

INTRODUCTION

As we approach Christmas, I hope you have plenty of presents under your tree. Our Christmases have been simplified the past few years because we only get gifts for the kids. Instead of getting presents for each other, my wife and I give an offering to the World Mission Offering. So, for us, Christmas is all about the kids. And it's a lot more fun. I did a little research to discover what have been the most popular Christmas toys over the past 75 years.

Can you guess the top five Christmas presents in the 1940s? And regardless of your age, if you've ever had one of these raise your hand.

1. The Hula Hoop
2. Paper Dolls
3. Bubble blowing sets
4. Scrabble
5. Legos

The Top Five Christmas toys in the 1960s were:

1. Chatty Cathy Doll
2. Ken Doll
3. Barbie's Dream House
4. Easy-bake Oven
5. G.I. Joe Doll

The Top Five Christmas toys in the 1980s were:

1. My Little Pony
2. Speak and Spell
3. Nintendo NES Gaming System
4. Cabbage Patch Kids
5. G.I. Joe Action Figure.

Now let's jump twenty-five years ahead to 2016. The top toys this year are:

1. Hatchimals
2. Cozmo Toy Robot
3. Pokemon Sun and Moon video games
4. Nintendo NES Gaming System
5. Legos Star Wars edition.

Kids, I hope Santa brings you everything you want and a little bit more!

Sometimes, as adults, we don't want to grow up. Like kids, we still want toys, but today we call them gadgets, like a Fitbit, Apple watch, or a smartphone. Everyone grows older, but not

everyone grows up. That's what we're going to talk about today.

Before the television series *Arrested Development* in 2003, the term had been used in medicine for over a hundred years. In the 19th Century, arrested development was a term used to describe people who stopped growing physically. However, more often the term began to be used in psychoanalysis to describe someone who developed chronologically in age, but they did not develop at the same rate emotionally. It isn't used much in modern circles, but the idea of arrested spiritual development is a theme that runs throughout the book of Hebrews. Another term for it is spiritual immaturity. Everyone grows old spiritually, but not everybody grows up. The writer of Hebrews is going to address this problem in the next few sections.

Hebrews 5:10-14. "And [Jesus] was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. We have much to say about this [Jesus and Melchizedek], but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 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."

The idea of arrested spiritual development was a tragedy when this letter was written and it is a widespread problem in our churches today.

I have four grandchildren, who are the smartest, brightest kids on the earth. Their ages are ten, eight, seven, and six. You may think I'm a little biased, but these kids say the cutest, the funniest, and the most amazing things I've ever heard. Every meal includes a made up-skit and songs. I love hanging out with them. But what would it be like in ten years when they are 20, 18, 17, and 16, if they had grown up physically, but they were saying and doing exactly the same things they do now? I doubt if anyone would call them cute or witty. We would be sad that they were suffering from arrested development. That's what the writer feels as he writes this letter to people who have known the Lord for years, but they are still spiritual babies.

What is your level of spiritual maturity? First we're going to look at the milk drinkers, and then we'll talk about marks of maturity.

I. INDICATORS OF SPIRITUAL IMMATUREITY

The writer really chastises the Hebrew Christians. He wrote, "You need milk, not solid food!" (Hebrews 5:12) There is a legitimate period in every believer's life when they are first saved, when all they can feed on is the sincere milk of the Word of God. However, everyone should grow up spiritually and get to a point where they can feed themselves on the solid food of God's Word. Milk is predigested food. And babies have to be fed and can't feed themselves. Are you still a spiritual babe? Here are three indicators of immaturity from this passage.

A. A baby believer is a lazy learner

He writes, "You are slow to learn." (Hebrews 5:11) In this context the writer has just mentioned that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. I remember having a professor in college who loved to give reading assignments and when you arrived back in class he would often say, "Everybody close your books. Take out a blank sheet of paper. This is a pop quiz." If you hadn't read the material, you were a goner. So, let's imagine that I said, "Close your Bibles. Take out a blank sheet of paper. This is a pop quiz with one question. In a hundred words or less answer this question. Who was Melchizedek?" I know many of you could answer that question. But if you've been a believer for ten years or more and have no clue, it's probably good to ask yourself. "Why don't I know that?" I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on you, but if you have no clue, you may be slow to learn.

By the way, if you're wondering, the answer is, "In Genesis, Abraham gave a tenth of his wealth to Melchizedek, who was a priest of Salem. But more importantly, Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus Christ." There's a more important question you need to ask yourself if you didn't know that. The question is, "Do I even care enough to know who Melchizedek is to dig into God's Word?"

B. A baby believer is unable to teach

We read, "You ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you." (Hebrews 5:12) Do you know enough about the Bible to teach others? I'm not talking about standing up in front of a congregation or a class and teaching a lesson. Parents, I'm talking about teaching your children. Are you able to teach your children and grandchildren about God's truth? Or are you someone who constantly needs to be fed?

Here's a scenario. Imagine I'm an unbelieving friend or family member, and I come to you and say, "You know, I've been thinking lately about life and death. What do you think happens to a person after they die?" How would you answer? Would you say, "Go ask a pastor?" Or would you say, "I don't know." Or would you be able to teach them what the Bible says? Would you be able to say, "Let's read what Jesus had to say about the afterlife in Luke 16. He talked about two men who died. One went to a place of punishment because he was a greedy, self-centered person. The other went to paradise because He was a man of faith." Are you able to teach others?

C. A baby believer requires a diet of basic truths

"You need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again." (Hebrews 5:12) One of the hardest speeches I've ever had to give was to a kindergarten graduation a few years ago at All Saints. I knew it had to be short and keep the interest of these fidgety five-year-olds. So I delivered an eight-minute speech about the miracle of reading and writing. I talked about how once they learned the 26 letters of the alphabet; they would then be able to put those letters into a certain order to make words. Using those same 26 letters, one day they would be able to read sentences, chapters, books, and entire libraries. And by the time they

graduated from college, entire libraries would be stored on their personal computer that would be the size of credit card that they would unfold into an interactive screen.

Can you imagine the tragedy if those kindergarten students were only taught the 26 letters of the alphabet, but they never moved on to words or sentences? That's the actual tragedy of arrested spiritual development. Some people have to be taught the basics over and over again. They never move on to maturity. This line of thought continues in Hebrews 6 where the writer identifies these elementary doctrines. They include the basics of repentance and faith. The Christian life begins with repentance and faith, but then you must move on to maturity.

I heard about a principal who needed to fill an administrative post in the school. He promoted one of his teachers who only had seven years of teaching experience. One of the older teachers came to complain. He said, "Why did you promote her? She only has seven years' experience. I've had fifteen years of experience, and yet you passed me over in favor of her." The principal said, "You're wrong. You haven't had fifteen years' experience. You've had one year's experience fifteen times." So, are these indicators of immaturity present in your life?

II. SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

"Solid food is for the mature." (Hebrews 5:14) I like Warren Wiersbe's distinction between spiritual milk and solid food. He says those who feed on spiritual milk can recount to you some of the things Jesus did 2,000 years ago. He fed the 5,000; He walked on water; He died on the cross; He rose from the dead. Those are important facts. But someone who is into solid food can tell you what Jesus is doing NOW. He healed my marriage; He delivered me from addiction; He took away my fear. So are you into milk or solid food? Here are two signs of spiritual strength.

A. A maturing believer understands righteousness

We read, "An infant is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness." (Hebrews 5:13) So let's talk about righteousness. Here's another pop quiz. In one sentence, describe how the Bible describes righteousness. What's your answer? Write it down mentally. If your answer sounded anything like this, you fail the test: "Righteousness is being good or doing good." Nope. Here's the correct answer: "Righteousness is right standing before God."

Now, please indulge me, because I have asked these two questions dozens of times through the years. And each time I ask them, we have a few more correct responses. I suppose I'll keep asking them until Jesus returns. Here it is: "How many of you are righteous? Hold up your hand." Okay, next question, "How many of you are going to heaven when you die?" Now if you didn't hold up your hand to both questions, we have a problem. You don't understand righteousness because ONLY those with a right standing before God will enter heaven.

When I asked, "Are you righteous?" you might have been reluctant because you thought I asked, "Are you self-righteous?" And Isaiah was correct: All our righteousness acts are like filthy rags before God's holiness.

Listen to these words Paul wrote, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they might be saved. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:1-4 NKJV)

Again, in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV) the Bible says, “For God has made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” So, once you understand righteousness you admit that you will never be good enough to have right standing before God. Only when you stand in the righteousness of Jesus can you relate to a holy God.

B. A maturing believer immediately knows right from wrong

Then we read, “Who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Hebrews 5:14)

A compass is a reliable instrument to point to the magnetic north. But if you hold a magnet near the compass, it becomes useless. The needle follows wherever you move the magnet. That is what has happened in our nation. America’s moral compass has been compromised by our magnetic, popular culture. For over two Centuries, American morality was based upon the teachings found in the Bible. But we now live in an age of moral relativity. Our culture has established that certain kinds of behavior are right because they “feel” like it’s right.

Dr. Jim Denison wrote: “Only 35% of Americans believe that moral truth is absolute. Most people are convinced that truth is whatever we believe it to be. As a result, tolerance is the guiding principle of our day, whether the issue is same-sex marriage, transgender restrooms, euthanasia or any other moral issue. So we are told to privatize all faith expressions, since we don’t want to offend those who disagree with us. And we are told to promote all agendas that promote tolerance. (Of course, such tolerance does not extend to those who disagree.)”

Notice verse fourteen says, “By constant use.” That means mature Christians are constantly in the Word of God. Are you a spiritual baby, who is stuck on a diet of milk? There is no shortcut to spiritual growth. You grow only as you feed on the solid food of God’s Word.

CONCLUSION

One the greatest discipleship organizations in the world is the Navigators. In the 1930s there was a young man in California who worked in a lumberyard. His name was Dawson Trotman. Dawson had a passion to lead people to Christ, so he became an active soul-winner. He witnessed to everyone he met. One night he was hitchhiking and was picked up by a guy who was constantly cursing and had a bad attitude. Dawson Trotman began to share the Gospel with him, and in the course of the conversation, they both realized Dawson had supposedly led the driver to Christ a year earlier. But the man hadn’t grown spiritually. That had a huge impact on Dawson Trotman, so he started focusing on helping young Christians grow into maturity.

There was a naval base nearby and some of the sailors attended his church. He invited them into his home and started teaching them scripture memory and Bible study. These sailors boarded ships and carried the same plan to others. Soon, there were thousands of sailors who were training Christians on hundreds of ships. The Navigators were born.

One of the teaching tools Dawson used was called God's Word in Hand. He would use a person's hand to illustrate how we connect, or get a grip on God's Word. It's so easy that I've been teaching it for many years. You can draw a hand on your paper and fill in these words. First, hold up your right hand with the palm facing you. The little finger represents HEARING God's Word. That's the most basic way you are exposed. And that's good because "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Your ring finger stands for READING God's Word. Once you hear it, you want to read it for yourself. In Revelation 1 we learn that there is a special blessing that comes from reading the Word of God. Your middle finger stands for STUDYING God's Word. That means you carefully consider each word, make notes, and read commentaries. In Acts 17 the Bereans were commended because they diligently compared everything Paul said to the scripture. The forefinger stands for MEMORIZING God's Word. In Deuteronomy 6 God directed His people to put His Word in their hearts and teach them to their children. The Psalmist wrote, "I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You." Your thumb represents MEDITATING on God's Word. That means thinking about God's Word when you lie down at night, and repeating the scriptures over and over in your mind. In Psalm 1, a blessed man is one who meditates on God's Word day and night.

So what kind of a grip do you have on God's Word? If all you do is hear, that's not enough. Jesus said the enemy comes to steal away the Word of God like birds that steal seed on a hard pathway. Even when you read and study, you don't have a very firm grip. But when you memorize and meditate on God's Word, you begin to get a grip. And the palm of your hand represents applying and obeying God's Word.

The only way you can move toward spiritual maturity is to constantly get into the Word of God. Listen to it; read it; study it; memorize it; and meditate on it. If you've been a believer for more than ten years, and you're still a baby Christian, I pray that God will give you a sense of holy dissatisfaction. Why don't you pray a prayer like this today, "God, I'm sorry that I haven't grown as I should in the faith. Please lead me from being fed the milk of your Word. I want to grow stronger by feeding on the solid food that you give us in Your Word." That's a prayer that God will answer!

OUTLINE

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"You are slow to learn." vs. 11

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"You ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you." vs. 12

C. requires a diet of basic truths

"You need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again." vs. 12

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"Who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." vs. 14

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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