

**Forward in Maturity**  
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I want to tell you today about a couple things that are frustrating to me. First – there are some Bible verses that frustrate me. I’m not talking about Bible verses that convict me. I’m talking about verses like 2 Corinthians 12:4, where Paul said:

*I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.*

When I read that, I immediately want to know what he is not telling us about heaven. Evidently, as amazing as Bible teaching about heaven is – there are some things so astounding that we can’t even handle hearing it. That’s awesome, but it’s frustrating because I want to know!

Here’s another passage that frustrates me. Hebrews 5 discusses how Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Verse 11 says:

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.*

I don’t know if anyone else feels this way, but when I read that I immediately want to know – what aren’t you telling us? And the frustration is compounded by the fact that the reason we don’t get the full explanation is that the people of that day were slow to learn. But I wonder if we are really any different?

One of the most frustrating things a pastor can ever hear is someone saying they are leaving your church because they are not growing. It’s frustrating because you know the responsibility to grow is on the individual, not just the church. It’s a shared responsibility because the church must provide teaching, preaching, discipleship, equipping, and opportunities to minister. But we cannot make individuals take advantage of those growth opportunities.

We are in a series called “Forward” and we’ve preached on Moving Forward in Faith – Discipleship – Family – Honor – Unity. Today I’m preaching on Forward in Maturity. This is going to be a very practical sermon and if you do what the word teaches – it will change your life forever!

As I said, it is very frustrating for pastors when people do not grow in their faith. This frustration is not new – it goes back to biblical times. Paul expressed this frustration many times. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 he said:

*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.*

In 1 Corinthians 15:34 Paul said:

*Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.*

Paul says that lack of knowledge of God is shameful for a Christian. I read Hebrews 5:11 earlier: *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.*

That passage goes on to say:

*In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.*

There are way too many believers today who live on milk, not the meat of the word. There are way too many who keep having to learn the basics over and over again. I know people who've been Christians for years and they still act like babies! They say things like – “We're still new at this” and I want to shout – “NO YOU'RE NOT!!”

These are the people who say they've been a believer for 30 years but they are still immature. That's because they haven't had 30 years of spiritual growth – they've had 1 year of growth 30 times! They keep doing the same things over and over! They never move on, press on, accelerate or grow.

It's okay to be an immature Christian when you're a new Christian. But after a while – you need to grow up! Notice that Hebrews says *solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves.*

Who trained them? They trained themselves! You see – preachers and teachers have a role – but at some point in time you should also be feeding yourself. How do you do that? By constantly learning the word, knowing the word and doing the word!

We are all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day and give an account for our lives. I will be held responsible for teaching and preaching the word. You will be held responsible for what you did with it!

God wants all believers to make progress - to move forward – to grow. But too many believers live life in park or reverse. They're going nowhere – or if they are moving – it's backwards.

But there are many Bible verses telling us to accelerate forward. For instance, Hebrews 6:1 in the Amplified version says:

*Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings of*

*Christ, advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity.*

We should all be steadily advancing in spiritual maturity! Some of can't even do the basics of the faith. Things like -

- Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
- Loving God and people
- Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together
- Giving our tithes and offerings
- Making disciples
- Praying without ceasing
- Husbands – love your wives
- Wives – respect your husbands
- Children – honor and obey your parents

**THESE ARE NOT SUGGESTIONS - THESE ARE COMMANDS, INSPIRED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION!**

Yes - We must start with the basics. But we must progress beyond the basics. That's why we must feed ourselves God's Word!

Unfortunately, many Christians cannot tolerate the meat of the word. They want to live their lives being bottle fed by someone else. But God wants us to grow to where we feed ourselves on His word.

We have good food here at Grace Fellowship Church and we're always looking at more and better ways to feed you! I'll talk more about that.

But – there comes a time when you must also feed yourself! Just stop making excuses and start getting into the word and getting the word into you. It will change your life. Mature Christians are strong in the word.

Where are you in regard to the word of God? Are you still drinking milk or are you eating meat? Still in elementary school or able to teach? The Bible says there should come a time when you should not only be able to feed yourself, but you should be able to feed others.

What are you doing to accelerate your spiritual growth? We must be willing to leave spiritual kindergarten and move on to elementary school and high school and college. Some people want to stay in kindergarten – it's easier and there's a snack and a nap time. But to do so is to choose to stay immature. But, maturity will not just happen. 1 Corinthians 13:11 says:

*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

The Greek word for “put away” is very interesting.

Put away = katargeo (kat-arg-eh'-o) - to render entirely useless, inactive and inoperative – to abolish, destroy, do away with, make of no effect, put an end to, bring to nothing.

Katargeo is a very strong active verb. Katargeo requires effort.

It does not mean to ignore childish things

It does not mean to excuse childish things

It does not mean pretending they're not there

It does not mean you will automatically grow out of it

In fact, the meaning here is that childish things will not go away on their own!

They must be put away. Childish things are put away by being recognized, refused and replaced with mature thinking based on the truth of God's word.

Listen, you can't outgrow Bible ignorance. You can't outgrow prayerlessness.

You can't just outgrow not being filled with the spirit. It's like saying I'm going to outgrow being lost and will one day automatically be saved. It won't happen!

It's time to put away childish things! It's time to accelerate – to take the next step in your spiritual growth!

**THIS DOES NOT JUST HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY!** Age does not equal maturity. There are many immature elderly people. You are only young once, but you can stay immature forever. Maturity is progressive. It doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen overnight.

We don't all grow at the same rate. We have times where it seems we are not growing and we have growth spurts – times of sudden growth. But 1 John 2:12-14 gives us the path to maturity:

*I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

We become God's children when we are born again. We have our sins forgiven and we begin to know God as Father. Some people stay right there and never grow.

We grow into spiritual young adults when we strengthen ourselves through the word and begin to wage spiritual warfare.

We grow into adulthood as we grow in the knowledge of God.

We know Him who is from the beginning. In other words, we develop an eternal perspective and a loving relationship with our Father.

But this does not happen automatically. There are some things we must do.

We must grow in the knowledge of God. Relationship with Him is the key to spiritual maturity.

Where are you in your relationship with God? Everything else we say and do flows out of that relationship. Spiritually mature people know the Father – they understand His love, grace, mercy and His truth, holiness and justice. They are able to see the Father’s heart for other people and be concerned with their needs. Mature Christians are also strong in the word.

Going forward to spiritual maturity is progressive. It starts with faith, but Romans 1:17 says: *The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.* I know you were saved by faith, but your faith should be growing.

The Christian life starts with grace, but James 4:6 says: *He gives us more and more grace.* I know you were saved by grace, but are you receiving more grace?

The Christian life starts with hope and results in praise, but Psalm 71:14 says: *As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.*

When you are mature in faith – you never lose hope. And you never stop praising. In fact, your praise is always increasing. And as you praise more and more, you spend more and more time in the presence of God. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says:

*But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.*

Spending time in the presence of God changes us progressively from glory to glory!

All of this is a journey! Psalm 84:5-7 says:

*Blessed are those whose strength is in You, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage... They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.*

Following God is a journey. And growing in Christ is a journey when we go from strength to strength. That means we grow stronger in relationship with God and with others. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 says:

*We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.*

Philippians 1:9-11 shows what the goal is:

*I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of*

*Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of righteousness produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.*

Going Forward to maturity means you are growing in love, knowledge of God, discernment and righteousness.

We tend to make it hard – but it's really pretty simple. Growing strong spiritually is very similar to growing strong physically. It does not happen without proper nutrition and regular exercise!

Thinking that you are going to grow strong spiritually just by coming to church and hearing a sermon is like thinking you can grow strong physically by going to a gym and listening to a lecture on exercise. That's great but you'll never grow until you begin to actually exercise!

Listen – no one can exercise for you! No one can eat right for you! No one can get into shape for you! You've got to do it yourself!

And no one can partake of the word for you or do the word for you! 1 Timothy 4:7 says: *Exercise yourself toward godliness.*

Exercise whom? Yourself! And notice you have a goal to move toward – godliness. That's God's goal for all of us – to be conformed to the image of Christ. But it doesn't just happen automatically. It requires exercise.

Now – I want to give you some practical help. First – the starting point is getting into a daily Bible reading plan. There are many you can download on your phone. You've been planning on reading the Bible – it's time to start.

Then – go deeper in Bible Study. We've purchased a tool to help you. We have purchased a subscription to Right Now Media for you!

Right Now Media is like the Netflix of Bible study. It has video Bible studies on every book of the Bible and almost any topic you can think of. If you need to grow in marriage, family, work, financial management – you can find help on Right Now Media. If you need to overcome a life controlling issue like anger or fear – you can find help on RNM. There's also thousands of awesome children's programs. All you need to do is text grace to 49775 to access this free library.

Then – take it a step further and do one of their series on how to study the Bible. That will enable you to feed yourself on the meat of God's word! Then – start teaching a class or leading a Grace Group here. Who me? Yes you!

Let me give you a big key to spiritual growth.

Who do you think learns the most from my sermons? ME!

I gather way more material than I have time to share on Sunday.

I am meditating on these truths all week long.

And the Word is working in me and on me all week long!

The teacher grows more than the people they teach!  
If you really want to grow – start teaching a class.

We have opportunities right now to teach in our children's ministry or to lead a Grace Group. The great thing about children's ministry is that the material is already developed for you and we have leaders to train and equip you.

Leading a Grace Group can be as easy as playing a video from Right Now Media and then leading a discussion. You can move from that to eventually developing your own material.

But start somewhere and start now!  
It's time to put away childish things!  
It's time for you to grow in spiritual maturity!  
Stop making excuses!  
Stop blaming the church or someone else!  
Stop saying your spouse is the spiritual one!  
Stop just being a hearer of the Word and start doing the Word.

As you feed yourself on the meat of the word and exercise yourself unto godliness – you will move forward in maturity!

Listen we are moving into the end times like we've never seen before!  
Those who don't know the word will fall into deception!  
Those who are weak in faith will fall away from the faith!

But like the writer of Hebrews said – I'm confident of better things concerning you – things that accompany salvation! And that includes you continuing to move forward in maturity as you become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ!