

**LEVEL 1 – NEW LIFE - Salvation is God’s work and whether YOU yield to Him or not!**

1. Everyone is a sinner and needs to be forgiven of their sin (Romans 3:23 / Romans 10:9)
2. Once you are one of His you need to understand how God sees you (1 Peter 2:9-11).
3. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin and allows us to enter God’s presence with confidence and boldness (Hebrews 10:19-25).

**PROS** – HOOOORRAAAAAYYYYYYY!

1. God called you! (Romans 8:28-29)
2. He has His eye on you and has set His plan in motion in your life! (Philippians 1:6)
3. You are going to live forever!
4. You are secure as a child in the Father’s arms! “And I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10:28)

**CONS** – The sobering reality!

1. Your body is no longer your own (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)
2. You cannot hold on to your carnal passions (Galatians 5:24)
3. Your goals in life should no longer be yours (Galatians 2:20)

A key verse for this level: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;” Philippians 2:12

**LEVEL 2 – Stages of Childhood - Growth is determined by what you eat!**

Just as what we feed our bodies in the natural realm determines our physical well being, the health of our spirit being is determined by how we feed and nurture it.

1. Peter taught the new believers in his care to crave pure spiritual milk (1 Peter 2:1-5)
2. Paul taught Timothy the value of study and applied the discipline of learning in order to mark an approved workman who would not be ashamed (2 Timothy 2:15)

3. A child has to be taught from DAY ONE how to eat good food. It's a discipline that pays off later in life!

Here is an interesting rebuke from the writer of Hebrews:

**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. For everyone who partakes *only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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.**** Hebrews 5:12-14 (NKJV)

What are the best ways to grow as a baby “milk sipper” Christian?

1. There is nothing wrong with being a baby when you are a baby! You WILL make mistakes **ILLUSTRATION:** Differences in eating habits our children.
2. Where do most children get their food? From their parents! **Who are your spiritual parents?** – the mentoring relationship.
3. There is food in the refrigerator! Classes at church, on the radio, on the Internet and on TV – become a student of God's Word. **ILLUSTRATION:** My iPod – I listen to the Bible and teaching from iTunes podcasts all day and it feeds me deeply and gives me vision for ministry and serving Him.
4. Learn to spend time with Daddy! – Daily devotions & prayer on a child's level

**PROS** – Look at yourself in the mirror! You are growing!

1. You're not going to become a big 'ole fat baby! Nobody likes to hang around bad kids who have too much and can't even tie their shoes yet. **ILLUSTRATION:** One of the reasons teens leave the church when they become adults is because they never experienced a mentoring relationship where they actually looked up to someone spiritually.
2. Developing a hunger for the right foods now will pay off later! **PARENTS:** If you do not develop a hunger for spiritual things in your life, your children will become just like you!
3. As you grow you will be able to explain what you believe to critics and truth seekers.
4. Your example will encourage others to do the same.

**CONS** – EAT YOUR VEGETABLES!

1. You have to eat the right foods. Yes, you are still a child at this level.
2. You can't eat junk food and expect to be healthy. The “*ya gotta die sometime ...*” view of life and how you take care of your body cannot mark the life of a growing follower of Jesus Christ – either physically or spiritually.

3. You can't sit around all day soaking your mind on things that do not bear fruit.

### **LEVEL 3 – The MEAT EATER – Adulthood - Maturity & wisdom comes through exercise!**

Paul was Timothy's mentor and spiritual father. Just as you grow physically, **Paul taught Timothy that exercise was vital for spiritual growth as well!**

1 Timothy 4:6-11 NKJV says,

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach.

**PROS** – You are becoming a man or woman of God!

1. You will begin to understand deeper levels of truth as you mature in the faith.
2. You will become more and more like Jesus!
3. God will give you a yearning for more of Himself (Psalm 42)
4. His plan for your life will be revealed (Ephesians 2:10).
5. You will be useful to God (Colossians 1:10)
6. He will equip you with everything you need to do the job (2 Corinthians 9:8)
7. You will become a mentor – In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said, "Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ."

Question: Can you say that?

### **CONFIDENCE vs. ARROGANCE**

**Confidence** is driven by what we can give – **Arrogance** is driven by what we can gain

**CONS** – It's time to get to work!

1. You have to get out and start working with people – FACE TO FACE – Maturity is getting out and doing ministry – interacting with people, getting hurt and misunderstood and learning to react properly.

2. Being an armchair quarterback may be fun for you but it doesn't do anything for anyone else! Maturity is not hiding behind your computer screen and bringing up controversial topics and splitting the Body of Christ. **ILLUSTRATION:** Discussion boards, blogs, Facebook, etc.

These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness *who* speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. Proverbs 6:16-19 (NKJV)

***There is a HUGE difference between speaking the Truth of God's Word in love and spouting off divisive rhetoric that drips with arrogance and pride.*** These things DO NOT mark the life of integrity.

3. You will begin to suffer persecution (Matthew 5:44 / Mark 13:13)
4. Maturity is learning how to interact with your spouse, children, and co-workers even when you mess up over and over and over. It's regaining trust with people you hurt. Then after you learn from your mistakes, you admit them, ask forgiveness and then go back into battle - building the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 6:12 – Imitate those who are over you. ***Is your life worth imitating?*** Many times over the years mine was not. Oh, the struggle for this! Don't give up! Don't give up!

**I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.** 2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NKJV)

#### **LEVEL 4 – Stewarding the POWER that comes from God.**

What is the next level for mature, courageous warriors?

PERSONAL TESTIMONY – I am going to be transparent with you. Here is a brief description of my own journey in these four levels .

1. LEVEL 1 - I was raised in a good Bible church and I accepted the Lord in 1971
2. LEVEL 2 - I learned to grow up in Him and was nurtured in my faith by many wonderful mentors.

3. LEVEL 3 – I learned to love the Word of God and handle it well in ministry to others. The term apologetics means: “the branch of theology concerned with the defense or proof of Christianity.” I have learned to do this.
4. LEVEL 4 – But what DRIVES me today is a deep NEED to understand the power that I have read about all my life but yet I do not have. **ILLUSTRATION:** Many people bring up what Jesus said, “... a wicked and adulterous nation ...” – elaborate on that.

All my life I listened to Bible stories and God stirred me deep inside. I wanted to be like David, Moses, Samson, ELIJAH, Daniel and Paul and others. But yet I heard people tell me that all this POWER died out when John breathed his last breath on Patmos.

So ... I would sigh to myself and press on preaching the Word and doing what I was taught. But I kept reading verses like these:

Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

REALLY?

Acts 1:8 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

*REALLY – Do you mean I could do this?*

John 14:12 says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

*REALLY – Do you mean I could do this?*

Mark 16:15-18 says, “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.””

*REALLY – Do you mean I could do this?*

Matthew 10:7-9 says, “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give!”

*REALLY – Do you mean I could do this?*

James 5:14-15 says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up."

*REALLY – Do you mean I could do this?*

Matthew 17:14-21 says, "When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

*REALLY – Do you mean I could do this?*

QUESTION: What are the things that you have seen in the Bible that you want to do for His glory?

On your own, you bring nothing to the table. But as His child He tells us in His Word that we have the very Spirit of Jesus living in us.

**PROS** – God says, "I have THE nuclear bomb for you if you want to win this war"

1. God is going to show you how He wants you how to use His POWER to draw the people you come in contact with to Himself.

Here's a thought provoking question for you: **What is more important to perfect? Preaching or power?**

In 1 Corinthians 2:3-5 Paul said, "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

*... but ... but ... God needs us to preach in order to show His power?... doesn't He?*

In Acts 19:11-12 Luke wrote: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them."

Here's the principle that we cannot forget:

**Preaching is our work – Power is God's work.**

Today many are placing the art of preaching (homiletics) over the power of the Holy Spirit. Some preachers even build doctrines that deny the power is for today because they don't have it! Oh, how this must grieve the Holy Spirit.

***What are the cons for striving for a life of POWER in the Holy Spirit ? – There is a price that not many are willing to pay.***

1. Just like a parent hides Easter eggs for their children, God like to hide things from us because it pleases Him when we find them!

Proverbs 25:2 says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."

Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

For many people, they give up when they expect God to work like a modern vending machine and He doesn't.

1. Demonic principalities and powers are stirred when they see men and women of God on the front lines of battle (Ephesians 6:12).
2. We will experience deeper persecution – Sometimes this comes within the Body of Christ. This is especially true when people are tempted to protect tradition over what the Bible clearly says (or doesn't say). EXAMPLE: Never build doctrine when God is silent over an issue.
3. We have to experience the "tenderizing" of our bodies and spirits through the disciplines that are experienced only in fasting – intimacy follows!

What does intimacy look like?

1. Close friendship
2. Confident with God
3. He wants fellowship with us – DON'T FORGET! He walked in the garden with man. He said, "I created it – now I want to be IN IT".
4. Is God your PRIMARY PREOCCUPATION?

One *thing* I have desired of the LORD,  
That will I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
All the days of my life,  
To behold the beauty of the LORD,  
And to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27:4 (NKJV)

Tom Denlinger

[tomdenlinger@comcast.net](mailto:tomdenlinger@comcast.net)

[www.lightshineministries.org](http://www.lightshineministries.org)