

“Hungry Babies”

Fourth in a series on Peter's First Letter

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1st Peter 1:22-2:3

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Now that your lives have been purified by obeying the truth, so that you have a genuine love for each other, love one another eagerly, from a pure heart.

It is not from seed which decays but from seed which does not that you have been born anew. It is by the living and enduring word of God, because

*All human life is like grass
and all human glory is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, and the flower falls
but the word of the Lord endures for ever.*

That is the word that was announced to you.

So put away all malice, all deceit, insincerity, envy, and slander. Like newborn babies, long for the pure, true milk. It will make you grow up to salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

My translation, using N. T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament* and various commentaries.

A newborn. Basically, a brain attached to a food processor, all packaged up in tiny adorableness. O yes, the alarm too! She needs to eat, and lets us know!

My mom had me in a time when feedings were supposed to be strictly scheduled, every four hours. Apparently I wasn't happy about it. I made sure she wasn't either.

Dr. Sarah Allen, a psychologist, writes, *“Having a baby changes the structure of the [mother's] brain so that regions that control empathy and anxiety have increased activity and that, along with hormonal changes, can make new moms react to a baby's cry with intense feelings of protectiveness and worry.”*¹ Mums, thank you!

¹ Sarah Allen, “When Your Baby's Cry Causes You Anxiety” drsarahallen.com/anxiety-when-baby-cries

It works on all of us. Researcher Katie Young used brain scans on a variety of people, and discovered that *"the sound of a baby cry captures your attention in a way that few other sounds in the environment generally do,"*²

She cries. We respond. Hopefully with what she needs to grow, strengthen, develop, become more of herself

After all, and it feels too soon, we will be unleashing her into this world.

II

In his letter, you just heard Peter mention some of what she'll encounter. We need no introductions. We know these well.

Malice: Wanting the worst for someone.

Deceit: Using trickery to climb over others.

Insincerity: Hypocrisy is the word. Faking it. Pretending to be what you are not.

Envy: Feeling sour about someone for what they have or who they are.

Slander: Speaking that fuels gossip and tears apart reputations. Even if the words are true, the speaking can still be evil.³

Most of these use words only. No sticks, no stones, no punches get thrown. Still, they shred people to bits, and crumble communities.

Rid yourselves of these, Peter says. *Of course! We want to! But how?*

III

At least part of the problem, I'm afraid, is . . . well, yes I'm afraid.

Fear is born when we see danger coming, or anticipate it will. Not having enough or expecting to fall short can cause fear. Fear scrawls a highlighter over everything that's scarce. What's scarce? We are. Our abilities are. Our lives are.

² Alok Jha, "Why crying babies are so hard to ignore," The Guardian (October 17, 2012) www.theguardian.com/science/2012/oct/17/crying-babies-hard-ignore

³ Legally, slander requires the words to be untrue or unsupported. However, true words spoken with harm-causing intent or effect are noxious.

Life is like grass. The best about us, like the flowers of the field.

I grow malice — I want bad stuff to happen to someone — maybe because she's taken something dear to me. I'm not going to get it back. It's withered and fallen.

I grow deceit — conniving and clawing, lying and stealing to scramble over someone — because there is only room at the top for one. If it's not me, I'll wither and fall.

I grow hypocrisy — faking it, pretend-acting like I want others to see me — because I'm afraid you'll see all that's withered and fallen in me.

I grow envy — bitterness what he has and who he is — because I'm afraid he's somehow not withered, not fallen.

I grow slander — spreading poison — to bring her down, hoping to lift me up from withering and falling.

Rid yourselves of these, Peter says. *Of course! We want to! But we are afraid. We are withering. We are falling.*

IV

Peter is writing to folks like us, and I figure he knows them. Jesus sent him, and he ended up in their places, and left with them believing in Jesus. I don't think he pulls these things out of the air either: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. He knows they are full of this stuff. He knows they are no different from anyone else. He knows himself.

What makes it strange though, is what else he says to them. Like, *"Now that your lives have been purified. . . ."* Have been purified? They're still stinking with all this stuff. That's why he has to tell them to get rid of it. But before they have, he talks like they've already been cleaned up. So have you.

Same thing: *"You have been born anew."* Not, "Get yourselves right, then you'll be newly born." Nope. It's already happened. They're this new sort of people already! You too.

Same thing again: *"Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."*

They have already tasted God's goodness. They have already been made holy.

They have already been born all over again.

V

You see, they have already encountered Jesus. They have heard Jesus' good news. They have been filled with Jesus' Spirit, the Holy Spirit. They have trusted Jesus, and been entrusted to Jesus.

When that has happened to you, in Jesus you've come face to face with God's goodness: God's embracing love for you; God's wider-than-you-could-hope-for forgiveness of you; God's lifting of shame and guilt from you; God's delight in cleaning you up; God's joy as God makes you new; God's unstoppable kindness toward you.

Peter is probably the one who brought this to them by telling them about Jesus. He calls what they've experienced "the truth," the "imperishable seed," God's word that lives and lasts. It's the good news, the gospel. It's Jesus, who he is for you. Jesus, all that he has done for you. Jesus, who says "Follow me," and delights when you do, because of what you'll get to see with him. Jesus, who brings all of your life into his, including the very worst about you. Jesus, who fills you with his life, his very best for you.

VI

I hope you have tasted and seen this, that the Lord is good. I hope that's your experience.

If it's not, though . . . or if it is, and you already know this deep in yourself . . . or if you are not sure . . . whatever, become like that newborn.

Be a hungry baby. Cry out! Cry out!

Peter says it. Be like newborn infants, longing for this pure, true milk.⁴

Professor Rachel Muers reads this as both a theologian and a mother who has nursed. She writes about how Peter's image here is so personal and intimate.⁵

⁴ Often the Greek word *logikos* gets translated as "spiritual." However, the word is closely related to *logos*, which literally means "word" and, more generally, relates to ideas of genuineness, truth, and rationality. Douglas Harink, 1 & 2 Peter, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos, 2009), 65.

⁵ Rachel Muers, "Demand Feeding and the Desire for God: A Brief Play at Exegesis," The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning 7.1 (January 2008). jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/

When a baby is feeding, he's not only receiving nutrition (though, of course, that's very important). He's close. He's held. He's protected. He's safe. He's feeding from his mom. It's so good.⁶

In this picture, Jesus is the milk: the word, the seed, the good news. He's also the milk giver: close to you, holding you, protecting you, feeding you. It's so good.

What happens to our fear? What happens to all those things fear grows in us, because we are withering and falling; we're perishable? Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander. *The grass withers, the flower falls . . . these wither, they fall . . . but the word of God — God's milk, God's goodness — lasts forever.*

Get rid of these things born of fear, by leaning close to God. Know that God is holding you, feeding you, protecting you, with God's embrace that never falls nor fails. Taste God's feeding. The Lord is good.

⁶ [vol-7-no-1-january-2008-spreading-rumours-of-wisdom/demand-feeding-and-the-desire-for-god](#)
Muers writes, "It is probably not implausible to find, in a text written before the modern science of infant nutrition, connotations of profound intimacy in a reference to a baby's desire for milk. What is received in response to the cry is not just something that meets the immediate need of which the cry is a symptom (the need for adequate nutrition); it is personal presence. All the other New Testament uses of *epithew* ('long for'), apart from the much-debated James 4:5, refer to the desire of one person for the presence of another or some others."