

## The Hard Stuff

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*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (**Hebrews 5:12-14**, ESV).*

With the 27th pick in the 2003 NFL draft, the Kansas City Chiefs selected Larry Johnson. The selection led to much head-scratching among the fan base. The Chiefs had one of the best running backs in the league ( Priest Holmes) running behind one of the best offensive lines ever assembled. Johnson got his chance to prove himself quickly. With Holmes nursing an injury, Johnson was thrust into early season action. The first two games went poorly and led to an eye-opening press conference the following week. Hall of Fame coach Dick Vermeil infamously said of Johnson, “It’s time to take the diapers off.” Though the message was harsh, insulting, and a belittling bit of typical locker-room talk, the meaning could not be missed: “Larry Johnson, it’s time to grow up.”

When the Hebrews writer reaches **5:11**, he tells his readers, “Folks, it’s time to grow up.”

Up to this point in Hebrews, the writer has leaned heavily on passages from the Old Testament to make his case about Jesus Christ. To do this effectively, he depends on our familiarity with the Old Testament stories and prophecies. If we have not taken the time to familiarize ourselves with the Old Testament, we will struggle to understand his argument. Here’s the bottom line: to understand Jesus in His fullness, we must seek to understand what was written before Jesus was born in the Bethlehem manger.

What the writer of Hebrews expects from his readers is not unreasonable. He wants to talk to them about deeper matters, but their ignorance of the Scriptures stands in the way. They have been in the faith long enough to be teachers but need someone else to teach them. They are old enough to eat solid food but still want milk. They should be adults but remain babies in their understanding of the Scriptures. As he says in **verses 10-11**, “You need to know about the connection between Melchizedek and Jesus, but it’s hard to explain, and you don’t really want to listen to what I have to say.” In short, the writer of Hebrews is deeply disappointed with the spiritual immaturity of his readers.

If we want our muscles to grow stronger, we need to exercise them. And exercise by itself is not enough: we gain strength when we consistently add more weight, increase our distance, or push ourselves to a new benchmark. In the same way, we need to push ourselves to learn and grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures. Sticking to the simple things keeps us immature and weak. If we want to be mature and strong, we must tackle the hard stuff.

When a baby grows, he or she reaches a point where milk is insufficient. Babies can nurse their mothers dry and still not be filled up. That’s why we introduce solid food — a growing baby demands it! In like manner, the basics of Scripture will nourish us, but they will not help us grow into maturity. We need solid food — we need to tackle the hard stuff — to grow into spiritual adulthood.

And that’s why in **6:1**, the writer of **Hebrews** says, “*Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.*” It’s time, my friends, to leave behind the basics and dig into the hard stuff.