



KEY VERSES

1 Peter 2:2 (KJV) As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,

Hebrews 5:12-14 (NLT) You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures. You are like babies who drink only milk and cannot eat solid food. And a person who is living on milk isn't very far along in the Christian life and doesn't know much about doing what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right.

The word "mature" comes from the same root as the word "ripe." It indicates something that has been completed or fully developed. In the Scripture, it is the same word Jesus used when He cried "It is finished" on the cross. (That's a sermon in itself!)

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1. IT IS NOT AUTOMATIC

John 8:31 (NLT) You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings.

2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1 (NLT) Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God.

2. IT IS A PROCESS

Proverbs 8:5 (TEV) Learn to be mature.

2 Peter 3:18 (TEV) But continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

3. IT TAKES DISCIPLINE

1 Timothy 4:7 (PHI) Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.

1 Timothy 4:7 (NAS) Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

Mature believers are called disciples.

I can't be a disciple without being disciplined. Physical fitness is not automatic – neither is spiritual fitness. Both take hard work!



The mark of a true disciple is “bearing my cross,” which means denying my own desires in order to put God first in my life every day.

Luke 14:27 (NIV) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Luke 9:23 (NIV) If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Growing OLD without growing UP is a tragedy! It is natural that babies should desire only milk, and we expect them to be limited in their ability and deficient in their maturity. But if these things are still happening years later there is a serious problem (and this applies both physically and spiritually).

There is a time in every Christian life when we must graduate from MILK to MEAT (solid food). It is at this stage that we become more than just BELIEVERS – we take on the responsibility of becoming mature DISCIPLES.

Anything that refuses to grow and change will eventually die. In fact, a clinical definition of death is a body that does not change. If you are not moving forward in your Christian life, you are backsliding. THERE ARE NO OPTIONS WHEN IT COMES TO DISCIPLESHIP!

What does the Bible mean when it makes this comparison between MILK and MEAT? In other words, what are the characteristics of mature Christians as taught in the Scriptures?



| | |
|---|--|
| Milk is given to the child by the mother (the church) | Meat is hunted and prepared by oneself |
| Milk is a comfort food (meet MY needs!) | Meat is an energy or strength food (what can I do to HELP?) |
| Milk is a predigested food (Moses was the “voice of God” to Aaron) | Meat must be digested, so it takes more “work” by the individual |
| Milk builds up the bones (the framework of spiritual life) | Milk builds up the bones (the framework of spiritual life) |
| Milk is the truth of what Jesus did (salvation) Gospels and Acts We don’t throw out the milk once we start eating meat! | Meat is the truth of what Jesus is doing (sanctification) Epistles, especially Hebrews Milk can enhance the meat, giving us more nourishment |
| Nothing has to die to produce milk! Milk, eggs and bacon for breakfast – the cow and the chicken were involved, but the pig was committed! | Something has to die to produce meat! The real mark of a carnal (fleshly, worldly) Christian is that they will not permit their old man to die! |



Contrary to what you might think, DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT LEGALISM! We are not trying to earn anything from God by being disciplined; this is a major point of contention and a matter of confusion in modern Christianity. Every time we say “work OUT your salvation” someone hears it as “work FOR your salvation.” But the two are utterly different!

The problem is that we are attempting to contrast GRACE with EFFORT. We say, “I live under grace, so I don’t need to make an effort. All that lifestyle stuff is just legalism.” But grace and EFFORT are not opposites; grace and EARNING are opposites!

Working FOR your salvation is heresy, but working OUT your salvation is basic Christianity!

There are several New Testament scriptures that tell us that because God has ALREADY given us all things, we therefore must ...

MAKE EVERY EFFORT to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (Romans 14:19)

MAKE EVERY EFFORT to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24)

MAKE EVERY EFFORT to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3)

MAKE EVERY EFFORT to live in peace with all men and be holy (Hebrews 12:14)

MAKE EVERY EFFORT to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him (2 Peter 3:14)

MAKE EVERY EFFORT to enter His rest (Hebrews 4:11) (There’s a unique concept – WORK to enter into His rest!)

Here’s one more ...

2 Peter 1:3-10 (NIV) His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, **MAKE EVERY EFFORT** to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness,

knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall.

“I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please.”

- Wilbur Rees