

## Introduction

In the past few months, we have had three grandchildren born. They were our sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth grandchildren. I was speaking with one of my daughters and I asked how often she was having to feed at night. She responded by saying that she has to feed every two hours. Mothers need grace to do what they do. They work around the clock, and they lay their lives down every day for their husband and children. We need to encourage, support, honor, and pray for them for the high calling on their lives. These new grandchildren are totally dependent on others to feed them. They cannot prepare meals, and they cannot feed themselves. They are infants and we do not expect them to feed themselves. We know that when we bring a child into the world, it is our responsibility to take care of that child and raise him up to be a responsible adult. If that child grows up and is now twenty-five years old, and still needs someone to warm up a bottle and feed him, there is something seriously wrong. If he needs someone to open up a jar of Gerber's apple sauce, and feed him, there is a problem. We expect adults to be able to feed themselves.

That is the context of our passage today. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Our title today is that a Mature Believer Has a Mature Diet.

(Heb 5:12) "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food."

The Christians that the writer has addressed are adults who are still needing milk and Gerber's Apple Sauce. They are still needing others to feed them. They have not learned to feed themselves, and they are not accustomed to eating solid food. By this time, they should be feeding others, and yet they need people to feed them. The writer of Hebrews saw a problem in the church, a lack of maturity, and he is addressing the problem. If we looked at the church today, we would find the same problem. Many believers have been in church for many years, and yet they are not able to feed themselves. They still need the elementary principles of the oracles of God; they still need milk, not solid food. They have not learned to eat solid food. Because they need others to feed them, they are not able to feed others. The passage is very relevant to the church today.

In our passage there are several characteristics of infants or baby Christians. First, they were not teaching others, and by this time in their spiritual life, they should have been teaching others. Second, they needed someone to teach them. Third, they needed milk, not solid food. We draw from the passage that a mature believer is teaching and serving others. Second, a mature believer is not dependent on others for spiritual nourishment. Third, a mature believer eats solid food; he has trained his senses to discern good and evil and can handle solid food.

## Mature Believer Has a Mature Diet

1. Teaches others (Heb 5:11-14)
2. Not dependent on others for spiritual nourishment (Heb 5:11-14)
3. Eats Solid Food (Heb 5:11-14)

(Heb 5:11–14) “Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. {12} For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary 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 not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. {14} But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

### 1. Teaches Others (Heb 5:12)

Just as a newborn baby is not expected to take care of others, newborn Christians are not expected to teach others. A newborn baby is only concerned about himself, and getting his needs met. If he is hungry, he will cry and let you know about it. However, as a child grows, he should become more self-sufficient and be able to do more things himself. As the child matures, we expect him to become more responsible and to serve others. In our passage, there has been sufficient time for these believers to have become teachers. Instead of teaching and helping others, they were still needing others to teach them.

(Heb 5:12) “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

How long of a time is it for someone to be expected to teach others? I think it will vary from one person to another. The apostle Paul began teaching others in Damascus immediately after being saved. People hearing Paul were amazed, and he was confounding the Jews by proving that Jesus is the Christ. Paul had been trained as a Pharisee and had studied under Gamaliel, one of the strictest Pharisees. Paul knew the Scriptures very well, and could start teaching very quickly. However, before he was released into an elder role at Antioch, he had gone home to Tarsus for fourteen years. He was growing and maturing in the Lord. God was preparing and seasoning him for the ministry he was being called to.

(Ac 9:19–22) “and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, {20} and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” {21} All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and *who* had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” {22} But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.”

Most believers today do not have that same background as Paul. As a Pharisee, Paul probably had memorized the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He probably had much more than that memorized, so he had an incredible background, which most of us do not have. In George Barna’s published findings, the statistics show that most pastors and congregants do not have a Biblical worldview. In fact, 63% of senior pastors do not have a Biblical worldview. Of people in the church that consider themselves to be Christians, only 6% of them have a Biblical worldview. We are not in a position to become teachers. The writer of Hebrews said that they have need again for someone to teach them the elementary principles of the oracles of God. They needed to get a firm grasp of the basics, the elementary principles of the oracles of God. Most believers today are in the same boat; they do not know the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and they need someone to teach them the basics.

What are these elementary teachings? A few verses later, the author said, “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.” There are six elementary or foundation teachings given that believers need to understand. I believe there are many other foundational teachings needed, and this list of six is not exclusive. I have found that very few in the church today have a grasp of these foundational teachings. God wants us to grasp and understand these, and then press on to maturity.

(Heb 6:1–2) “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, {2} of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.”

A baby thinks only about getting his own needs met. An immature Christian also thinks only about getting his needs met. A mature believer is no longer just thinking about himself, but is concerned about others. He does not just look out for his own interests, but he looks out for the interests of others. He is not selfish, but is selfless. A mature believer has become a servant and lays down his life for others. Not everybody is going to have a teaching ministry. Some are going to have the gift of helps, or service, or giving, or prophecy, and they will be using their gifts to build up others in the body. One of the signs of maturity is our service in the body of Christ. It is not the only characteristic, but it is one of many signs of spiritual maturity.

(Php 2:4) “do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

(1 Pe 4:10) “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

In addition to the knowledge of the scriptures, and a mature attitude of serving others, there are some study and teaching skills that are very helpful in teaching others. I still remember the first group Bible study that I taught. It was at the golfer’s weekly Bible study, and I was asked to teach. I taught on spiritual gifts, and did a poor job. I felt like never teaching again. Fortunately, God brought several mentors into my life, and they taught me how to study and put together a message. They helped equip me to do the things that God called me to do.

## 2. **Not dependent on others for spiritual food** (Heb 5:12)

The second characteristic of a mature believer is that he is not dependent on others for spiritual food. A baby needs milk, not solid food, and he is dependent on others to feed him. God tells them, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need **again** for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.” This would not be the first time they were taught these principles; they had already been taught these principles. They needed again to be taught these elementary principles. Unfortunately, many in the church have never been taught these elementary and foundational principles; they need to be taught for the first time.

(Heb 5:12) “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

In verse eleven, we are told why they needed to be taught again. They had been taught, but they had not grown and matured after hearing it. Something has hindered their spiritual growth; they had become dull of hearing. The Greek word for dull that is used is *nothros* (Strong's G3576), which means sluggish, slow, or dull. Sluggishness is something that will hinder us from pressing on to maturity.

(Heb 5:11) "Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."

The term, "dull of hearing" is something that mentioned a number of times. In the book of Isaiah, the Lord asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah answered in his vision, "Here am I. Send me!" Then, the Lord tells Isaiah, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." When we are told of being dull of hearing, it means that we have heard something over and over and have not understood it. We are not grasping and learning the things that are being presented.

(Is 6:8-10) "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" {9} He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' {10} "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed."

There are a number of reasons that we can become dull of hearing. One reason is that we don't pay attention to it. We don't listen intently and respond to it. Many years ago we lived in Acworth, Georgia, and we were close enough to the railroad tracks that ran through the town to hear the train whistles blow. For a while we heard them, but over time, we did not even notice them. We had tuned them out, and become dull of hearing. Sometimes, we hear something and don't pay attention. Perhaps we think we have heard it before and already know it. Perhaps it is something we are not particularly interested in. For whatever reason, we can tune it out, and become dull of hearing.

We can become dull of hearing by not gaining understanding. We may need to ask ourself some questions to help us understand. After hearing a message, we may need to go back and study the passage on our own. That is what the Bereans did. In Acts 17:11, Luke recorded that the Bereans "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." They were not dull of hearing; they heard with great eagerness. They did not just accept things; they went back and examined or studied the Scriptures to make sure what they heard was correct.

(Ac 17:11) "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so."

After reading a passage of Scripture in our quiet times, we may need to spend some additional time meditating and praying about the passage. Hearing a message is not an item on our "to do" list that we cross off after the service is over. To avoid being dull, we must be engaged in what we are reading. We must read for understanding. It may mean that we look up the Hebrew and Greek words. It may mean that we read the passage in several different translations. It may mean

that we stop and think about a verse before going on to the rest of our reading. It may mean that we talk to the Holy Spirit about what we are reading. It may mean that we ask a pastor or other leader about the meaning. It may mean that we spend time praying that passage for ourselves and for others. Ultimately, we must respond and apply the message to our lives. We must be doers of the word, not merely hearers, who delude themselves.

(Jas 1:22) “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

This concept of being dull of hearing was well known. In Matthew 13:10-17, the disciples asked Jesus why He was speaking to the people in parables. He answered that they had been granted to know the mysteries, but to them it has not been granted. Then, he quoted Isaiah 6:8-10 to His disciples. The disciples heard the same parables and also did not understand. But they went to Jesus and asked Him to explain the parables to them. When we don't understand something, we need to ask questions and try to gain understanding, or we run the risk of becoming dull of hearing. Understanding was not enough. Jesus said that they would understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them. We must act on the things that we learn or we can become dull of hearing. Small group ministry is vitally important for our spiritual growth, because it allows people to ask questions and gain understanding. Teaching is great, but the ability to ask questions and get clarification and better understanding is vitally important.

(Matt 13:10-16) “And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” {11} Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted... {15} For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.””

How do we become dull of hearing? We become dull by not listening intently. We become dull by not asking questions to gain understanding. We become dull by not applying the scriptures in our lives. After James wrote that we must be doers of the word, and not merely hearers, he expounded on the idea. He said, “For if someone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” If we do not apply the scriptures in our lives, we forget them, and we become dull of heart. The remedy is to look intently at the scriptures. Second, we must apply them in our lives. A third remedy is to begin to teach others. When we teach others, it causes us to learn the principles at an even deeper level.

(Jas 1:23–25) “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; {24} for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. {25} But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

Mature believers do not need to be taught the basics again. It is great to review the foundational teachings, as we are all prone to forget things. Mature believers are committed to spending time in the word of God and studying the scriptures. They have learned that man does not live by

bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. They have learned that meditating on the word day and night keeps us healthy and helps us to bear fruit.

(Dt 8:3) “He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”

(Ps 1:2–3) “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. {3} He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”

Before moving on I want to share a story that gives balance to this. One day when I was serving as a chaplain at the Cobb County Adult Detention Center, one of the men told me that he did not need me to teach him any longer. He had the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and did not need others to teach him. He quoted 1 John 2:27, “As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you.” Spiritually mature people do not need people to feed them, but they are humble enough to receive and learn from others. It is arrogant to think that we cannot learn from others, or do not need to listen to their teachings. We need apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the church. Everyone can benefit from their ministries, including those who are mature. Our passage in Hebrews and this passage in 1 John are not saying that we don’t need any instruction from others. Those passages are saying that we need to get into the word and learn to receive from God, and not be solely dependent on others to feed us.

(1 Jn 2:27) “As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

### 3. **Eats Solid Food** (Heb 5:12-14)

After stating that by this time they ought to be teachers, he states that they needed milk, not solid food. Then, he said, “For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” Mature believers eat solid food.

(Heb 5:12–14) “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary 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 not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. {14} But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

Many people have not learned how to eat solid food. They have not learned how to study, and they have not trained themselves to discern good and evil. Many people have never learned how to study the word of God for themselves. People read daily devotionals, where someone else has studied the passage, and has broken it down into a simple thought. They are giving milk to the readers. The church needs to get into the word, and learn to study passages on their own. The church needs to become mature and eat solid food.

God has called me to be a teacher, and as a teacher, my job is not just to teach, but to equip the saints in the area of teaching. God has called me to teach you believers how to study and teach

the word. While I was still playing professional golf, I was putting on seminars for fathers, teaching them how to teach their children the word of God. I have put on teaching seminars for many different churches. In every church that I have been involved in for the past thirty-eight years, I have disciplined men in word ministry.

Shortly after we started the Connection Church, I taught two different courses on preaching. The first course was based on Haddon Robinson's book, *Biblical Preaching*. The second course was based on a book that I wrote, *Solomon's Seven Principles of Teaching*. We used Zoom, so I was able to include my friend, Paul Barnett, who lived in Houston. We were also able to include five pastors from the Philippines. I showed them how to get the main idea of a passage, and then how to tie the main point to all the supporting points, or complements. I taught them how to give an opening to a message. I taught them how to illustrate a passage. There are lots of different types of illustrations, and depending on what you are trying to accomplish in the message, you would want to use different types of illustrations. I taught them how to give applications. I find that it is helpful to ask the Holy Spirit for illustrations and applications. I have also found that many illustrations and applications come out of meditating on a passage. I want people to be doers of the word, not just hearers. I want to help people grow, mature, and eat solid food.

There are many different study methods that can be used. I like the subject complement method. In this method, one must identify the main idea of the passage. Then, he must identify what the passage says about the main idea, which are the complements. Once the subject and complements have been identified, the outline of the passage is essentially done. Our job, as students of the Bible, is to accurately determine what God is saying in a passage, and what applications there are for our life.

Here are two examples of the subject/complement method. The first example is a secular one from a line in the song, *My Fair Lady*. It says, "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain." The subject is where it rains in Spain. The complement is that it rains mainly in the plain.

A second example is from Psalm 150. We are exhorted to praise God twelve times in this short psalm. It is easy to see that the subject is praising God. As we look closer at the psalm, we see in verse one that we are told **where** to praise God. In verse two, we are told **what** to praise God for. We are to praise Him for His mighty deeds and for His excellent greatness. In verses three through five, we are told **how** to praise Him. We praise Him with musical instruments and dancing. In verse six, we are told **who** should praise the Lord. Everything that has breath should praise the Lord. So, when we look at the subject, it is about four considerations to praising God.

(Ps 150:1–6) "Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. {2} Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. {3} Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. {4} Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. {5} Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals. {6} Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"

<b>Subject</b>	What Are Four Considerations to Praising God?
<b>Complements</b>	1. Where should we praise God?
	2. What should we praise God for?
	3. How should we praise God?
	4. Who should praise God?

Rick Warren wrote a book called, Bible Study Methods. He gives twelve different methods of studying the Bible. Kay Arthur wrote a book, How To Study Your Bible, and it is outstanding. I highly recommend her book. Her method is called Inductive Bible Study. Haddon Robinson has several books on preaching, and the one that I have used is called Biblical Preaching. He teaches the subject complement method, which is my favorite method.

In addition to knowing how to break down a passage to study it, you need to have a good set of Bible tools. One of the most important tools is a concordance. The Strong's Concordance will tell you the Hebrew or Greek word that is used, the definition and the root word(s) that it comes from, and all the occurrences it is used. In addition to a concordance, a Bible Dictionary is very helpful. Lexicons help go deeper into the meanings of words, but some of them require Greek or Hebrew backgrounds to use them. A Bible atlas is also a valuable tool. Commentaries are also helpful, but I encourage people to do their own study before going to a commentary. Some commentaries give excellent background, historical, and cultural information. These can be very helpful in understanding the context and meaning of a passage. Bible Encyclopedias are also very good at learning about the historical and cultural information.

When the Lord told me to leave professional golf and plant a church, He also told me to trade in my old tools for new tools. I sold most of my golf equipment and used the money to buy a library full of resource books. I went to Thurlough Switzer, a respected Bible teacher, and asked him to help me develop a list of resources to buy, and I followed his recommendations when I purchased my books. Most of my resources are on my computer now, but I still use some of the hard copies in my library.

The goal is not to have a nice library; it is to learn how to study. The goal is to learn to break down a passage and understand what the main idea is, and what it says about the main idea. The goal is to rightly divide the word of God. The goal is to regularly study the word, and through practice train your senses to discern good and evil. The goal is to eat meat, and to press on to spiritual maturity.

If you want to learn how to study the Bible, let me know and I will be delighted to work with you. Like Paul, I want to present every man complete in Christ, and learning to study the scriptures is something that will help you become complete in Christ.

### **Conclusion and Applications**

The passage in Hebrews is an exhortation to the church to press on to maturity. After stating that they were dull of hearing, immature, needing others to teach them, and needing milk, not meat, he exhorts them to press on to maturity. We read, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity." God wants the church to press on to maturity. He wants all of us to be complete. There is a decision to be made. Are we going to be dull of hearing, immature, needing others to feed us, and needing milk, or are we going to press on to maturity?

(Heb 6:1) "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,"



In Joshua 24:15, Joshua gave the tribes of Israel a choice of whether they were going to serve God or not. Then, he stated, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Are you going to move on or stay where you are? I encourage you to determine in your hearts to press on.

(Jos 24:15) “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

How are you going to press on to maturity? Do you have a handle on the six foundational teachings that are given? If not, are you going to study those teachings so that you can press on? Are there hindrances in your growing process? Have you become dull of hearing? Do you need to ask questions to gain understanding? Do you need to look intently at the scripture, and take time to study the passage yourself? Do you need to work on applying the scriptures in your life? Do you need to be more disciplined and set aside time to study the scriptures?

Do you need training in how to study the scriptures? What are the hindrances that keep you from pressing on to maturity? Identify the hindrances, and then develop a plan to overcome any hindrances so that you can press on to maturity.

Are you teaching others? Do you have opportunities to teach others? Identify the opportunities that you have, and take advantage of them. Ask God to give you opportunities. God wants many of you to be teachers. Teaching others is a great way of helping each of you press on to maturity.

I will close with a testimony about teaching others. In the mid 80's, we went camping in Georgia, and there was a robin's nest right by our campsite. I watched the mother and father robin go back and forth all day long bringing food to their babies. When the mother would leave, the father would stay at the nest. When the mother came back with food, the father would leave and go find food. They tag-teamed it all day and fed their babies. As I was sitting there watching them, the Holy Spirit told me that if I would feed my babies the word of God, He would develop my teaching gift. God was showing me the path to becoming more mature and how to develop my teaching gift. When we returned home to Orlando, I began having teaching times every morning with our children. And God did exactly what He said He would do; He developed my teaching skills. Then, He gave me many opportunities to teach others.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father God, we want to be a church of mature believers. We want to be able to feed ourselves, eat meat, and not live on milk. We want to be able to feed and teach others. Help us to learn the elementary teachings. Help us to understand and retain the things that we are taught. We do not want to be dull of hearing, so help us to listen intently, ask questions, and apply what we learn. Help us to press on to maturity. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Introduction** (Heb 5:11-14)

1. **Teaches Others** (Heb 5:12, Ac 9:19–22, Heb 6:1–2, Php 2:4, 1 Pe 4:10)
2. **Not dependent on others for spiritual food** (Heb 5:11-12, Is 6:8-10, Ac 17:11, Jas 1:22, Matt 13:10-16, Jas 1:23–25, Dt 8:3, Ps 1:2-3, 1Jn 2:27)
3. **Eats Solid Food** (Heb 5:12-14, Ps 150:1-6)

**Conclusion and Applications** (Heb 6:1, Jos 24:15)