

# THE ENDURING WORD

## 1 PETER 1:22 - 2:3

I want to begin this morning with a short poem about a little boy...

“He has his mother’s eyes, his father’s chin, his auntie’s nose, his uncle’s grin - his great-aunt’s hair, his grandma’s ears, his grandpa’s mouth, so it appears - poor little tot, well may he moan. He hasn’t much to call his own.” And none of us do... We all inherit features from our parents.

In fact, some of us may look a whole lot more like our mom and dad than we care to admit... People say I have my father’s chin - *both of them*.

Whenever my daughter comes to church folks are shocked at how much she looks like her mom. *Something my daughter should take as an incredible compliment!* But whether it’s a dad’s height – or a mom’s hair – or a grandpa’s nose... everyone inherits a few traits from their parents.

And this is especially true of a child of God. In fact, there’s one trait all God’s kids inherit from their heavenly Father - *a believer’s birthmark* is love.

In John 13:35 Jesus pointed out that His followers would be identified, not by their *doing* or their *debating* – but by their *love for one another*.

This is what Peter affirms in verses 22-23. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again...”

Notice this phrase, “*born again.*” In the 1970s Watergate conspirator, Chuck Colson chronicled his conversion to Christianity in a book he titled, “Born Again.” In the 1976 Presidential campaign Jimmy Carter referred to himself as a “*born again*” Christian - further popularizing the term.

Sadly, in recent years the term “born again Christian” has become a media code word for evangelical conservatism – *a political persuasion.*

This isn’t what Jesus meant when He told Rabbi Nicodemus, “You must be born again” - nor is it what John, or Peter, or the early church meant by the term. The phrase “*born again*” refers to God’s greatest miracle – the one He works every day all around the world – in hearts that trust Him.

The Bible also refers to this miracle as “regeneration” or “the new birth.”

One moment my spirit is dark, and cold, and hopeless, and void – but the seed of God’s Word is sowed in my heart, a gentle watering takes place of conviction and repentance. I believe, and in that first instant of faith, the seed breaks open with the life of God’s Spirit at work in my spirit.

Germination takes place inside me – a release of life, and light, and love.

This initial budding of spiritual life shapes who I am forever. I'm born again with the Father's love – the Spirit's power – and the Son's character.

I'm sure you know the foods you eat today are not always what they seem. Our supermarkets are full of vegetables on steroids. Many of the groceries in the produce section have been genetically altered...

Scientists now grow corn and tomatoes with built-in pesticides. Rather than spray chemicals on the skin of the plant – the poison is inbred into the tomato. *Which really bugs me...* there was always some security in the fact you could wash off a tomato before you ate it - that's no longer the case.

The DNA of squash, and cucumbers, and grapes are now altered to resist disease. It's made life easier for farmers... *A sick squash is a thing of the past - cucumbers no longer get into a pickle - grapes no longer whine.*

Potato DNA can be engineered to absorb less oil and produce leaner French Fries. Coffee beans can be manipulated to produce less caffeine. Peas now have a longer shelf life. Peppers are resistant to fungus. *Which reminds me, what did Miss Mold say to Mr. Algae? You're a real fun guy!*

Today's geneticists breed for specific purposes, but this is what God has been doing for ages... *He breeds godliness into believers.*

When you give your life to Jesus, spiritually you're born anew. You received a new nature – divine DNA – love and godly traits are birthed into your spirit. The Father in heaven *makes you* and *marks you* as His child!

When you came to Jesus, you *“purified your soul”* and gained a *“sincere love.”* According to verse 22 Jesus engineered into you *purity and love*.

And know this, the reason some Christians struggle to walk victoriously *in their life* is they underestimate what happened to them *at their birth...*

They don't realize the dynamic implied in Peter's phrase *“born again.”*

Think of it this way, in the 1940s the US government experimented with nuclear weapons. Bombs were detonated in the deserts of New Mexico.

You've seen the news reel footage... A massive explosion clears out a huge crater, and pushes a mushroom cloud of nuclear fallout into the air.

This is how I want you to think of the miracle of new birth...

Imagine a spiritual explosion. The detonation clears out my sin, and selfishness, and pride. It digs deep. It uproots the layers of sinful buildup that have accumulated over the years. It carves out a crater of holiness.

Peter recalls how the new birth *“purified your soul...”*

But along with the *inward impact*, it also pushes *upwards* a flume of fallout - a “**sincere love of the brethren.**” The work of the Spirit purifies deep into our spirit, but then produces an upward love for God and other people.

And here’s the Christian’s response to this explosion - *go with the flow...* Peter tells us that our souls have been purified, and we’ve been given a sincere love – *now* “**love one another fervently with a pure heart.**”

Use what you’ve been given... Go deeper... Reach out further...

None of us are capable of purifying ourselves, or manufacturing a true love for one another. Both purity and love require a work of the Holy Spirit in us, but when God does that work we need to jump on the bandwagon...

A strategic factor in the success of any endeavor is **momentum.**

Momentum is seizing the moment - riding a wave of confidence - getting into a groove of activity - quickly building on previous successes...

Today at Augusta National the winner will receive a coveted Green Jacket. (*Not many churches have a pastor with his own Green Jacket.*)

But the Master’s low score won’t necessarily belong to the best golfer. The Green Jacket will go to *the golfer who takes advantage of momentum!*

The last three champions were relative no-names who caught fire at the right time. It wasn't just ability, but momentum that keyed their success.

And this is true in the Christian life – in following *the* Master!

None of us can muster up purity and love. It takes a miracle from God.

We must be *“born again,”* but the victorious Christian is the one who takes advantage of this momentum – *who continues in love and in purity.*

*And how do we seize this spiritual momentum?*

Peter points us back to the seed that sprouts the change. *What is God's change agent?* Verse 23, *“having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”*

In keeping with our explosion analogy – the blast that causes depth and purity - and releases a mushroom cloud of love - is detonated by God's Word! The Bible is the fuse – the charge – the spark that ignites the fires of faith. God's Word is the spiritual explosive that generates purity and love.

Understand the book you hold in your hand is the most effective and powerful change agent known to mankind. It has unlimited potential to convict, and correct, and convert men from their wicked ways. The Bible can take a

cold and callous heart and set it on fire with passion for God.

Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu, but was familiar enough with the Bible to rebuke the Christians of his day. “You Christians have in your keeping a document with enough dynamite in it to blow the whole of civilization to bits, to turn society upside down, to bring peace to this war-torn world. But you read it as if it were just good literature, and nothing else.” And he’s right...

The Bible is no mere book. It’s spiritual seed - an “**incorruptible**” seed.

Peter says, *“Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...”*

In Mark 4 Jesus told a parable. A farmer sows seed in four different types of soil - *hard ground, shallow ground, thorny ground, fertile ground...*

The seed that fell in the hard dirt was eaten by birds before it could grow. The seed tossed in shallow soil never took root and was scorched by the hot sun. The seed that fell among the thorns got choked out. Only the seed that fell on fertile, moist, nutritious ground yielded a bumper crop.

Jesus went on to explain His parable... The seed is God’s Word...

The soils are different conditions of the human heart... Some people are hard-hearted – others are insincere and



superficial – still others get distracted – but some folks are humble, repentant, and filled with faith. When God’s Word lands in such hearts a spiritual explosion takes place...

In the remainder of our text Peter teaches us 3 truths about the Bible...

God’s Word is **the living Word** – it’s **the enduring Word** - and it’s **the nourishing Word**. If you’re a Christian God has done a miracle in you, but to seize that momentum - to fuel the fire and live in victory - you need to center your life around *the living, enduring, and nourishing Word of God*.

Notice first, the Bible is God’s **living Word**. There is life in this book...

The Bible is not just good literature – it’s alive. In Proverbs 6:22, Solomon is discussing God’s commandments, and he tells us, **“When you awake, they will speak to you...”** The Bible talks to you. It’s a talking book.

Do you remember the talking books we had as kids. You not only read the book, but if you pulled a cord, a voice inside the book would speak.

This is what happens when you read your Bible. Its author speaks to you. The Bible is alive. It reaches out to you. It touches you. It impacts you in personal ways. Martin Luther once said, **“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold**



of me.” The Bible is unlike any other book. It has a power all its own – internal combustion.

This is why God calls His Word a “seed.” Seeds encapsulate life – then release that life wherever it’s planted, and nurtured, and allowed to grow.

Seeds hold the DNA – the codes and secrets of life. A seed reproduces itself... and God reproduces His life in us through the seed of Scripture.

In John 6:63 Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” Paul adds in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The Greek word translated “*inspiration*” is “*Theopneustos*.” “*Theo*” means “*God*” - “*pneusto*” means “*breathed*.”

The Bible is “*God-breathed*.” God exhaled it into the men who wrote the Scripture. This is why I say, the Bible is the only *living, breathing book*.

I heard of two college roommates – a Christian and a Muslim... The two men became friends. But neither one of them knew much about the other person’s religion. Before long they agreed to exchange books – the Muslim would read the Bible, while the Christian would read the Koran.

After several weeks the Muslim became convinced of the truth of Christianity and became a follower of Jesus. Yet several months later he returned to his Christian friend. He was shaking his Bible, and saying, “*It’s not fair. It’s not fair.*” The man pointed to Hebrews 4:12 - where

the Bible says it's "living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword..."

The former Muslim reflected on his conversion, "The Koran is just a book - the Bible is a living book. I'm not going back, but it wasn't even fair."

Compare the Bible to other religious books and it's not a fair fight. The Bible has an advantage. It's more than a mere book. It's God's living book.

The Bible is *the living Word*, but it's also God's **enduring Word**.

Peter refers to the Bible in verse 23, "the word of God which lives and abides forever, because (and here he quotes Isaiah 40) "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you."

The Bible is a seed, but not of a corruptible variety. It's "incorruptible."

From the moment we're born we begin to die. Our flower starts to fade the instant we begin to bloom. Let me quote an old Yiddish proverb...

"A grandmother becomes feeble. Her grown daughter gives her a wooden bowl that trembling hands cannot break. The old woman dies, and the bowl is discarded. But the granddaughter retrieves it. The bowl, she knows,

will be needed again.” She’ll need the bowl. We all are going to die!

Scientists don’t understand the mystery of aging, but they’ve developed theories. They’ve noticed that normal human cells grown in tissue cultures reproduce for many generations - then suddenly degenerate and die.

It’s as if human cells are preprogrammed to die – as if *death* was written into the genetic code and imbedded in our DNA. Apparently, human seeds or cells have a built-in *time-clock* which shut down at a predetermined point.

Human seed is corruptible - it deteriorates. Physically, you were born to die - yet spiritually, you’re born again to live forever. God’s Word is “**incorruptible**” seed. The life it produces lasts forever. It yields eternal life.

Peter quotes Isaiah, "**All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever.**" Life has a flower’s fragility – it’s as temporal as the grass. Your life is a shooting star – seen for a moment then gone. Like cut roses - we flower a few days; then we wither and die.

One of the most powerful visuals I’ve ever seen occurred at a funeral.

After preaching a powerful sermon the pastor walked off the platform to escort the body up the aisle. As he walked past the casket he reached out and pulled off one of the blossoms from the flowers on the casket.

In dramatic fashion he wadded up the pedals in his clenched fist - threw them down on the floor - and then he quoted this verse, *“The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever...”*

Life is fragile and fleeting – the wisdom and opinions of men are fickle and foolish - but God’s Word is strong, and steady, and true, and lasting.

You and I need to *base our lives on God’s enduring Word...*

Over the centuries countless attacks have been aimed at the Bible.

In 303 AD the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, issued a three-fold edict. First, he ordered *the destruction of all churches* - second, *the burning of all Bibles* – third, *all professing Christians were stripped of basic civil liberties.*

Christians at the time were worried about the future of their new movement – would Christianity survive? Yet how quickly the tide changed...

Diocletian's successor, the Emperor Constantine, became a Christian. He granted his newfound faith *“favored status.”* Constantine even commissioned Rome’s finest scribes to produce 50 copies of the Bible. Ironically, the project was paid for with money from Diocletian's treasury.

You’ve probably heard of the French skeptic Voltaire - an opponent of Christianity. In 1738 Voltaire predicted

that in 25 years the Bible would be a forgotten book. Yet 40 years after his death - in 1778 - the Geneva Bible Society purchased Voltaire's home and used it to print and store Bibles.

It's been said, "The Bible is an anvil that has broken many hammers."

People try to *pound* it - *pick* at it - *pulverize* it - but the Bible *prevails*.

Author Bernard Ramm once said, "A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, the committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified..." Yet the Bible lives on. It's indestructible.

The Bible's endurance is proof of its divine authorship. Emperors, popes, kings have attacked it – these men die - yet the Bible lives and thrives.

It was Napoleon who said, "The Bible is no mere book, but a living creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it..." Jesus said it best in Luke 16:17, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail." The Bible conquers all! Its God's *enduring Word*.

When all else fails the Word of God remains!

The Bible is history's number one bestseller. If you want to purchase a book on the New York Time's Bestseller

List just wait a few weeks. You'll find it on some bargain table for a lot less than today's asking price.

Human ideas become dated, and trendy, and faddish. They lack substance and staying-power. Only the Bible's wisdom endures.

Psalm 19:10 refers to God's Word as "**sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.**" The Bible brings a sweetness and satisfaction to the human soul - *but there's another reason the psalmist uses this comparison...*

**Did you know that honey is the only food that doesn't spoil?**

Human philosophies, and formulas, and theories come and go, but God's Word is always relevant. Believe it, obey it - and it will fuel your faith!

And here's one more point about God's enduring Word...

As I mentioned earlier, human cells have a built-in timer that causes us to die. Well, I believe the seed of God's Word also has a delayed effect.

Scripture is a time-release capsule – it doesn't go off immediately.

Like a bomb on a timer – a verse of Scripture spoken into someone's life ticks, ticks, ticks... You wait and wait... then in God's predetermined timing the verses suddenly explode in the heart where they were planted.

God tells us in Isaiah 55:11, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” The Word works!

Some of you have sowed God’s seed in the heart of your husband, or teenager, or co-worker – and you’ve become discouraged. You assume all your efforts have been in vain. But it’s time to rein in your feelings and reject that notion! **Jesus promises that His Word will never return void.**

When the time is right, something will happen. Suddenly, God’s Word will explode in the person’s mind. It might be a verse you sowed 10 years ago, but the Spirit will use it at just the right moment – in just the right way.

In so many ways God’s Word is His *enduring Word*.

Finally, understand the Word of God is the **nourishing Word**.

Chapter 2 begins, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Peter speaks of a newborn baby’s thirst for pure milk...

Here’re *The Top 10 Funny Sayings Found on Baby Bibs and T-shirts...*

- 10) Dangerous When Wet
- 9) I’m the New Boss



- 8) Party at My Crib... 2:00 AM
- 7) I'm My Parents Vacation Souvenir
- 6) Daddy's Little Tax Deduction
- 5) I Do Not Suffer in Silence
- 4) Smell Something?
- 3) No Hair Day
- 2) My Parents Have No Rhythm
- 1) Got Milk

There's one common characteristic of all babies – *they love milk.*

*Ever seen a baby at feeding time?* Its little mouth starts to root. It eagerly and aggressively searches for the nipple. Nothing is more important for the baby at that moment than satisfying its own hunger.

And this is the diligence newborn babes in Christ need to show toward the study of God's Word. We need to hunger and thirst for biblical truth.

The Bible is God's *nourishing Word* – it's the key to your spiritual health.

Milk is a baby's *only food*, because it's the *perfect food*. It strengthens bones and teeth. It provides calcium, Vitamin D, and protein to the body. It helps develop immunity to disease and allergies. It even benefits the brain.

Likewise, the pure milk of God's Word has a similar effect on our spiritual health. Peter says in verse 2, *“that you may grow thereby...”*

Faith is *fueled* and *fortified* by a daily diet of God's Word. Learning the truth of Scripture helps us spot the lies of the enemy. God's nourishing Word builds immunity to deception and temptation. The Bible has all the nutrients a Christian needs to grow and develop a successful spiritual life.

This is why we need to be diligent in our study of the Scriptures!

A baby doesn't have to be taught its need for milk. He doesn't have to be coaxed to suckle his mother's breast or even take formula from a bottle.

This is intuitive knowledge. It's the baby's natural desire.

Likewise, a new Christian needs to understand their dependence on the milk of God's Word. The Bible is the perfect formula for spiritual growth. And if you've been born again you'll have a natural hunger for this milk...

Every mother knows the only time a baby doesn't eat is when he or she gets sick... *and this is true of a believer in Jesus!* Our major deterrent to God's Word is sin. Certain sins stunt our natural hunger for the Scriptures.

*A person won't run to God's Word when they're on the run from God.*

This is why diligence for God's Word is often demonstrated by what we're willing to set aside to seek after, and spend time in the Scriptures. Peter says in verse 1, "Laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy,

envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word.”

If you're harboring bitterness and hatred in your heart...  
If you're denying the truth about yourself or your situation...

If you're preaching one thing, while practicing the opposite...

If you're jealous of another person's blessing...

If you're gossiping about another person...

Notice, Peter doesn't say, *“If you're tempted, or overcome, or empty, or fearful, or lonely...”* Honest admissions of weakness only stir up our hunger for God's Word. Sincerity draws us to Scripture. It's the secrecy, and deceit, and hypocrisy, and stubbornness that'll suppress our desire for the Word.

My wife is a great cook. She's the female Emeril. She serves up some delicious meals, but if every night on my way home I stopped by Burger King and pigged out on a couple of Whoppers... it doesn't matter how gourmet my wife's cooking might be, I wouldn't benefit from her dishes.

If you fill up on junk food you won't be interested in the good stuff...

And the same is true spiritually... You'll never cultivate a hunger for God's Word – *even the living, enduring, nourishing Word* – if you keep stuffing your mind with this world's junk and clutter. The old saying is true, **“Either the**

**Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.”**

If at one time you were hungry for Scripture, but now that hunger has dissipated, *here's a suggestion* - Turn off the TV, lay down the novel, lay off Facebook or computer games, unplug the DVD, *and open your Bible.*

Limit your diet - reserve your heart for God – and you'll get hungry again.

I think the biggest culprit that stunts our hunger for God's Word is **pride**.

Try handling your life on your own – assume you don't need anyone else's help - and you'll lack the motivation to open your Bible and seek the truths of God. Pride suppresses our natural hunger for the Scriptures.

This is why Peter adds the caveat in verse 3 **“If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** **Grace is the antidote for prideful deception.**

Grace is God's unmerited favor and fortitude. Grace is the love, and healing, and forgiveness, and strength, and courage, and will-power that are not your own. Grace is the opposite of pride. It produces a total, God-ward dependence. Develop a taste for grace, and nothing else will satisfy.

The truths of God become tasty again, when you humble yourself and renounce your self-sufficiency - and develop a taste for God's grace.

Let me share one more thought with you... *this is why I do what I do!*

When I stand and deliver God's word week after week I'm sowing seed.

It might not sprout today or next week, but it eventually accomplishes God's purpose. *The Spirit of God uses the Word of God* in powerful and wonderful ways. Here's what happens to people who sit under biblical teaching for a time – they either change, or they get so convicted they split.

But no one goes unaffected. The Bible forces you off the fence.

Most of you have been born again! Through *precious blood* and *incorruptible seed* God made you pure and filled you with His love. Now seize the momentum He's supplied, and continue in that love and purity...

And we do so by laying aside every hindrance - developing a taste for grace - and taking heed to the *living, enduring, nourishing* Word of God.

We'll resemble the Master if we continue in purity, in love, and in truth!