

# How the Christian Grows

Sermon #0923  
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Study by W. D. Frazee—March 15,

Our text this morning is 2 Peter 3:18. I would like to have you look at this verse and see what word in it makes you think of Spring time. What is it? Grow. Peter says:

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” 2 Peter 3:18.

This morning I would like to study with you how the Christian grows. How the Christian grows. Any of use who are five or six feet tall this morning or anywhere in between have grown some. None of us started at our present height. Children grow a great deal. The babes in arms grow. All of this is an object lesson illustrating Christian growth.

This morning I want to study with you the three great things that are necessary for growth in the physical life, and in the spiritual life. For the same laws we are told, that run through one, run through the other. Before I study those three great laws of growth, I want to share with you an interesting sentence in the Spirit of Prophecy.

“As the members of the body of Christ approach the period of their last conflict, the time of Jacob’s trouble, they will grow up into Christ and will partake largely of His Spirit” *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol 7, page 984.

I am glad friends we are going to be mature Christians as we enter Jacob’s trouble. We are going to need all the maturity possible for we are going to be engaged in a man-size conflict.

Now we are told very clearly friends that we don’t grow up in a minute nor a day.

“Courage, fortitude, faith, and implicit trust in God’s power to save do not come in a moment. These heavenly graces are acquired by the experience of years” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 5, page 213.

I would like to study that experience with you this morning. I suppose it has always been true in both physical and spiritual things that people are hunting for shortcuts. If they need to lose weight, they want something they can take and it will melt the fat off of them. If they need to gain weight, they want something that will do

it fast. You have seen these pictures perhaps of muscular specimens, and if you will send so much money, you will learn how to be like Samson.

Well, all this shows the desire in the human heart to get somewhere quick. And as in the physical, so in the spiritual. We are in the time when every wind of doctrine is blowing. Some of these winds of doctrine are concerned with how to get there quick. Well God knows friends, we need to get there quick. We need to get there fast. That is what the angel said, "Step fast."

But there is no elevator. There is an experience which we need to understand, very simple laws, very simple rules. If we learn to follow them, we will grow in grace. And our precious Savior will see to it that we are mature, fully ripe, before he lets the time of Jacob's trouble come. I praise Him for that love. In fact dear friends, that is why He has kept it off all this time, isn't it? Yes. He has seen that we are not grown up yet and this struggle that is ahead needs maturity.

Now let us look at this three rules, three experiences which we must have in order to grow. If I were to ask you, what it takes in order to grow?, what is one thing that you would think of? Food. We are very conscious of the fact, several times a day, that we need food in order to what? Well, when we are younger we may not think about it having anything to do with growing at all, we just think about food because we are hungry. Is that a normal state to be in "hungry"? Oh yes.

God has given people an appetite because we need food. A normal appetite is the reflection of a normal need, isn't it? And we are always glad when we see that people have a good appetite.

Now God has given us His word as the food of the soul.

"Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger" John 6:35.

Oh what a promise of satisfaction! Again:

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" John 6:51.

If you want to live and grow, here is Living Bread that came down from heaven. Jesus is speaking. He is the Living Bread.

Now you will notice, continuing with the figure, He says that this bread is His flesh which He will give for the life of the world. And so that there may be no misunderstanding, He explains:

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" John 6:63.

So the word is represented by the flesh, and the flesh is represented by the bread. This Living Bread then is Christ Himself received by us through His word. This Word, the Bible, is the Living Bread through which Christ imparts His life to us. Do you want to grow? Feed on the Word. Feed on the Word. The Word will build you up in the most holy things.

Now there are some individuals in the world that we don't give bread to. When little ones are a few days, or a few weeks old, there is a special food that God has provided for them. What is it?

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” 1 Peter 2:2.

Do babies grow? Oh yes, they grow quite rapidly. And for some time their main, if not their only food, is what? Milk.

There are two things that I would like to have you think about in the matter of milk. One is that milk is a simple food for babies. And so in the Word of God there are simple truths that babes need to feed upon. And those who are feeding them need wisdom not to poke down their throats Vega-roast, or Protose, or some other wonderful food even though it comes from the Bible. We need wisdom, we are told, to give everyone his portion of food in due season. There is a time for everything. And simply because some truth is good for a mature Christian, is no evidence at all that it is for those who are babes in Christ. Babes in Christ need milk!

And Paul tells his converts that he fed them with milk, and he knew they were not able to take strong meat, and he said, “Neither yet are ye.” So he recognized there was a time for certain truths and a time for certain others. We need to recognize that in feeding others. And may I say, we need to recognize that in feeding ourselves. Let me illustrate.

Suppose I come in my study to some portion of the Word which I cannot understand at all, pray and study as I may. Shall I simply camp there and not study anything else until that point is clear. If it is certain chapters in Ezekiel friends, I think some of us might stay there a long time.

But don't misunderstand me, I have no objection to anybody studying them, but I say to you friends, there is milk of the Word which every babe needs. And if we are babes, and there is some things that we cannot understand, let us quietly, shall I say, put them to the side and find something which we can understand. What do you say? That applies to both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

You know it is interesting the different things that God has put in food, hard things and soft things, things easy to digest, things hard to digest. They all have their place and time. And so it is with the great word of God, these inspired writings, I am thankful that we can find something suitable for every stomach. Praise the Lord we can!

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” 1 Peter 2:2.

Now there is another application of this matter of milk that I would like to have you think about. You know milk for the human infant is provided by its mother. And that is a very interesting arrangement that the Lord has made. The mother eats the different foods which everybody eats, and God, in the mother, arranges that that shall be transformed into milk which the baby can easily absorb and utilize.

So it is in the beginning of the Christian life, there are some things which we need to have studied for us by other people. The Sabbath school teacher perhaps, the pastor, the minister, the one who gives us Bible studies, and we all appreciate how wonderful it is to have somebody dig out the wonderful things from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, and bring them to us. And May I say to you friends, much of that is milk. In other words, it is something that has passed through the physiology of another, shall I say, to reach us.

Well you say sure, isn't that what all the members of the church receive? I am afraid more than God ever planned, my friends. You know it is a wonderful thing to see a little baby at the breast, but it would be too bad to see a ten year old there, wouldn't it? We would really wonder what was the matter if we say a twenty or thirty year old at the breast, wouldn't we?

But do you know there are individuals in the church whose main source of truth and light and spiritual nourishment is what somebody else studies out for them, and speaks to them, or writes for them. Do you see what I mean?

Oh my dear friends, thank God we can get to the place where we have some teeth of our own! And we can begin to take a crust and chew on it. We can begin to take some other foods and chew on them, and learn to eat like other people. Is that important in growth? Yes it is friends. And so, while I repeat a milk diet is very suitable and appropriate for the infant period, it was never designed by God to be the entire source of nourishment year after year, and decade after decade. And if you have been on a milk diet for many years, ask the Lord if it isn't about time for you to be weaned a bit, to begin to get some solid food of your own.

Ask the Lord if isn't time, that He isn't ready, to help you get down on your knees and find things from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy directly for yourselves. That is His plan my friends.

“Everyone must now search the Bible for himself upon his knees before God, with the humble, teachable heart of a child, if he would know what the Lord requires of him”  
*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 5, page 214.

There are many wonderful things that you and I can get through milk. We have gotten. We have learned many things through the teaching of others. But let me tell you my friends, there are some things that God wants to teach you, that you will never learn unless, down on your knees with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, you seek God for yourself. And those of you who have had that experience know what I am talking about. And those of you that haven't, it is there waiting for you. And however much we may like milk, let me tell you whole wheat

bread, and beans and potatoes, and all the other wonderful things have their place. Don't they? Thank the Lord!

To grow then let us eat the Word of God. Let us take the sincere milk of the word, but let us press on to the, shall I say, the harder things, the more difficult things, the things that require our own personal thinking, and wrestling with God in prayer and study. Do you my friends, this kind of eating, this kind of study brings great satisfaction.

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart”  
Jeremiah 15:16.

What was it that Jeremiah found joy in? His word. And if you and I will eat the Word of God, we will find what? Joy.

But do you know the way to find sweetness out of a cracker or a crust of bread? Chew it. And so we are not to take verse after verse and read it hurriedly, but we are to take a small portion of Scripture, a little piece of bread as it were, and chew it. Meditate upon it, think about it until we find the sweetness in it.

Notice what the psalmist says:

“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”  
Psalm 19:10.

Thank the Lord for the sweetness of the Word of God!

Now God speaks to us not alone through this written Word, and volumes of the Spirit of Prophecy, all these inspired writings, He speaks to us through His works. In this same nineteenth Psalm, notice the first verse.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day after day uttereth speech, and night and night sheweth knowledge” Psalm 19:1-2.

So by day and night, Christ, the Living Word, is speaking to us through His works. Through the birds, the flowers, the trees, the beauty of the sunset, the glory of the sunrise, the twinkling stars, the passing clouds, the falling rain, in a thousand ways Christ is speaking to us through nature. Happy are those who have learned the joy of feeding on Christ through His word, and His works.

Now I would like to know something else the body needs besides food. What is it? Air. We can live for several days without food. How long could you live without air? Only a very few minutes. And what do we call the process by which we receive air? Breathing. We are told that prayer is the breath of the soul.

In 1 Thessalonians the fifth chapter, verse seventeen, we are told to pray without ceasing. Just as we must keep breathing. Either consciously or unconsciously we breathe right along; so our hearts are to be in the attitude of prayer.

Now we have heard that many times. This morning I would like to study it with you a little as we look into the physiology of it.

How many parts are there to breathing? Two parts.

What are the two parts? Expiration and inspiration.

Suppose you decided to do just one, which one would you think was the most important?

Now dear friends, just as there are two parts to physical breathing, there are two parts to spiritual breathing. And we need to become experts in inspiration as well as expiration. Let's think of those two parts for a little while. Expiration—that is breathing out. That means in prayer giving everything to God. Casting off the waste products of activity shall I say. The tiredness, the fatigue that comes from the buffetings of the enemy. The worries, the cares. How does Peter put it?

“Casting all your care upon Him.” 1 Peter 5:7.

That is the expiration. Laying down every care, every burden, every worry, every fear at the feet of Jesus. Laying our sins down. How many waste products there are in the body. Why dear friends, we are really a poison factory these bodies of ours. We could die in a short time unless there was some way of casting off those waste products. So we need in prayer to let go of many things. To lay many things at Jesus feet and leave them there. That is prayer.

Pouring out our heart's desires and longings to God. Telling Him of our needs, our burdens.

Are we weak and heavy,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
(What a Friend we have in Jesus, 320)

What a privilege prayer is, isn't it friends? To lay every burden and care at His feet. But my friends, that is only half of it. When we have breathed out, then we need to breathe in! The more we have expelled that which is from deep down within, the more then we need then to push down the diaphragm and push out the rib cage, and fill our lungs with those deep inspirations of life giving oxygen.

What does that mean? That means to receive the life of God.

I feel sorry for those in prayer who merely kneel down, and tell God all their troubles and ask God for everything they want, and then, having done that, say

Amen and get up, and go off. They are like somebody that has breathed out all they can, but they haven't stopped to breathe in. It could leave one with a rather weak feeling friends.

Now let me read you a wonderful description.

"You are to *give* all,—your heart, your will, your service,— give yourself to him to obey all His requirements; and you must *take* all,—Christ the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey"  
*Steps to Christ*, page 70.

The purpose of prayer is not been accomplished until, having given to Him all that we have and are, we take and receive from Him all that He has and is. How do we do that in a very practical way?

Here is the inspiration, friends. When we have given God everything that we have and are, and when we have made a full surrender of ourselves, then it our privilege to claim the promise of Mark 11:24. This is one of the greatest promises in the Word of God and teaches how to claim all the other promises in God's word.

"Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" Mark 11:24.

When are you to believe? When you pray, right there on your knees. "Believe that ye receive them" that is the inspiration, that is the taking in. "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Oh how many Christians have an air hunger. Every cell of the soul is crying out for the life giving oxygen of divine power, the Holy Spirit breathed into the life.

But dear ones, let me show you something. God has surrounded us with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe, but I have got to push down my diaphragm and open up the lung chamber in order for that air to rush in. Am I right?

God doesn't, may I say it reverently, take a pump and force air into my lungs under extra pressure. But if I will open the way the oxygen will rush in. And if you and I there on our knees will not only lay down our burdens, and give up our sins, but we will open up the door of our heart, and say, come Lord Jesus into my heart, and I believe You do. Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove with all Thy quickening powers, come into my life and heart, and then thank the Lord that we receive the gifts that He has promised, inspiration can be to us the most wonderful part of respiration my friends.

Receiving can come to mean to us the goal, the objective of the prayer experience. Why really friends, the laying down of our burdens, our griefs, our sins is simply the preparatory work, that is all. That is just making room. There is no limit to the usefulness to the one who, by putting self aside, makes room for the work of

the Holy Spirit. So let us cultivate this double work, Expiration, inspiration, expiration, inspiration. Then all through the day friends, every time you think of something to give to God, think of something to take from Him.

Every time you ask Him to forgive some sin, tell Him you believe that He has heard you, and that you accept His pardon. Every time you meet a problem and ask for His help, thank Him for it. Keep mixing faith with your prayers and you will grow in grace.

Now what else is it that our bodies need besides food and air in order to grow? Exercise.

It is amazing how long a person can live without exercise. But oh to grow, to grow as God wants us to grow we need to exercise. I have been very interested in studying this subject to note that just as there are two great phases of breathing, so there are two great phases of exercise. We have the flexors and extensors you know. This may help some of you who are studying physiology. May I suggest as you study how the body works, remember that for every law of physiology there is a law of spiritual life. Learn to see the parallels and to correlate them.

I would like to have you think of spiritual exercise in a very simple way, as push and pull. There are some muscles that we use to push, and there are others we use to pull. There is a time to push. There is a time when the only answer is push. The reason that God lets us get into a position where we need to do some pushing is because we need to develop our muscles in order to grow.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” James 4:7.

Which word in this verse means to push? Resist.

Who are we to push? The Devil. Oh, I am so glad that we haven't been given the job of pushing people, our fellow human beings. Nobody likes to be pushed around. The Devil doesn't like it either, but he needs it. We need the freedom that comes from pushing. But you know dear friends, there are many people that kneel down and pray long and earnestly for the Lord to push the Devil away. They don't understand that they need the exercise.

Oh you say, but we can't do it without God. Well no, of course we can't, but He won't do it without us. We can't do it without God anymore than a person can exercise without breathing and eating. But breathing and eating alone will never drive the Devil away my friends. Don't forget it! You can pray all night, and in the morning the Devil will be there perhaps at the door, and you will have to do what? Push! Push! Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.

That is not righteousness by works friends, not at all. That is righteousness by faith. Do you know what righteousness by faith is? It is right doing by faith. And part of right doing is resisting the Devil. And if you have faith in God you will believe He gives you and you will push against what? The Devil and all his temptations.

It means that the person that has been smoking cigarettes and gives them up to God and asks for help and believes he gets it, that the next time one of his old pals meets him, and says, here George, have a smoke, he says, no. Thank you sir, but I have quit that sort of thing. You have? When did you quit? I quit last night. Shouldn't you have just one to taper off? No. And so with every other temptation. Am I right friends? Push, resist the Devil and he will what? Flee from you.

Now if you were picking out a little word with two letters that would tell you exactly what to say to every temptation, and mean pushing, what would it be? No. Can you say "No"? Someone has said that "no" is the hardest word to pronounce in the English language. It surely is for some people in some circumstances, but can it be done? By the grace of God, if we will feed on His word, and breathe and breathe deep, then we can pronounce that word.

We can push. We can use our spiritual muscles that have to do with resisting, and pushing, and we can say to the enemy, No!, No!, No!, No!

Who was it that was born in this world, that every opportunity that came to Him, He used those spiritual muscles to resist the Devil? Jesus. That is the way He condemned sin in the flesh. Bless the Lord, that is the way that it can be done in our lives.

Now what is the other part of exercising? Pulling.

Did you ever see somebody let down a bucket in a deep well and then start pulling on the rope? What do they want? They want to draw the water out. Are they getting some exercise? Oh yes. And there are many other things that we do with our pull muscles. My friends, there is a work that God has for us to do in our spiritual life in pulling.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" John 12:32.

Now which word in this verse means to pull? Draw. Oh what a great drawing, pulling power there is in the love of Jesus! My dear friends, you know it is an interesting thing, if you take a big magnet and let a peice of steel come somewhere near it what happens? It is drawn.

Let me tell you something else interesting, some of you know this, as long as that peice of steel is connected with that magnet if there is another peice of steel which comes near it, what happens? It is drawn to, and through that little peice of steel to that big magnet in back of it. Is that right? Oh God wants every one of us to become so attached to Jesus that working in and through us is a great drawing power, a great pulling force leading men and women to Christ their Savior.

I have just been, the last few weeks, where I have seen so many needy ones. Poor people, sick people, ignorant people, illiterate, people that need to learn to read so they can read the Word of God. People that need to learn the simplest principles of cleanliness and sanitation. People that need to learn how to live the life of Jesus. People that need to have brought into their darkened minds the love of and heaven.

I am so glad there are a few folks down there working with and for them. I want to ask you, do you think their spiritual muscles are getting developed?

I want to tell you something friends. If there is anybody here that feels that you are in a place where there are so many other people around doing the work of pulling that your spiritual muscles are not growing, I would advise you to do one of two things. I would either advise you to find out from God where He wants you to do some pulling right around here, or I would advise you quickly to get out into some place where the very needs, the crying needs will challenge you to exercise every spiritual muscles in your body.

Now don't misunderstand me, I know that there are plenty of needs right around here that need to be taken care of, but if you can't see them, if you can't find them, it might be in the providence of God for you to be someplace where the very challenge of the obvious needs would appeal to your soul and draw you out of the lethargy of selfishness.

“The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us—to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them. Strength comes by exercise; activity is the very condition of life. Those who endeavor to maintain Christian life by passively acceptin the blessings that come through the means of grace, and doing nothing for Christ, are simply trying to live by eating without working” *Steps to Christ*, page 80, 81.

It doesn't work does it? It doesn't work. And so dear friends, I bring you these three simple, wonderful, rules for life. If you want to grow in grace, eat, breathe, exercise. And as you eat, remember the two great sources of life, the Word of God, and the works of God. And as you breathe, remember the two great phases of respiration, expiration and inspiration. Giving all and receiving all. And as you exercise, remember the two great muscles that you are to use, the push muscles against the Devil, and the pull muscles drawing men and women to Jesus as you minister to them and love them for Jesus' sake.

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W.D. Frazee Sermons  
PO Box 129, Wildwood, GA 30757  
1-800-WDF-1840 / 706-820-9755

[www.WDFsermons.org](http://www.WDFsermons.org)  
support@WDFsermons.org