

WHAT IS CENTRAL? "TRANSFORMATION IS CENTRAL" HEBREWS 5:11-6:3

We all know what it takes to be physically healthy: eat a healthy diet, exercise at least three times a week, get enough sleep, manage your stress, and if you smoke, stop. Faithfully doing these things leads to better health; neglecting them has the opposite effect. Our physical health isn't static; it's either getting better or getting worse, based in large part on how consistently we engage in these "healthy habits" or how quickly we return to them after getting off track. So, if you're not practicing any of them, pick one and get after it; if you're practicing all of them but one, get after it.

Exercising vigorously three times a week is my biggest challenge—which explains why it's important for me to exercise on Monday. Backsliding on Monday has weeklong implications for me. I'm not likely to exercise *at all* the rest of the week, if I miss on Monday. Perhaps avoiding fast food is your biggest challenge. If so, no fast food for you on Mondays! In a nutshell, the bad news is too much fast food and too little exercise will take a toll on our health; the good news is we can reverse the effects of our backsliding by returning to a healthier lifestyle.

What it takes to be spiritually healthy is analogous: listen to God's Word, come into his presence in prayer, solitude, silence, and worship, connect with others in biblical community, and live missionally. Faithfully doing these things leads to

Always in the Christian life, one either moves forward or slips back.

— Leon Morris

better spiritual health and increasing maturity. Neglecting them has the opposite effect. And like our physical health, our spiritual health isn't static; it's either getting better or getting worse, based in large part on how consistently we engage in these "healthy habits," aka spiritual disciplines. So, if you're not practicing any of them, pick one and get after it; if you're practicing all of them but one, get after it. As one writer says: "Always in the Christian life, one either moves forward or slips back. It is almost impossible to stand still" (Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 12:52).

This Week's Core Competency

Bible Study – I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Spiritual formation is one way to view the process that we all go through to become like Jesus (Ro 8:29)—discipleship and sanctification are other ways. Clearly, the goal of church life is to facilitate the transformation process, but facilitation is made difficult by the fact that quantifying spiritual maturity and identifying the stages in spiritual development, which are both highly desirable, are also both extremely difficult.

Nevertheless, one research project attempted to do those very things. After surveying 5,000 congregants in seven congregations, one research study discovered that people move through the following four-stage spiritual continuum toward maturity: 1) *Exploring Christ*: people in this group believe in God but are unsure about Christ, and faith is not a significant part of their lives; 2) *Growing in Christ*: people in this group have a

cont. pg. 2

personal relationship with Christ, but they are just beginning to learn what it means to be a Christian; 3) *Close to Christ*: people in this group depend on Christ daily for their lives, and they see him as someone who assists them in life; 4) *Christ-Centered*: people in this group identify their relationship with Christ as the most important relationship in their lives, and they subordinate everything to his will and purpose for them.

From there, the researchers went on to identify fifty factors, sorted into four types of *spiritual catalysts*: 1) Spiritual Beliefs and Attitudes; 2) Organized Church Activities; 3) Personal Spiritual Practices; and 4) Spiritual Activities with Others. They were looking for various types of factors that moved people from one stage on the spiritual continuum to the next. Here's what they discovered regarding Personal Spiritual Practices in general and Reflection on Scripture in particular. "Personal spiritual practices are very powerful catalysts" and "Reflection on Scripture is the number one factor across all three movements," namely from Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ, from Growing in Christ to Close to Christ and from Close to Christ to Christ-Centered. Actually, "it is much more influential than any other personal spiritual practice. In fact, for the most advanced segments—Close to Christ and Christ-Centered—it's twice as catalytic as any other factor" (Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Follow Me: What's Next for You?* 41).

From the above findings, it appears that as far as "healthy habits" of spiritual formation are concerned, listening to God's Word is the most impactful over a lifetime. Regular reflective Bible reading and study leads to *progression* in the spiritual life; neglecting it leads to *regression* in the spiritual life.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Cf., another translation

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 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! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6:1 Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

11 On this topic we have much to say and it is difficult to explain, since you have become sluggish in hearing. 12 For though you should in fact be teachers by this time, you need someone to teach you the beginning elements of God's utterances. You have gone back to needing milk, not solid food. 13 For everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced in the message of righteousness, because he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil.

6:1 Therefore we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and move on to maturity, not laying this foundation again: repentance from dead works and faith in God, 2 teaching about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this is what we intend to do, if God permits. (NET)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "this" in v. 11.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 11.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 11.
- * Bracket "no longer try to understand" in v. 11.
- * Circle "elementary" in v. 12, and 6:1.
- * Underline "milk" in vv. 12-13.

- * Double underline "solid food" in vv. 12, 14.
- * Circle "righteousness" in v. 13.
- * Box "therefore" in 6:1.
- * Bracket "acts that lead to death" in v. 2.
- * Circle "cleansing rites" in v. 2.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. To what does "this" (v. 11) refer?
2. Put the *reason* "it is hard" for the writer "to make clear" what he has to say in your own words (v. 11).
3. Verse 12 suggests one of two things is true: either the readers are believers who have *not progressed* spiritually, or they have *regressed* spiritually from an earlier state. Explain which makes more sense to you and why.
4. "Milk" is clearly used *figuratively* in verse 12b. Identify the meaning of the *metaphor* (cf., vv. 12a, 13).
5. Spiritually speaking, are you a *milk* drinker or a *meat* eater? Explain.
6. Describe the *liability* faced by milk drinkers (v. 13).
7. Describe the *training regimen* of the mature that results in their ability to distinguish good from evil (v. 14).
8. Put what moving "beyond the elementary teachings about Christ" entails in your own words.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the place of reflective Bible reading and study as it pertains to spiritual transformation in your own life.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The first Christians were Jews who responded to the preaching of the apostles following the resurrection of Christ. According to the book of Acts, about 3000 believed on the Day of Pentecost (2:41); not long after, the number of men grew to about 5000 (4:4). It was only later that Gentiles were added to the church (10:23-48). The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem and its environs before the destruction of the city in A.D. 70. As a result of their newfound faith in Christ, these Jews were being persecuted by other Jews (7:54-8:3). One author writes, "Those Jews who were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ were 'put out of the synagogue' (John 16:2). They were no longer considered Jews or members of the commonwealth of Israel. They were treated as Gentiles. They were no longer welcomed in the synagogue or in the temple. They also gave up any possibility of employment because they were considered unclean" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith that Endures*, 17). No wonder some of them began to count the cost of their confession and look for a way out. Another writer describes their dilemma this way, "The Hebrew Christians who received this letter were sorely tempted to return to the religion of their fathers. After all, any Jew could travel to Jerusalem and see the temple and the priests ministering at the altar. Here was something real, visible, concrete. When a person is going through persecution, as these Hebrew Christians were, it is much easier to walk by sight than by faith. Some of us have doubted the Lord under much less provocation than these people were enduring" (Warren W. Wiersbe, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:290).

Commentators generally agree that Hebrews 5:11-6:3 introduces a warning against refusing to move on toward spiritual maturity. The writer has much to tell his readers regarding the high priesthood of Jesus "in the order of Melchizedek" (vv. 8-11), but is having difficulty doing so. That difficulty resided neither with him nor with the truth he wanted to share but with his readers. One commentator explains: "His readers 'have become dull of hearing.' The word 'become' indicates that

they were now in a state that previously had not characterized them. There was a time when they had not been dull of hearing, but now they have entered that undesirable spiritual state. His readers, then, are characterized by *regression*, by *moving backward*, and this state makes it difficult for the writer to convey the concept of the superiority of Melchizedek's priestly order over Aaron's. To correct this situation and make it possible for his readers to understand this truth, the writer pauses in his development of the priesthood of Melchizedek to give an extended exhortation. *This is a warning that must be heeded before their regression can be reversed and they can understand, appropriate, and respond to the truth*" (Pentecost, 100, italics added). Another explains the *reason* behind the community's regression. He writes: "Their regression to infancy must represent a quite recent development. It was apparently an attempt to sidestep their responsibility in a world that persecuted them and held them in contempt, but it threatened their integrity. The purpose of 5:11-6:12 is to preserve the community from such aberration by reminding them of what they have experienced and what they possess through the gospel" (William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47a, *Hebrews 1-8*, 135).

In the opening paragraph, the writer suggests that their regression is calculated. "You no longer try to understand," he tells them. They apparently matured to the point that they *could* have and *should* have been teachers, but they reversed course and regressed to the point that they now need to be taught the basics "all over again" (v. 12). Figuratively speaking, they "need milk, not solid food," that is, they need to review their spiritual ABCs before being "taken forward to maturity" (6:1). As spiritual infants, they are not skilled in using the Word to make moral choices; whereas, the spiritually mature through constant use of the Word have trained themselves to make such choices. By way of summary, four things can be said about the readers: "First, they have been believers for an extended period of time. Second, they have been taught sound doctrine in the past. Third, they have not retained or used the truth

they had been taught, so that they need someone to teach them again 'the first principles of the oracles of God.' And fourth, they have reverted from adulthood back to infancy in spiritual things, or have lapsed from maturity back to immaturity" (Pentecost, 101). Too many in the church today are like them.

In the final paragraph, the writer resolves to move beyond the ABCs and forward toward maturity, refusing to lay again the twofold foundation of repentance from sin and faith in God—consisting in instructions about baptisms,

laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgment. All these things were doctrines stressed in Pharisaic Judaism, which may suggest that the "readers were attempting somehow to remain within [or return to] Judaism by emphasizing items held in common between Judaism and Christianity in order to avoid alienating their Jewish friends or relatives" (Donald Hagner, *Hebrews*, NIBC, 87). Yet, it is the writer's conviction that his readers have not regressed to an irreversible state. In spite of their setback, they are still able to go on to maturity.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Heed Scripture's warning against regressing spiritually by moving beyond its elementary teachings about Christ toward spiritual maturity nourished by the solid food it provides.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being most), rank the importance of reflective Bible reading and study to your spiritual formation.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being most), rank the amount of time you spend in reflective Bible reading and study weekly.

Are you willing to commit to at least reading Pastor David's sermon text each week before listening to his message? Explain why or why not.

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 11 **this** "The opening statement . . . refers to the author's declaration in verse 10 concerning the appointment of Christ as a 'high priest in the order of Melchizedek.' Indeed, the author does say a great deal about Christ's Melchizedekian high priesthood when he returns to this topic in chapter 7" (George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 201).

v. 11 **no longer try . . .** Cf., "since you have become dull of hearing" (ESV); "since you have become sluggish in hearing" (NET); "since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen" (NLT). The expression in Gk. is *nothroi tais akoais*. "In the ancient world the first of these words (*nothros*) could mean 'sluggish, dull, dimwit, negligent, lazy.' It was used in extrabiblical literature, for example, of a slave with ears 'stopped up' by laziness, who was thus not obedient instantly to the call of his master. In the sphere of athletics, the word could designate a competitor who was out of shape, lazy, and sluggish. In a Christian inscription from Eumeneia a man who had used his own resources to build a tomb for his sisters calls his older brother, Amianos, 'negligent,' since it was he who had the responsibility to carry out the task and failed to do so. In other words, *nothros* connotes culpable negligence or sluggishness in some aspect of life" (201-202). "The word *become* indicates that they were now in a state that previously had not characterized them. There was a time when they had not been dull of hearing, but now they have entered that undesirable spiritual state. His readers, then, are characterized by *regression*, by *moving backward*, and this state makes it difficult for the writer to convey the concept of the superiority of Melchizedek's priestly order over Aaron's" (Pentecost, 100, italics added).

v. 12 **elementary truths** Cf., "basic principles" (ESV); "first principles" (NKJV); "first lessons" (GNT). The Gk. term [*ta stoicheia*] means "the *rudiments*, the first, simplest, elements of which anything consists: 'the alphabet' of a subject" (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 133). "This word's use in 5:12 is more in line with those places in ancient literature where it refers to the elements of the alphabet or the most basic aspects of education. In line with this interpretation the NEB translates this phrase 'the ABC of God's oracles'" (Guthrie, 202).

vv. 12-13, 14 **milk, solid food** "Milk' stands for elementary instruction in the Christian way. 'Solid food' is, of course, more advanced instruction, the kind of teaching beginners cannot make much of but which is invaluable to those who have made some progress" (Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 12:52). "The use of 'milk' and 'solid food' as metaphors for basic over against advanced teachings were common in the ancient world and apparently were brought over into the pedagogical language of the early church (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:2). So when the author exclaims, 'You need milk, not solid food' (Heb. 5:12), he is describing in no uncertain terms a level of immaturity among his readers" (Guthrie, 202).

v. 13 **teaching about righteousness** The Gk. phrase [*apeiros logou dikaiosunes*] "inexperienced (or, unacquainted) with the teaching about righteousness," or "unskilled in the word of righteousness" is unusually difficult to interpret. After listing possible interpretations, one commentator suggests "to obey the word of righteousness" is an allusion to martyrdom based on Polycarp's words to the effect that to obey fully the word of righteousness one must be willing to endure the severest treatment. The commentator writes: "The expression acknowledges a basic moral weakness aggravated by the fear of violent death (cf. 2:14-15) . . . the community had begun to avoid contact with outsiders because they were unprepared for martyrdom" (Lane, 137-38; cf., Guthrie, 203). However intriguing this interpretation might be, based on the *contrast* in verse 14, the phrase more likely alludes to an infant's inability to make correct moral choices: "In verses 13 and 14 the apostle defines his concept of that which characterizes a baby and an adult. Spiritual babies are 'unskilled in the word of righteousness,' while spiritual adults are those 'who by reason of use have their senses exercised to *discern both good and evil*'" (Pentecost, 101, italics added).

6:1 **acts that lead to death** Cf., "dead works" (NET). The expression probably refers to sinful actions that bring death rather than legalistic adherence to Jewish law.

v. 2 **cleansing rites** Cf., "baptisms" (NET). "The author may be referring to repeated ceremonial washings as found in expressions of first-century Judaism" (Guthrie, 205). "'Baptisms' (here *baptismon*) is a word usually used of purification ceremonies other than Christian baptism (9:10; Mark 7:4), and it is plural (which would be unusual for baptism)" (Morris, 53).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Our home, like many of yours, has a doorframe with marks all over it chronicling 16 years of our kids' growth. I walk past it several dozen times daily but don't really pay much attention. Occasionally it will catch my eye and I'll allow myself a moment stop and to rewind the clock. So many memories float through my mind as I look at how little they once were and consider how much they've grown. Though it's sweet to measure my kids' physical growth, it's a blessing and privilege to witness their spiritual growth. I recently listened to my daughter support a friend going through a difficult time. She pointed out that God was in control, and no matter the outcome, He would be with her. She committed to pray for her friend and check on her after a few days. I have to admit, I shed a tear or two. My precious teenage girl fully understood how to point her friend to Christ and encourage her with His Word. Nothing is more important than training a child in the way they should go. Friends, let me encourage you to stay diligent in discipling your young children. Take every opportunity to tell them about God and the amazing work He has done in your life. Share your favorite Bible story and memorize scripture with them. We are praying for you as you train your children to know and love Jesus.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Heb 5:11-6:3

1. What does it mean to be "slow to learn"?
2. What stage should the readers have been in at this point? In what stage were they stuck?
3. How does someone prepare themselves to know the difference between good and evil?

What Do You Think

Why do you think the readers struggled to move into spiritual maturity?

What R U Going To Do

NASB translation says the readers were "dull of hearing" in verse 11. Wear headphones or ear plugs through dinnertime. How difficult is it for you to hear what's being said? Are you able to participate in the conversation?

Core Comp

Bible Study - I read the Bible to know who God is and what He wants from my life.

Memory Verse

Matthew 22:39 - *"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.