

Life Together, Are We Maturing? 9/11/22 Hebrews 5:11-6:1

Pastor Terry and I are tag teaming a four-week September series called **Life Together**, a series about practicing Christian community. Each of the next three weeks we are also leading this conversation downstairs in our Christian Ed classes to discuss how to apply these messages in our lives. The key question in this series is what makes Christian community distinct from a fraternity, country club, neighborhood or the YMCA? The answer is Christ, our older brother who through the gospel story, brings peace with God the father, and takes strangers and makes them family. This is why the most accurate description of what is happening on Sundays is not listening to a lecture, not a Christian concert, not children's program...It's a family gathering. As imperfectly as we do that...but when you are here, your family. Today we are asking the Question: **Are we maturing one another?**

Turn with me to Hebrews 5. The church addressed in this book is a condition some of us may be familiar with... we like to call it **faith fatigue**. These were Jewish people who came to faith in Jesus as their Messiah and received the gospel with joy and power, they were maturing in their faith. But their conversion was decades ago, and lately they were losing their focus, losing their passion, they were dealing with the sufferings of life, spiritual numbness was setting in among some of their members, who were showing up less and less to the Sunday family gatherings.

To what degree does faith fatigue describe you? Are you feeling spiritually stuck and distracted? If that is you, even partially you, Hebrews is a book for you to prayerfully and slowly read, asking the Spirit to speak to you afresh through it. We are just studying a few glimpses of the book, but throughout the letter the writer gives us two antidotes to faith fatigue- **#1 Seeing and savoring the infinite supremacy of Jesus Christ above all else**. But the second antidote to faith fatigue, and this is really our focus for the series: **#2 Life together in Christian Community**. Throughout the book the author says, this phrase "See to it that." This was a communal challenge to all the family members to look after one another. In other words, the antidote to faith fatigue is a truly caring community encouraging, challenging, supporting, teaching you to do the #1 thing: see and savor the infinite supremacy of Jesus Christ above everything else. So this morning we are going to see the **Problem with Faith Fatigue and how to Progress toward Maturity**.

Hebrews 5 11 *There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen.*

12 *You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food.*

13 *For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. 14 Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.*

Now I don't know about you, but where I'm from: them's fightin' words. The writer just called the members of this church a bunch of babies! Now, to be fair, I like babies. Babies are cute and cuddly. And, especially with your first, everything they do is amazing. When Nathan was born, my mom would say, "Oh look he held up his head! I don't think they are supposed to be able to do that yet!" If you listened to my mom you would have thought we were going to have a child prodigy. And we expect babies to act like babies. They are vulnerable. You need to change their diapers. You need to use a pee-pee teepee, because they can't control their bodily functions. I can finally tell a story about one of our boys because my wife and kids, and the whole student ministry are at the Fall retreat today but you all have to promise me you won't tell, it's our secret. When one of our boys was an infant, we were up on the boardwalk at OCNJ, and my dad is walking with him in the baby Björn, and we all went into a gelato shop, and suddenly there was...shall we say... an explosive event...this explosive event happened all over the floor. There were gasps and people cleared out like a bomb went off. And now every year we walk up on the boardwalk we say, hey Nathan, do you remember that spot? Do you need to use the bathroom? We expect accidents like this from 3-month-olds, not from 30-year-olds. A 6-month-old is drinking from a bottle it's cute, if a 60-year-old is? Not so cute.

Imagine if you went into a fancy restaurant and you noticed that everyone in there was drinking milk out of large baby bottles.¹ Men in suits, women in dresses, happy couples gazing into each other's eyes, sucking milk from a big Dr. Browns baby bottle. And you ask for a menu, and the entire menu is milk. Cow's milk, soy milk, high end, Non-GMO grass fed, free-range goat's milk, hemp milk...which is a non-dairy milk made out of rope I guess. Something's amiss. This would be weird even in Portland, Oregon! You get the picture? This is what is going on spiritually among this church.

Notice he's not talking about brand new Christians, that would be normal and expected. **12 You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word.** This is a portrait of spiritual regression back to infancy. They are like Benjamin Button, aging in reverse. It's not cute, it's a sickness. It's a tragic disease that is spreading in the life of a church.

How does it happen that adults Christians need to go back to their ABCs. Is there an intellectual problem? A literacy problem? A memory issue? No, this doesn't have anything to do with their intellect. I know mature believers who never graduated high school who discern more about the deep realities of the gospel and can teach others about living the Christian life better than Ph.D. seminary professors. So what is the problem? **11 There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen.** In the train of thought, the writer was going deeper into the reality of what it means that Jesus is our ultimate High Priest. And he sort of hits the e-brake in the middle of that teaching to say...I can't even go any further down this road, not because of your mental IQ but because of your spiritual IQ- You aren't listening. He calls them "dull". This word was originally used to describe **male lions [Picture]** who can develop a form of neuropathy in their legs from laziness.

¹ Thanks to Alistair Begg who gave a similar illustration.

All the female lions would do all the work for them, all the hunting, care of the children, while they watched football and drank beer. They get so numb and feeble that they could no longer run and would end up being taken out by other predators or a rival. This is the image- spiritual numbness, born out of spiritual laziness to the point where their spiritual understanding, their acuity, their passion and desires were fatigued. And it had another result. ¹³ *For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right.* Not only did they revert in their passion and spiritual understanding, but in their practice. They no longer knew how to live out the Christian life. When facing suffering and trials they were reverting back to fear and anxiety instead of courage and peace. When dealing with temptation they were giving in instead of standing firm. Instead of living out the spiritual disciplines they were getting distracted and developing bad habits. Bad decision after bad decision. Does any of this feel familiar to you?

We somehow have this notion in the Christian life that once we learn a certain amount about the Bible, once we reach a certain place spiritually, we can sort of plateau. You know we can sort of coast in the Christian life and go through the motions and go into maintenance mode. That's not what happens. There is no neutral in the Christian life. You are either moving forward or you are sliding backward. You are either heading toward spiritual adulthood, or you are moving back toward infancy.

This is faith fatigue. This is reverting back to spiritual infancy, and it is a serious problem for an individual. But this can also happen to an entire church if left unchecked...like a disease of spiritual laziness that spreads among the members...we can get distracted corporately by things that really don't matter, that really don't have to do with our mission of introducing people to Jesus and helping them follow him. This is a warning, it's a wake up call. Being called a baby is offensive. But wounds from a friend can be trusted. There is hope for you baby Christian! At the end of a rather lengthy warning, the writer of Hebrews says in ^{6:9} *Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case.* The wonderful news about our savior, he is full of mercy and kindness. His favor is toward us. He doesn't give up on us or leave us where we are. The Spirit can revive you, if you are willing, and wean you off the bottle and onto solid food again. If you are numb, if you are experiencing signs of reverting back to infancy, there is good news!

How to Progress from Infancy to Christian Maturity.

The solution to this infancy problem is NOT- go fix yourself. The solution is found in Christian community. At the end of this warning against spiritual infancy, the writer gives them two communal commands for their maturity. Hebrews 6:10-12

#1 Diligently Help Each Other Mature

¹⁰ *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.*

¹¹ *We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized.* Notice he encourages their work to help their fellow Christian family. God

sees and rewards that work. How were the helping their brothers and sisters? Hebrews 3:12-13 by making sure none of them were falling away from the faith, by encouraging them in the faith. Hebrews 10:24-25 spurring one another on toward love and good deeds, encouraging them to meet together frequently. Verse 34- sharing in the suffering of those who were going through particularly hard times. Life together- when you help your family you are showing that you love me, God says. Then he says Each of you diligently help each other. Not just the pastors, not just the deacons, not just the teachers. We all have a spiritual responsibility for one another, no brother or sister left behind.

[Blank Slide] A few years ago, one of our members had his life turned upside down, let's call him Mark. After decades of marriage, his wife decided she no longer wanted to be married to him, and moved out of the house...you can imagine the upheaval, especially with young children. If you have been through similar experiences you know the fear, disillusionment, anger, shame that comes. The family disappeared from church. But a fellow member Mark knew from church noticed as well as others that they stopped seeing Mark's family in church. And so his friend reached out to him, and said- I haven't seen you in a while, is everything OK? Mark, kind of blew it off, "Yeah, everything's fine, just been busy." But it was the spark he needed, and eventually he went back to that friend and got honest with him. So the fellow member and I began to help him and walk through this valley of life together. We began encouraging him to avoid bitterness and anger. To soften his heart, to listen to God's voice of what to do next, to come back into fellowship at church so that he can hear God's voice. Slowly but surely, the Spirit began to soften his heart. He was back in church again. He began to see the areas of his own immaturity that contributed to the state of their marriage. He began to see that he wasn't investing in his marriage and his family like he was called to do as the leader. He learned to forgive his wife. I have witnessed a transformation in his spirit, in his role as a father, in his hunger for the Word, in his humility and prayer life. On several occasions I have sent other men going through hard times his way. This is how the church is supposed to function. It's not an event we go to on a weekend. It's a family, and you are responsible to help each other.

Let me give you just one practice of diligence that if everyone did it, it would make an enormous impact. **Make Sundays about what you give not just what you get.** What if instead of just asking what did you get out of Sunday? What did you get out of the lesson? What did you get out of the sermon? The worship? What did you give to your family today? Before you come into church on Sundays- Ask the Spirit to direct you to someone who you can help? Who you can encourage. Are you coming in just thinking about yourself? Who is standing by themselves? Is there someone who looks new you can welcome? Is there a friend you can ask, how are you really doing? Is there something you can pray for? Who haven't you seen in a while that you can reach out to?

#2 Imitate the Spiritually Mature

¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

We think of imitation in negative terms. As somehow being inauthentically ourselves. I'm an original...That's not how the Bible sees it. The Bible sees everyone as imitators. We are either imitating the world, or we are imitating Christ and those who follow him. The Biblical understanding of imitation is to become a student of how the Spiritually mature live. Watch what habits are in their lives, how they respond to challenge, how they treat others, the words that come out of their mouths, what their marriage, family, how they live out singleness and manage their money. At a conference, I once heard a Chinese pastor who was responsible for planting literally 1000s of house churches throughout China talk about his philosophy of discipleship. His talk was not recorded nor was he named for his protection. The person who interviewed him asked him something about how he thinks about how his church makes disciples. I'll never forget what he said. The spiritually immature watch the spiritually mature and do what they do. We teach them something, then we help them practice that truth together, we encourage each other and help each other and correct each other until all the members have sufficiently developed that skill or discipline or principle. Then we teach them something new." That's it. There something to that. Mentoring.

One practice: **Find a mentor or be a mentor.** We overcomplicate mentoring. Mentoring- get coffee. Have someone over to your house. Ask them about their life, marriage, etc. If you are a spiritual infant, watch a spiritual teen and do what they do. If you are a spiritual teen, watch a spiritual adult and do what they do. And if you think you are a spiritual adult, but you don't have anyone you are mentoring, pouring into and helping to mature? You may want to evaluate whether that is true. Mary does this.

Where do I find these people? Where do I find mentors, mentees, where do I find people to encourage me and to encourage and help grow? You need to get close enough to other people's lives to see what to imitate, or if they are worthy to imitate. Today is the **connect fair**. Get into a small group. Also **friendship circle**