

Babies need special nourishment, as bodies are adjusting to breathing, eating, and swallowing. A baby doesn't question their diet. They eat what they are given. They don't understand how bones, nerve endings, and muscle convert baby food into growth. They accept the gift and eat. It is just like the progress and process of faith.

Paul loved the Corinthian church as a father loves his children. He helped them cut their teeth on the basics of the Gospel but was concerned as they still acted like their unbelieving neighbors. His words sound harsh, but he was confused as to why they weren't ready to give up childish ways.

They were like adults with a drivers' license who don't really know how to drive. Or adults who have children but have no clue how to be parents. They were like politicians who are more interested in keeping their job safe than actually serving all the people they are responsible for. Like a parent, Paul was patient and assertive, reminding them it was time to give up baby food and learn to eat and live like mature people of faith.

Growing up is hard to do! But none of us can eat baby food or take baby steps forever. For twenty years we have had our kids and grandkids stand back to the kitchen wall and with a pencil mark and date how tall they were. Every time they come home, they want to see progress in their growth. In similar fashion, Paul was assessing the growth rate of Corinth, but disturbed by the quarrels and selfishness within the family of faith.

He lamented their actions showing a lack of growing into their faith, as they quarreled like kids in a sandbox, fighting for control rather than seeking to serve. Paul asked if they couldn't love members of their own family, what credibility would they have in reaching out to people they didn't know? It was time for them to grow into their faith.

Some only baptize adults, claiming one can't live a spiritual life until he or she can explain or understand faith. But we, like most, baptize infants, as we understand faith is a gift (like mother's milk!) It isn't something we can create. Just as an infant cannot explain the chemical composition of mother's natural nourishment or why it works but simply accepts that gift of life, so it is with faith! The nourishment and vitality is there, we simply need to allow God's life in us to help us grow and mature.

For that reason, Bible study, prayer, regular worship, and daily ministry are adult nourishments that move us from baby food to more solid meals. They are opportunities to keep maturing in our faith, rather than expecting someone to spoon feed us forever.

Children act out Bible stories. Adults live them out in daily faithfulness. Children memorize commandments. Adults understand how they change daily living. Children learn the Lord's Prayer. Adults understand it is a gift to help us know how and when to pray every day. Children act out the Christmas story. Adults celebrate Christmas daily by letting the joy of Christ change each moment of living. Baby food is good for babies, but not enough for adults. But if we don't leave baby steps behind, it is increasingly difficult to learn what it means to really be an adult.

As we start cutting our teeth on adult approach to faith, we will mature into the lives of servant love and faithful disciples that God has created us to be. Paul complained that adults thought they were grown up because they could read the ingredients of the law – like don't murder -- but hadn't allowed that law to transform their actions into love.

99.99% of people will never kill, but 100% will at one time or another harbor hatred and anger or share words that can destroy a reputation as quickly as a knife cuts flesh. Jesus taught that is destroying God's gift of life, just as surely as is murder! This was a radical concept for many, but simply what God intended from day one.

Pharisees thought they were closer to God because they made sure they tried to keep the letter of the law. But they hadn't taken the intent of the law (love for God and neighbor) into their hearts, and so their living was quite shallow and childlike and empty of the maturity of growth.

How would any conversation about someone else change if you realize Jesus is standing next to you? How would your use of time change if you remember how Jesus spent his time on earth? How might daily living change as we remember WHOSE we are, and HOW we are called to be lights in a world that too often is overwhelmed by the shadows of sin?

None of us are perfect. We will never love and forgive as well as God asks. In that sense, our faith life is often like that of an adolescent, trapped between the world of infant and adult. Until we are reunited in perfect heavenly grace, that is life, for we are still growing up! That is why servant love so important, and the faith Paul wanted his church to grow into.

There comes a time in every life for baby food to end. Some enjoy being spoon fed but need to learn to pick up their own utensils and chew on more adult issues of faith. That is why we speak so often about prayer, meditation, Bible study, the stewardship of God's gifts, and reaching out with Jesus' love. These are the nourishment which miraculously changes us from helpless infants to loving disciples.

The point is not to sit in judgment or wallow in guilt but make certain we are partaking of the adult soul food Jesus offers. It isn't enough to say, "I am not a child," the key is to act with the maturity faith brings.

Children act impulsively and instinctively. Adolescence practice learning from experience and becoming responsible in thought, word, and deed. As adults, we keep building on each lesson of the past and expand our diet of faith so that hearts of love replace knee jerk reactions of selfishness and cries of self-gratification. This was Jesus' loving example of washing feet, healing the sick, and serving rather than seeking to be served.

The toughest thing as a parent is to realize how quickly children grow and move out on their own. In fact, the only role a parent has is to offer the right nourishment of loving guidance so that one day children can be free to live as responsible and productive adults. Faith does the same for us! If Jesus needed time in the wilderness and constantly went away for meditation, reflection, and prayer, it was because baby food wasn't enough. In doing so, he has not only shown us the way, but offers himself as the spiritual nourishment that will mature and strengthen our faith. Accept his help so your growth isn't stunted, and your life becomes the gift He has made it to be. Amen.