

"A Healthy Diet"

By Allan Pole



Theme: Your capacity for input depends largely upon your output.

Text: Hebrews 5:11-14

Here's a thought: Someone has concluded, "Spiritual maturity isn't measured by how high you jump in praise but how straight you walk in obedience."

Today is Mother's Day and I speak with Mom's New King James Version Bible because she instilled within me a love for God's Word. She passed away in 1999 but her influence lives on in me and hopefully in the people that I influence.

As the youngest of four children I often wanted to be part of what my older brothers and sister were doing. I dreamed of being older and more mature. I also recall the conflicts with my parents as they tried to teach me to eat everything on my plate. I still remember refusing to eat yams one supper and being sent to my room.

What does it take to grow and mature? Look at this solid spiritual diet in Hebrews 5:11-14:

11 of whom [Melchizedek] we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. NKJV

There is a time and a place to consume:

Milk



It would be ludicrous to place a T-bone steak in front of a baby. In fact, we would kill a newborn if we tried to feed him solid food. Instead, infants require breast milk or formula with no solids to get them started. Similarly, it would be overwhelming to try to force feed weighty spiritual principles into a new follower of Jesus. Simple nutrition provides a good start for physical and spiritual babies.

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4:

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? NKJV

The church in Corinth appears to have been the most “Charismatic” or “Pentecostal” church in the New Testament. Prophecy, tongues and other gifts of the Spirit were being expressed fully and freely in their meetings. They must have had some exciting gatherings! Ironically, the church in Corinth appears to have been the least mature church in the New Testament. They struggled with envy, strife, divisions and other issues that Paul addresses in his letters to them. Giftedness does not equal maturity. The Corinthians are a prime example and, much to our surprise and disappointment, there are plenty of modern day examples to remind us that giftedness does not equal maturity.

Someone has concluded, “Spiritual maturity isn’t measured by how high you jump in praise but how straight you walk in obedience.”

The Apostle Peter calls us to more in 1 Peter 2:1-3:

1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. NKJV

Do we ever outgrow milk? A grandmother who is 88 can enjoy the taste and

benefits of a tall glass of milk like a girl who is 8. A simple, healthy diet is foundational for anyone physically *and* spiritually. The moment we drift from the basics as a driver, worker, educator, musician or athlete is the moment we are vulnerable and prone to mistakes and decline.

The writer goes on in Hebrews 6:1-3 to list six foundational truths of the Christian life, all of which, by the way, are also foundational to the Jewish faith: repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

The milk of the Word is essential and should never be despised. Let us never drift too far from the fundamentals of the faith.

The Green Bay Packers had been losing for almost ten straight years. They were at the bottom of the standings, and morale was sagging.



Vince Lombardi became the team's head coach and general manager in 1959. Charged with the challenge of turning the franchise around, he began leading practices, inspiring, training and motivating. But at one point in a practice, he just got so frustrated with what was going on with the players that he blew the whistle. "Everybody stop and gather around," he said. Then he knelt down, picked up the pigskin, and said, "Let's start at the beginning. This is a football. These are the yard markers. I'm the coach. You are the players." He went on, in the most elementary of ways, to explain the basics of football (www.joshhunt.com/mail23.htm). He would begin each season by rehearsing these basics.

Success followed as the team mastered the basics. Over his nine years of coaching the Green Bay Packers, his team only finished third once (his first year), and took home a championship five times. In fact, his 1966 team won the first Super Bowl, thrashing the Kansas City Chiefs 35-10 (www.dunhamandcompany.com/blog/gentlemen-this-is-a-football).

The Vince Lombardi Trophy is the trophy awarded each year to the winning team of the National Football League's championship game, the Super Bowl.

Every now and then, it is good to get back to basics. If we continue to practice them we will finish well.

Do you have a good understanding of the basic truths of the Bible? If no, I invite you to talk with me. If yes, are you helping others to understand the basic truths of the Bible?

There is a time and a place to consume:

Milk

Solid Food



We would leave an adult seriously undernourished if we fed them only milk. What is adequate at the beginning of life becomes inadequate as a person grows and develops. It seems that only yesterday our children were toddlers and now they are in their twenties! Their diets are radically different now than when they were newborns.

The writer of Hebrews 5:11 charges the readers with being dull of hearing. This Greek word translated “dull” literally means “lazy, sluggish or slothful.” Their spiritual hardness of hearing was not the result of a birth defect, injury or sickness but was the result of willful disobedience and neglect.

Jesus had asked a Samaritan woman for a drink and initiated quite a thought-provoking conversation with her in John chapter 4. Time was slipping by and the disciples urged Him to eat but Jesus replied in John 4:32, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” While most people are preoccupied with what we shall eat and wear and where we shall live, Jesus calls us to focus on the eternal kingdom of God (Matthew 6:31-34). Obviously, Jesus ate, drank and slept to live for 33 years as a human being. Physically, He did not live on “fresh air and sunshine”. However, His call was to accomplish a heavenly mission here on earth. He continues to call His people to live with our eyes focused not on earthly matters but on the King and His kingdom.

Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. “Trained” or “exercised” comes from the Greek verb, “gumnazo,” and from this comes the English word “gymnasium”. I almost get hot, sweaty and thirsty just thinking about the gym. Mature people train or exercise so much they need more spiritual calories than milk can provide. Like finely tuned athletes who need the balance of training, nourishment and rest,

so fruitful followers of Jesus need the balance of time with God, active obedience and rest.

Maturity develops as we learn to distinguish good from evil. This flies in the face of a culture where tolerance and moral vagueness is valued highly. Blessed is the one who maintains high standards and firm convictions while loving, accepting and forgiving others.

What do we think of when we hear about “the meat of the Word?” Does it mean the teachings we hear or the books we read must be full of big words? No, solid food brings solid expectations, calling the one eating it to shoulder more responsibility. It is totally normal for a one-year-old to wear a diaper and to depend upon someone else to change him. It would be tragic if a *twenty-one-year-old* was still wearing a diaper and depending upon someone else to change him. A newborn has no responsibilities in the house but an adult has *many* responsibilities in the house. The meat of the Word requires the one eating it to digest it and to use it. The meat of the Word calls us to live in loving obedience to Jesus Christ.

These are taken from real resumes and cover letters, and were printed in "Fortune" Magazine:

"Am a perfectionist and rarely if ever forget details."

"The company made me a scapegoat, just like my three previous employers."

"Reason for leaving last job: maturity leave."

“Use it or lose it” applies to anything we receive from the Lord. We certainly see this in everyday life from our childhood to senior years. Unless we practice and use the skills we learn in our music lessons we will not advance. Unless we speak a new language that we learned we will soon forget the vocabulary. Likewise, we grow what God gives to us not by neglecting or hiding it but by using, giving and investing it.

A mature follower of Jesus is not necessarily a gifted teacher. Neither is a gifted teacher necessarily a mature follower of Jesus. A mature follower is able to impart who they are and what they believe to others by their life and by their words (2 Timothy 2:2).

Jesus uses this word picture in Matthew 7:24-27:

24 Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And

great was its fall." NKJV

Maturity is not measured by what you know. Maturity is measured by what you *do* with what you know. If maturity was measured by what we know then the North American church would be amongst the most mature in the world and in history. When you consider our resources and the opportunities for learning we have, people in developing countries could easily conclude, "You are so advanced!" Technologically, we *are* advanced in North America but are we advanced spiritually? I have had enough exposure to what the Lord is doing in other parts of the world to say we are not advanced spiritually.

I remember thinking in the early eighties when I was studying the Book of Romans in Bible school, "Al, do you realize that you are becoming more accountable as you learn more and know more?" This question rattled me and left me with two options: either I can stop learning and supposedly maintain a plateau of accountability or I can apply what I learn and accept the responsibility and accountability that come with it. Is ignorance really bliss when it comes to following Jesus? Should we avoid knowing more about Him and His ways? It sounds silly to ask it this way but maybe this is what many North American Christians think but don't dare to verbalize.

Where is the breakdown, then? Is it knowing what to do or doing what we know? I have discovered there is often a *big* gap between knowing what to do and doing what we know. As one who loves to study and teach God's Word I am not saying that we should avoid reading, learning and studying. I *am* saying that we should remind ourselves and one another that reading, learning and studying is not an end in itself. Instead, these disciplines should lead to greater love for the Lord and for one another. This greater love is not merely an idea or theory but is evident in the character and fruit that results.

Jesus gets right to the point in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." NKJV

Jesus does *not* say, "If you love me you will read the Bible, go to church, give more and help little old ladies cross the road." As fine as all these activities are, if this is how we gauge love for the Lord and spiritual maturity then we have missed the point. To follow Jesus is not simply to check off boxes beside various good deeds or religious activities. Maturity starts with a heart that is surrendered and obedient to Christ. Faith starts with a changed heart and ends with good works that spring from abiding in Christ and obeying Christ.

Will you spend time with the Lord and His Word each day to talk with Him and to hear His voice? Will you commit to doing and saying what He asks you to do and say?

There is a time and a place to consume:

Milk **Solid Food**

Your capacity for input depends largely upon your output.

