



Today we meet Joshua, who took over leadership of Israel after Moses died. We're encountering Joshua just after he and the Israelites have entered into the Promised Land, and their story is going to show us what our own journey with God looks like.

So first, a question: among those of us in here who have already committed to follow Jesus, how many remember those first weeks of your new life?"

When a person first commits their lives to Jesus, when we first accept his rescue, there's a tremendous sense of life and vitality. It's really not unlike falling in love for the first time (which is where our talk of having a 'relationship with Jesus' comes from). The world just looks better, brighter. You're seeing things differently, there's hope everywhere. Living as a Christian is easy - prayer comes almost naturally, the Scriptures seem alive. Life is good!

We in the Church love to talk about that. It's often part of our sales pitch when we're evangelizing. But we leave out something pretty important:

That feeling goes away.

You know what I'm talking about. Suddenly, you have to work a little bit at being joyful. Old habits you thought were gone are back with a vengeance. Scripture doesn't make sense anymore and prayers just feel like talking to yourself.

You don't tell anyone, because no one prepped you for this. So you think it's just something with you. Like maybe you did something wrong, or you just need to try harder. Or maybe that whole God thing was just a phase, like it was all in your head.

Well, I've got some good news for you: you're not crazy, you're not alone, and there's nothing wrong with you. What you're experiencing is a totally normal, natural part of your spiritual lifecycle. And believe it or not, it's actually very good news.

Consider our Road Trip encounter today: Israel has just crossed into the Promised Land. They celebrate Passover, and then the next morning they wake up, come out of their tents and there's *no manna on the ground*.

We think, Big deal? I've never seen manna. I don't even know what that is. Who cares?

Well, after the Burning Bush, Moses went to Egypt and freed Israel from Slavery. So when Israel entered the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land, they were a brand new nation. We could say that politically, they were a baby.

In the wilderness, Israel had no access to food or water. So God gave them both. Food came in the form of manna, which was a bread-like substance that appeared every morning outside their

tents. We don't know anything more about it (neither did the Israelites - Manna is Hebrew for "What's that?").

So put yourself in Israel's sandals: you're part of a brand new nation. You have no armies, no infrastructure, no land. You've spend the last 40 years living as nomads in the wilderness, and you didn't eat unless God fed you. Which God did. Every day. For 40 years. (I did the math - that's over 12,000 days!). Every day, you walk out of your tent, and you have this hard, physical evidence that God is with you, that God is watching out for you, that God is taking care of you.

Then, you finally get to the Promised Land. And it's full of well-fortified cities with standing armies. The people there are terrifying. But that's okay, because God is with you.

Then you celebrate Passover - you celebrate how God freed you from Egypt. And you're probably getting all excited.

Then you wake up and go outside to get your manna...

...

and the Manna's *gone*. As in there is none.

What does that mean?! Has God left? Does God only come up to the *edge* of the Promised Land and no further? Are we on our own now? Did God abandon us?

And the answer in Joshua is, No! God hasn't left you! But you're *in* the Promised Land now. Now you're surrounded by lush earth, fruit and animals. Now you don't need manna because you can feed yourself. Israel the baby nation is growing up.



Several writers in the Scriptures compare our spiritual journey with Jesus to our ancestors' journey to the Promised Land. Just like they were slaves in Egypt, so too we were slaves to Sin and Death. But then Jesus becomes our Passover Lamb who was killed to free us from slavery. We become a new nation - the Church - and we begin our journey towards a life fully with God, a spiritual promised land.

Those same writers compare that same spiritual journey to the biological journey we all take. We are born again in Jesus, and then grow in our faith. We begin as Spiritual infants and we grow into mature Spiritual adults.

That time right after we become Christians that's all warm and awesome, when our faith is easy? It's like when Israel was in the wilderness and God was feeding them every day. They didn't have to do any work; they just walked outside and picked up manna. It's like we're spiritual infants. Babies don't feed themselves; they don't do *anything* for themselves.

And that's okay. Babies aren't *supposed* to feed themselves. Israel wasn't *supposed* to get their own food. Brand-new Christians aren't *supposed* to know how to live as mature Christians.

But babies *are* supposed to grow up. Israel *did* have to feed themselves once they got into the Promised Land. Christians *are* supposed to mature.

Our problem is we don't. We stay spiritually immature, expecting someone else to feed us, to live our lives for us. And we're not the first generations to have this problem. In a sermon preached often in the early Church, one preacher said this:

You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong. -- Hebrews 5:12-14 (NLT)

In the middle of his sermon, he chastises this group of Christians, tells them to grow up! They've been content with milk way longer than they should be. Instead of growing up, moving on to solid food, they're choosing to remain babies. And according to this preacher, that's a huge mistake.

If you've been a Christian for a while, and you're still relying on the Church to feed you, there's a problem. God's plan isn't for us to remain spiritual infants. We have to learn to feed ourselves.

No one expects a baby to produce anything, to contribute to the overall welfare of the home or community. You're a baby. All you do is consume.

But as you grow, you learn to start producing. First maybe it's just walking instead of having to be carried everywhere. Expressing your thoughts and feelings with words instead of making others guess what you want. Dressing yourself. Feeding yourself food (that someone else cooked). Eventually, you're going to start doing chores. You start to *contribute* to the overall welfare of the house.

The older you get, the more you're expected to produce, to contribute, instead of just consuming.

An adult who still only consumed without contributing isn't really an adult. We have a word for an organism that only takes and takes and takes from a host without contributing anything to its welfare:

Parasite.

A problem in the Church today is that we have a lot of people who shouldn't be spiritual infants anymore but still act like it. They expect the Church to feed them, but they don't contribute anything in return.



Spiritual parasites.

It's not a pretty image, but it's not supposed to be. There's actually something really wrong with a person who refuses to grow up - biologically *or* spiritually.

And while churches are pretty good about enabling us to be parasites, God loves us too much to let us be consumers.

So while we're spiritual infants, God cares for us. Just like God provided manna for the Israelites. Faith is easy, it's new, fresh and fun.

But at some point, God pulls off our Spiritual training wheels and expects us to start feeding ourselves. To own our faith, to lean into it.

Baby faith is fine when you're a new Christian. In fact, it's more than fine. It's beautiful and special, just like a baby is.



But when you refuse to grow, it's not fine anymore. You'd be like an adult who still wears diapers and drinks from a bottle. It's not cute. It's not beautiful and special. It's gross. People wouldn't go Awww! Look how cute! They'd say, Ewwwww and cross the street.

I remember the years during which I made this transition. I grew up in a Church where we weren't really encouraged to grow in our faith. If it happened, great! But it was the exception, not the rule.

I really didn't take ownership for my own faith until college. I led a couple of bible studies. And I really studied the life of Jesus, the story of the Scriptures. Since my degree was in New Testament, I was immersed in God's story.

And it wasn't until my senior year of college that I really sensed God urging me to take a more active role in my faith. It was almost like I could feel God saying to me, Don't you see how everything you're learning is give, give, give! Love people! Serve them! Share your life with them! But all you're doing is taking.

I realized I was learning a lot about Jesus, but not actually learning to live like him. I was a parasite, not a producer. I was consuming a lot of knowledge, but not contributing anything.

So I committed to get involved in a Church. And since I enjoyed learning and teaching so much, I'd teach.

You might think that's the end of that story, but it's not. I became a youth pastor, and the first couple of years, I was a *terrible* teacher. Ask my youth. I had not the slightest idea how to communicate Biblical truth in a way that was interesting or compelling to youth.

I had to learn. A lot. The hard way.

I'm still learning, still growing. Still getting better (as some of you are kind enough to point out).

So if you're in that place where it feels like you've lost that lovin' feeling, if following God doesn't seem as easy as it used to, don't worry.

There's not actually a thing wrong with you. It just means you're growing up. And God is inviting you to walk on your own, to begin to learn to feed your own soul.

It won't happen overnight. It takes kids a while to learn how to walk. To talk. Even longer to learn to feed themselves.

It's the same with us. Learning to feed ourselves spiritually doesn't happen overnight. Learning to read the Scriptures takes a lot of work. Prayer isn't something that comes naturally to us. Keeping Sabbath is a foreign concept it takes time to figure out. Giving is tough.

But we have to start. We have to move forward. We have to learn to be producers in God's kingdom, not parasites. To be spiritual contributors, not spiritual consumers.

### Examine

1. Where are you in your spiritual journey? Would you consider yourself an infant, child, teen, adult?
2. Is your level of spiritual maturity appropriate for your spiritual age?
3. What steps can you take to grow spiritually? What does the next step look like for you?
4. In the next week, how can you take that next step to be a contributor more than a consumer?