is these letters to these churches.

And here's what he writes. He says, To the angel of the church at Ephesus write, The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[3 : 31] I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently, bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

The reason I'm reading that is because what John's doing is he's giving that church a warning that that church can lose its effectiveness, that church can lose its ministry in the plan of God and what God is doing.

And as we think about the future, we're making ready for the future, my heart is to call you to say that God is doing something in this world. His scripture tells us that he's doing something in this world.

[4 : 44] And we, as a church body, can be a part of that plan or not. You know, here's the thing. God is not going to fail to do what he has said to do. And we can be a part of that plan or not.

And a part of what we need to do in being a part of that plan and not having the lampstand removed is for every single one of us as Christians to grow in maturity in our faith.

The more that we grow as individuals in maturity in our faith, the stronger we become and we're able to be used by God to accomplish his purposes here instead of removing us and bringing somebody else in our place.

And so I want to, I want us to think about this idea then of maturity. And I want to give you from, from Hebrews chapter five, four reasons why we ought to press on in maturity.

Four reasons why we ought to press on in maturity. Reason number one is there in verse 11. And the reason is, is that immaturity keeps you from learning the deep things of God.

[5 : 55] Immaturity keeps you from learning the deep things of God. Listen to what he says in verse 11 again. He says about this, we have much to say. It is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.

And when he says there's about this, we have much to say. The ESV says about this, right? But the new American standard says about him and the King James says about whom.

Now, all of them being a little bit different, it's not, it's not a problem because they're all referring back to what was just in verse 10. And in verse 10 was his, the end of the discussion concerning Christ as a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Now, all of a sudden, we've got some things being said that a lot of Christians don't even know much about. And it's okay if you don't even understand the word Melchizedek. Don't worry about it. The point is, is that neither did these Hebrews, right?

They didn't understand about it. And he said, there's much for us to talk about. There's more for us to say. There are deeper, greater things for us to talk about.

[7 : 01] And he's probably talking about how the Bible has that shadow substance feel to it, right? That the Old Testament kind of foreshadowed something and the New Testament tells us the substance of what that was.

He's probably got more like that to teach them, but he can't because he says it's hard to explain. It's difficult to explain. It's not easy to tell these things.

But the question is, is why? Why is it so hard to explain? I mean, what he doesn't say is that it's hard to explain because the things that I would tell you are esoteric and unrelated to daily life.

He doesn't say that. He doesn't say it's hard to explain because you'll need a theology degree to grasp these deeper things. He doesn't say that either. He doesn't say that it's hard to explain because I only know 5 words to use to explain it.

He doesn't say that either. He says that the reason it's hard to explain is because you've become dull of hearing. Wow. You've become dull of hearing.

[8 : 08] This word dull means sluggish, lazy, slothful, careless, almost a calloused getting used to something, right?

And so the reason that the deeper things are hard to explain is not the fault of the knowledge, not the fault of the teacher, but the fault lies in the listeners. Because they've become dull and lazy and careless.

They've become hardened to the truths and so they're not growing and so they can't learn anything else. Beloved, when we do not become mature, when we do not keep on maturing in our faith, we will grow dull in listening to the things.

What happens is that we hear a truth, we know a truth, and because we feel like we've heard that truth again and again and we're not thinking deeply about it, it becomes like dripping water.

It becomes like a callous. It becomes like something that hardens us so that we're just so used to it that we don't even notice. Now, I know a callous can be a good thing. I play the guitar.

[9 : 15] David plays the guitar. Callouses are good on your fingers, right? If you don't have callouses on your fingers and you play the guitar for any length of time, you begin to cry. Because it just hurts.

And I have to stay practiced because my callouses like to just go away just real fast. But a callous can be a bad thing.

You know, you can have your feet so calloused that you don't even notice an injury that happens to them. And here's the thing, beloved. We want to grow in our faith because the more that we don't, the more calloused we become to the things of God.

And we can't even learn the deeper things because we can't even listen. So my question to you is this. Do you bore quickly during the sermon on Sunday mornings?

It's a good question. I'm not afraid. The fault is not here. Do you find it impossible almost to keep your attention as you're reading your Bible?

[10 : 31] Do you find yourself kind of coming back to earth in the middle of a Bible study or sermon because now a story is being told? The story catches your attention and now you're in there.

But once we start explaining something that's in the text, it's easy to just sort of drift away. You know, Paul calls preaching foolishness.

And the reason he calls it foolishness is because I think of this idea that it's not easy to sit where you are and listen to someone talk for 20, 30, 40 minutes.

20 if you're lucky, right? It's hard to listen. It's hard to do that. It's easier to count ceiling tiles. It's easier to do other things and make grocery lists or clip your fingernails, as I've heard some people do before.

The thing is, is that we become dull of hearing because we're not activating and we're not getting ourselves in there. And because of that, our hearts are calloused over. And so we can't even learn the deeper things of God.

[11 : 35] And so what do we need to do? Well, the one and only thing I would tell you to do is this. You need to ask the Lord. You need to pray and ask the Lord to help you to listen.

Not just to the sermon, but to Bible studies, to your Bible reading, to Bible studies that you do to really help you listen. To not grow dull. To not grow sluggish.

To not grow used to it. I mean, you know, if you're like the average Christian, you hear someone quote John 3, 16 and begin to explain it, you'll find yourself saying, yes, I know that.

I've heard it all in my life. And where's the wonder? Where's the surprise? Where's the glory? Where is the heart that says that is such a great truth, even though I've heard it a thousand times.

Hearing it one more time is good for my soul. We're way too captivated by the new, the improved, the prototype, the inventive.

[12 : 32] But we need to know the truth. And to do so, we need to not have our hearts calloused. Because immaturity, immaturity helps keeps us from learning the deep things of God.

The second reason is that immaturity keeps you from pouring into the lives of others. Immaturity keeps you from pouring into the lives of others. In verse 12, he says this, For though by this time you ought to be teachers, by this time you ought to be teachers.

He's talking to everyday Christians. He's not talking to the leadership of these Christians. He's talking to all of these Christians. And he's expecting that all of them would get to some place of being able to pass on what they've learned.

As a matter of fact, a literal rendering of the passage says, The time is right that you should be teaching others. The time is right that you should be teaching others.

He's expecting that every Christian can attain to the point of being someone who can pass on the truth to someone else. And here's what the interesting thing is, is that this word for teaching in the New Testament is the same root word from where we get the word doctrine.

[13 : 54] So when you see in Scripture the word doctrine, or you see the word teaching, it comes from the same root word. We tend to think of teaching solely on methodological ideas.

Like how do we get the information across? The Bible is more interested in the content of what we teach than in the way that we teach. The way needs to be informed by common grace, by just understanding the wisdom of the world and understanding how humans are built.

But the important thing Scripture's after is the content of what we teach. And all of us have the ability to just pass on what we've learned.

I mean, you can be standing at the kitchen sink, washing dishes at a holiday, and a little kid walks up to you and they want to help you with the dishes. You can put a chair right up there.

You can put that kid right up there in that chair. And you can say, well, here's what you got to do. And you tell them the things that you think they ought to do to be able to wash these dishes. You're passing on content to that kid.

[14 : 59] Teaching is just sharing truth. And here in this context, it's the idea of passing on the doctrine and the teaching and the truths of Scripture.

He says that being a teacher is related to the time. In other words, he's saying there's not a time limit that once you reach so many years, you ought to become a teacher.

But he's saying, listen, you've been a Christian long enough, you should be doing something with this. You've been a Christian long enough that you ought to be sharing the truth of God with those around you.

If you've been a Christian for two years, you should know enough to be able to help someone else who's been a Christian for less than you. But if you come to the end of your life and you've been a Christian 40 years and you've never helped anybody, the reason is because of the immaturity of your faith.

In our immaturity, we won't help others. We won't teach them. We won't try to share with them. Probably about 20 years ago, I was out at Rock Springs.

[16:10] Rock Springs. That way. That way, David? Okay, thank you. That way. Rock Springs. I have no idea which way it is from here. I did not live here going there.

I was from someplace else, Glen Rose. And we went to Camp Eagle and I took a bunch of kids who were there at the farm in Glen Rose. And one of the things that we did, they called it the Sherpa Trek.

Now, I don't know exactly if there's some sort of word, what this word means in other contexts, but for Camp Eagle, a Sherpa Trek was this, that there was a trail that went along the face of the cliffs and that trail was only one person wide.

Like, it was just wide enough for me. Nobody could walk beside me, but they had to walk behind me. And right here was a drop-off. Now, sometimes it would go down and it would get close to the ground and no big deal, but sometimes it was way up high.

And you had to wear a harness and you had your little carabiners right here and there was this cable that ran the length of our trail. And along the way, there were eye bolts that were into the face of the mountain or the cliff.

[17:20] There's no mountains here, right? Anyway, into the face of the cliff and you got this cable running through. And so as you're walking, these two carabiners have you strapped in. So if you fall, you're safe, right?

And as you walk this thing and you come to one of these eye bolts, you take one carabiner off, clip it on the other side of the eye bolt. You take the other carabiner off and you clip it to the other side as well.

So you never have anything unattached, right? You've always got something. And what happens is that as you go through, I'm standing here ready to get to the next part and the person in front of me turns and looks at me and tells me, by the way, the trail right in front of us, it's a little bit slippery and there's two eye bolts coming up.

So put it between the eye bolts and then go along this way and they would tell me all kinds of things. And then the last thing they would say to me is, and by the way, tell the next person. And so we had this long string of people going around this mountain and it was my responsibility to help the person right behind me to know what was coming.

Beloved, that is what we're talking about here. Teaching and sharing and discipling other people is taking what you know right here and turning to this person and letting that person know and letting them know they need to tell another person.

[18:37] But when we are immature in our faith, we just sort of keep it to ourselves. And so we want to grow in our faith.

We need to grow in our faith because the good of others is at stake. The third reason that we need to grow in maturity is because immaturity keeps us from being skilled with the word of God.

Keeps us from being skilled with the word. Now I want to go back into verse 12 and come into verse 13. And listen to what he says. He says, For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

You need milk. So basic principles of the oracles of God and milk are the same thing. Okay? He says you need milk, not solid food. Right?

For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child. So what is he saying here? He's saying that they need to know the basic oracles of God. They need milk because they're immature.

[19 : 49] Milk is not bad. Milk is a good thing in this context. The problem with the milk is not the milk itself. The problem is that you've been drinking milk for a long time and you should be eating solid food.

If you've got a 10-year-old still just taking a bottle, that's a problem. Both health-wise as well as other. Right? That child, as they grow, they need more complex food to grow and to have the kinds of bodies that they need to have.

Spiritually, it's good to get the basic principles down. It's good to get the basic ideas down. But we're not supposed to just stay there and constantly just be at the basics.

We're to move on. We're to grow in what we learn. And what would be these basics? That's really the question. When he says the basic oracles of God, the basic foundational truths, I think he tells us what those are in chapter 6.

Beginning in verse 1 and 2, he says, Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ. There's one thing, doctrine of Christ. Go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

[21 : 00] That's another. And of instruction about washings. That's another. And the laying on of hands. That's another. And the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. That's another. That's five doctrines.

That's the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of baptism, the doctrine of the church related to elders and deacons, doctrine of the end times. He says, he calls these the basic elementary principles.

He says, let's go on. Let's not lay this foundation again, but let's go to other things. In other words, living on milk is not the plan. It's not the idea just to get these basic truths and run with that and nothing else because when you do that, you are unskilled with the word of God.

You do not know how to use the word of God because you don't know what else it teaches. Let me ask you this. If someone were to come to you and ask you, listen, I'm really struggling right now with an assurance of my salvation.

Am I, I'm not sure if I'm a Christian. Do you know where in the Bible you would send them to be able to read, to find out? What they need to do about that? If you had someone coming to you saying, listen, I'm not sure how to find my spouse.

[22 : 17] How do I pick a good spouse, a good mate for life? Do you know where to point them in the word of God to help them to understand the principles that would be involved in that?

If maybe they're struggling with their job and they've got a boss who is unjust and all that he does and they come to you and say, how do I handle my boss? Do you know where in the word you would point them to go read, to find out and understand what they need to do?

You see, the thing is, is that if we're not growing in our faith, we're not understanding the word and if we don't understand the word, we can't use it in the lives of others. We don't, we don't have the skill with it.

Hundreds of years ago, churches were using a tool to teach Christians how to use their Bible. That tool is called a catechism.

A catechism. What a catechism is, is that it's pre-written questions and answers to theological topics with all of the scripture passages that teach or have some bearing upon that particular doctrinal point.

[23 : 28] So you could take the Westminster Catechism and it could be, what is the chief end of man? And the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. By memorizing the question, the answer, and the scripture passages that go along with it, you begin to develop a compendium.

I don't know if I said that word right, but that's okay. Give me some latitude here. You develop an encyclopedia knowledge of places you can go to in the scriptures to deal with particular issues.

And this was what every Christian, every church member was to memorize. This is how you disciplined people. This was not just for pastors, but this was for every lay person.

The catechism covered three big basic ideas. It covered the Apostles' Creed, it covered the Ten Commandments, and it covered the Lord's Prayer.

And by memorizing both the question and the answer and going over the scriptures of what proved those points, it helped them know their Bible well.

[24 : 44] Now, that's not the only way you can know your Bible well, but it was a great tool. And for some reason, a lot of churches have just sort of jettisoned the thing because they feel like it's too old. Well, I would say to you that I encourage you to pick up a catechism.

I encourage you to pick up one and learn. As a matter of fact, let me show you a picture of one. Here's a picture. Now, the reason you're seeing a picture is because they're in the post office right now.

I ordered three copies of this just in case somebody wanted one, but I'm showing you the picture, so if you just want to get the picture and buy your own, you can do that. And if you want to wait until next Sunday, I'll have a couple of them here so you can pick it up and you can look at it.

This is a great tool because it gives you the question, the answer, the passages, and then it gives you a whole week, five days, of devotional material that helps you sort of understand what this is all talking about.

This is based on the Heidelberg Catechism, which says, all of a sudden, I drew a blank. What is my only comfort in life and in death? That's the first question.

[25 : 45] What is my only comfort in life and in death? Does anybody know the answer to that question? No. I belong in both body and soul and life and death to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Something along those lines. The point is, you need to pick up one. I dare you. I dare you. I double dog dare you to pick up a catechism and begin to memorize it.

I think you will be surprised at how much of the scriptures you didn't know. You didn't know. Well, let me just run on to the last point then.

The last point. All these points so far have been saying that immaturity does this and immaturity does this and I'm going to switch it up just a second. I'm going to talk about maturity because what happens when you do mature in your faith?

You're able to discern what is good and what is evil. That's what he says in verse 14. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish from good and evil.

[26 : 51] You see, that's the goal. The goal in our faith is that being able to look at this world and look at the decisions we make and look at things that are happening and being able to tell good from evil.

the problem that the Hebrews are facing is that they can't see the difference between good and evil because for them, because something about Judaism meant something to them, because it connected to them on an emotional level, because it was something that they're familiar with, they're running back to it and that would be something that would be evil because they're abandoning Christ in order to do so.

And what the writer is telling them is that you need to be able to understand good from evil and the only way to understand good from evil is to have this constant practice.

One of the statistics about our world is that annually, every year, 37% of those who call themselves Protestants, 37% change their religious affiliation.

that means that one third of you next year could potentially be a different religious affiliation than you are currently.

[28 : 10] And why is that the case? Because we do not have any discernment. We don't understand when there's a doctrine that's right or wrong. We make this mantra that says, well, we all believe the same thing and so long as we're just all together and we minimize our differences and we maximize some small little sort of connection that we've got and we say that, well, it just doesn't matter.

But, beloved, that is just a wrong way to believe. I mean, if you're talking about your favorite flavor of jelly beans, that's fine. But if we're talking about truth that is about eternal things, we need to know the truth.

truth. I mean, if I'm wrong, I want to know it. And I don't care if you tell me I'm wrong. You don't hurt my feelings if you tell me that I'm wrong. The way I think that I'm right is because I look at the text, I try to interpret it by the rules, and then I try to see what it says.

I don't feel my way through this, or at least I hope I don't. But the way that we come to this discernment is by this constant practice.

It's this constant use that as we come to know the Word of God and we make application of that Word to this situation, then the more that we do that, the more we can do that on things that begin to get complicated and difficult.

[29 : 39] The more that we discern the good and evil using Scripture, the better we become at doing that. Solid food, then, is what we need in order to grow.

And that solid food is going to be in the form of taking in the Scriptures. You've got to listen to the sermons. You've got to be in Bible study. You've got to read the Bible on your own.

Anything and everything that's available to you, take advantage of it. If you don't take advantage of it, then in the end when you find yourself in a place where you don't know the good from the evil, you have only yourself to blame.

We need to grow in our faith and a healthy future for First Baptist Church means that every member is growing in our faith.

So let me give you here at the end four things to do. Okay? Four things to do. Some of this is a repeat from what we've said, but let me just expand and give you a couple of things.

[30 : 42] Number one, first thing to do if we're going to grow in our faith, number one, pray for it. Can't start anywhere else but there. You've got to pray for your own growth in faith.

You don't like where you are spiritually. You think that you're not very mature in certain ways and other ways maybe you've made some ground but you're just not happy with these things. Pray. Ask the Lord to grow you.

And while you're at it, ask the Lord to grow the others around you. If we don't pray for growth, we're not going to grow. Secondly, read your Bible over and over and over again and read it different ways every year.

Read maybe from a different translation. Read different parts of it more slowly. Read some of it faster. I mean, don't get stuck in a rut and don't feel guilty if you don't read Genesis through Revelation every year and mark the little check boxes.

You know what I'm saying? Like that's not the goal. The goal is not to guilt you to try to read it in a certain time frame. The goal is just that every day you're consuming the word. So to that end, I've got something for you.

[31 : 53] Okay? And this is not at the post office. There's some packets up here. Bible 101. I didn't create this, but we took it with permission from the original author.

and this is getting through the story of the Bible in one year, reading 15 verses a day. Can you read 15 verses a day?

Yeah, you can read 15 verses a day. It starts in the beginning. It doesn't give you every passage. It doesn't give you every verse, but it also tells you over here the things that you're reading.

It tells you questions to think about and things to go through, and this is a great resource and it's free. They're right up here and if I run out, I'll print more. Just tell me that you didn't get one and I'll get you one.

If you've got a way to read the Bible, don't pick it up. It doesn't matter. You just need to be reading the Bible. Third, you need to attend some sort of Bible study.

[32 : 54] I'm convinced that it's not enough just to be in the sermons unless, unless you take copious notes and you go read, reread, all the passages that we're talking about.

If you do that, then maybe you could skip it, but listen, you've got to, you've got to be in a Bible study and I know, I know that being in a Bible study with me can be a little difficult because sometimes I'm blunt and weird and strange and those kinds of things, but you know, if I stopped doing all the healthy things because of how blunt my doctors have been, I'd be in bad shape.

I remember when I was about 35, 40 and I'll go to the doctor this first time I've seen him, he looks at me and says, you're too fat. In that moment, I could have easily just said, I'm done with all the healthcare profession.

But you know, one, he was right and two, well, I got over it. So, listen, it's easy to get sidetracked with other things, but I'm just saying, you've got to be in some sort of study.

It doesn't have to be my study. I don't care if you come to my study or not, I want you to be in Bible study and I want you to learn, although mine's better, so just come on. The last thing I say is study a catechism.

[34 : 11] Study a catechism. Now, all of that should be pretty simple, easy to do things for every one of you. And then as you grow, just remember, somebody's right behind you that needs to hear that truth.

I loved, as a kid, watching the Dallas Cowboys. Roger Stalback and Tony Dorsett and Drew Pearson. My dad, being a pastor, we lived right behind the church and there were some Sundays.

The church was starting at 6 and we were sitting there watching the time and the TV, the time and the TV, because we had to get to the church, but we wanted to see fourth quarter because they were down.

And what would happen in fourth quarter with that team? They played harder, they threw further, they hit harder. I mean, they was just phenomenal to watch. And one of the things that you have to understand about where we are is that we're in the fourth quarter.

The Bible says that we've been in the last days since Christ came. And that's exactly where we are. We've been in the last days for 2,000 years.

[35 : 26] We will continue to be in the last days. It's the fourth quarter. At any moment, it can all be over. And therefore, we ought to pursue growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to read harder. We need to read longer. We need to pray harder. We need to pray longer. because the end is at hand. And we want to be people who know the Lord, who can then pass that on to others.

Will you commit to growing in your faith in this new year for the sake of God's glory in this community? Let's pray.

good