

Taste & See

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We're looking at how to live with hope no matter how hard or dark the times. This hope, of a Christ-ruled new creation, breaks in now to form holiness and love. In chapter 2, St. Peter shows us how, how we "grow up into our salvation." We grow by a) **pulling the weeds** b) **tasting what's good** c) **bending to the light**.

Pull the Weeds

When spring rolled around, I'd see a splash of color arrive on the front lawn: snapdragons, impatience, and geraniums all in their black plastic containers, waiting to colonize our garden. My mother would invite me to join her in beautifying our lawn. But first, we had to pull the weeds. Get down, on our knees, and dig into that East Texas clay, to pull out *what threatened growth*. Only then would our plants be safe. Only then would their beauty last. **You are created to bloom in holiness and love.** But to do it we've to get down on our knees and pull the weeds. Peter says: "[So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander](#)" (2:1). [Put away](#) means disrobe, change clothes. Take off *malice* like a dirty garment. What's malice? In verse 16, it's translated evil. We think of evil as something out there. But the moral realist is humble enough to acknowledge what's in here. Jeremiah the heart exceeding deceitful (17:9). As Kant said, we're all made from crooked timber. And if we're to straighten out, if we're to bloom in holiness and love, we've got admit our evil. **But it's not enough to admit inner evil; we have to see the evil, come face to face with it, before we pull it out.** Peter shows us several weeds that grow in the flowerbed of the heart. Let's look at two: envy and slander. **Envy** opposes love by, instead of desiring the best for others, hopes for their downfall. Envy seeks personal advance over the joy of others. Instead of being happy for someone's new home or car, you silently discredit them, tell yourself that you deserve a bigger house, nicer car. *We do this with good things*. People who struggle to conceive can, instead of taking joy in others' children, begin to despise them. Singles without a spouse may, instead of taking pleasure in a marriage, grate against the joy of married couples. And married couples can envy the freedom of singles. *We do it in tinier ways*. Not the house but their ability to decorate the house. Not the car but the features of the car. Not the children but we judge how poorly or well the children behave, praising or condemning *ourselves*. Not the married or single but their companionship or the freedom. Envy destroys community by creating invisible walls of distrust, hatred, and meanness. **Slander**. Someone tells you something in confidence but you let it slide out in a conversation followed by "pray for them." **Slander opposes love by lusting after popularity or power so much you're willing to ruin a friendship.** And Peter comes along and says, Get it out! All of it. All malice, all envy all slander, "[Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.](#)" He tightens the language. It's not enough to put it off; he urges, *abstain* from sin. Abstain means to create distance, to get away from. It's popular to say, I'm really struggling X (drinking, lust, envy) but what that often means is I'm putting this sin on, I'm close to it, and I really kind of like it. *There's little tenacity about fighting sin in modern Christianity*. Peter says, Run, your passions are waging war against your soul! This week an armed criminal fled to my kids' school. Two things happened. The school went into immediate lock down, and courageous men tackled the man. You don't struggle with evil;

you fight or flee! **It's not enough to admit evil, or even see evil; we have flee evil.** And we're called to do it *together*. You are not the only plant in the garden. There are many, and one plant's disease (or health) affects the others. We wither and grow together. Peter draws attention to this by using many communal metaphors: *priesthood, living stones, spiritual house, holy race.* When we are saved, we are saved into a community, a garden where we pull weeds together. Are you in that kind of community, one that loves enough to get tenacious about sin? If not, why are you there? How do you need to change? Owen "Be killing sin, lest it be killing you." It's not an exaggeration; envy leads to debt, divorce, divided relationships and distance from Christ. For the love of God, pull the weeds.

Taste What's Good

That's the dirty work, but growing together also includes lovely work: absorbing what makes us grow: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (2-3). In order to grow into our new selves, we have to **long**, have a strong desire for. The word is over-desire. So in true religion, desires are not evil. God is not a killjoy. He insists on our joy knowing that our desires need to go in the *right direction*. Babies long for milk; engines run on gas, but the modern dilemma is that we don't know the baby from the engine. We don't know what to run on. So we try a little of everything. Career, friends, diets, exercise, breweries, books, films, music...but it all comes up short. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, there's a place in the book where Anna, having all the wealth, all the comforts, all the power she could ever dream of confesses, "**I don't know myself; I only know my appetites.**" Do you only know your appetites? What are you running on? Social connection, productivity, fun? A text, a tweet, a status—compelled by envy we scramble to stay up with a culture that is in overdrive. Where should our desires turn? You have to know who you are—a newborn infant, a new creation, born again to a living hope through the resurrection—only then can you direct your appetites to a place of satisfaction. What is it?—**pure spiritual milk**, it's what grows us up. Pure means a 100 proof (opposite of evil). What's in it? Spiritual milk. Now this word, what we're to long for, is a little tricky. It's not the typical word for spiritual (used later). In fact, the word has more in common with the rational, *logikos*, from which we get *logos* or logic. So how do you grow? Well it depends how you read this word. Some will say, the way you grow is to think better, to have the right beliefs, to read your Bible (and you should. They take a more *rational* approach. Others say, no its more mystical than that, which may be why its translated *spiritual*. What you need to grow is an experience in prayer, worship, a blessing. And so you've got the Bible people and the Prayer people, the rational and the spiritual. The people who take theology classes and the people who join the prayer team. So who's right? Neither or both, kinda. It's not the person who reads, or the person who prays; it's the person who *tastes*: long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." The spiritual milk that causes us to grow requires a tasting, in particular, tasting the goodness of the Lord. How? 3 Things. **Tasting takes time.** When I used to wash windows with my grandfather, we would take a break and have lunch together. Famished, I would inhale my food. And Poppa would say to me, "Johnny, did you taste it?" He knew something I didn't. He knew how to taste, how to linger, how to enjoy, not just God's gifts but *God's presence*. You can read the Bible and miss his presence; you can pray and not taste his goodness. Are you tasting or *just reading, just praying?* Tasting takes time, meditation. On your law/word

I meditate day and night. How do you do it? *You take a piece of truth and mull it over, sit with it, chew on it, and converse with God about it.* Ask him for understanding, what it means; how to experience it, how it applies (rejoice, repent, obey), and for desire, ability to respond. This takes time, not a ton, but you have to slow down and chew slowly, and when we do, the juices settle in, and we taste the goodness of the Lord. But slow isn't enough. **You have to be hungry.** And if we're not hungry, we have to figure out why. Hunger begins by taking the position of a baby—crying out (not assuming) for God to satisfy you: *“Satisfy me in the morning with your lovingkindness, O Lord.”* Second, **Ask for hunger.** We may need to confess misdirected appetites, which have dulled us to goodness of God. On Monday I woke up and checked my phone. I saw a message that sent my heart and mind reeling in a direction. I stood in the shower and worked it over and over. And when I sat down to commune with God, it was very hard to meditate, to taste him because I was hungry for something else, *resolution*. I've resolved to not make checking my phone my first act of devotion. Third, **silence.** JP: *“Only the one who is silent can hear.”* To taste God, we have to turn off all the other appetites. Tune out the things that clamor for our attention. Phones, screens, sleep, work, play. Find a **place of silence**, in a corner, outside, by the bed, early/late, on a walk, wherever you can be still and know he is God. Spiritual milk, 100 proof, comes not through Bible study (rational), not through Prayer (mystical), but when they overlap and taste *the Lord* (personal).

Bend to the Light

Pull the weeds, taste what's good, and finally, bend toward the light. Verse 4, *“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.”* We come not rationally, not mystically, but personally, as to a person; we come to **him**. [CC] In our community, in our discipleship we come to *him*, not to ideas about him, or offering prayers to him, but come to *him*. Bring *him* with you into CG & FC, to work and to play. Having tasted the goodness of the Lord, bring *him*. Who is he? A living stone rejected by men. Isaiah the prophet compared him to a stone cast aside in a great building project. Overlooked, insignificant, rejected—Christ on the cross for all our envy, slander, indifference. But this was no ordinary stone—a living stone Christ rose from the dead, triumphing over sin, death, and evil. He is chosen and precious, assessed by none other than God. Jesus is the corner piece of a whole new humanity, the church. He is not the cornerstone of a non-profit or a political party. Christ is the cornerstone of the church, a living stone so powerful that when people touch him, they too are brought to life. And they assemble together, snap into place, and exist to build one another up into a magnificent, spiritual house, a temple where people taste and see the Lord is good. **Are you cultivating a garden where people pull out weeds and blossom in holiness and love.** Peter says, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (9). As you come to him, you will bend towards the light. You'll be prone to proclaim the excellencies of God's mercy. You won't leave him out conversation; bring him in. You'll credit him for his excellent mercy, unwavering goodness, and marvelous grace. You'll draw attention to what you have tasted, invite others to where you have feasted, and chase away the darkness with the light. Let's pull the weeds, taste what's good, and bend towards the light.