

Coach House Church

BEACONS

HEARD OF 'PETER PAN SYNDROME'?

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I suffer from it from time to time, chronically, and you know, it never quite goes away. When it shows up I find my room a mess, leave my responsibilities behind, and put off my job list for another day. This beacon helps us see how God empowers us to grow in faith and progress.

I often leave the house with the absolute bare minimum I need for the day. Not going far? My phone stays. Is someone else bringing the house keys? I'll leave mine behind. Not going to buy something? My wallet stays. That last one (rightly) got me in trouble with my girlfriend a couple of times when we hung out and we ended up having to buy something.

As you might have guessed, my invented 'Peter Pan Syndrome' is the desire never to grow up and relinquish the joys of childhood. And negatively it's the desire to avoid responsibility. It can be a conscious state of mind or just an embedded way of life. This attitude slots in to the way that we live spiritually and relate to God.

1 Peter 1:23 says we've been "born again" into a new life which never dies. Christians often focus on the 'born' bit. But Peter focuses on the lesser known part: growing up. Wouldn't it be strange if a baby just stayed as it was? It'd be cute for a while and then it would be weird. The natural process is one of change and transition into life, and it's abnormal not to do so.

Peter wants people to grow in this new life. In this letter he says it negatively first in 2:1: "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." As consequence of being 'born again', new behaviours are required. Certain things need to be left behind which were attached to the old life. Specifically, behaviours that govern how we treat each other. Think of a group of kids play fighting and scrapping. There's nothing wrong with that when they're little, but if they're still doing it at 18 then it's going to be a problem. Different behaviours are expected as children grow into adults.

So what should we do about it? He says: "2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." So get your spiritual food and grow.

We're told to "crave" this nourishment. It's easy to picture. Babies cry, and cry, and cry and cry until they get what they need. We need stay in relationship with God and

persistently ask him to change us. This happens connecting with God through prayer, the bible and spending time with Christians.

Why do we need to grow like this? It's part of the package of "salvation". Salvation means rescue. God rescued us from our old lives living in decay, sin and death and let us be born again to a new life. Wouldn't it be weird if we were rescued from our old way of life, and then just did all the same things as before? It doesn't make sense, but it happens.

So, why do I spent almost all my free time on leisure, forget my wallet and leave my room a mess? I'm accustomed to living that way over the past 27 years and it's a tricky habit to break. The natural trajectory is to do what you've always done.

So the big question is, what helps us leave the past behind? Peter gives us the answer: "we have tasted that the Lord is good." Christians are different from the world around them because they have experienced the good new life that God has given to them. We need to look deeper into the goodness of God to leave the past behind. The more I see the goodness of God to me, the more I am willing to let him change me. If I think he's going to make my life miserable I'll just want to resist him. He's come through for me so many times now that I'm slowly entrusting more of my life to him. This is the track God wants us to be one, even with the inevitable failures and messes along the way.

I'll leave you with an example of this that covers both the spiritual and material aspects of my imaginary 'Peter Pan Syndrome'. I find it extremely hard to focus on work and I often find it overwhelming. I'm a slow worker, I'm not diligent and I have very high standards. Knowing this, I took on a course to help my career along and could barely make a start on it. Instead of giving up in frustration, I came to God honestly with the situation and asked for help. Each time I've done so I've found the strength to be diligent and press on, which I certainly didn't have before. Each time it happens, it causes me to thank and praise God more and more and believe he can do it again next time.

Craving change, we can come to God again and again and he will help us take the next step on the road to maturity.



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