

Latch on

By Aaron Dowds

In order to get enough milk to satisfy and nourish, a baby needs to latch on.

This may seem easy and straightforward but mothers know that's not always the case. There is expert advice and guides to help mothers achieve a good latch.

If the baby doesn't latch on properly, it can suck all day and not receive enough of its mother's pure milk. Over time this leads to hungry, unhappy and undernourished babies.

Similarly, as Christians, we also go hungry, unhappy and undernourished when we also fail to latch on properly.

Peter teaches we are to be like new-born infants who long/crave/drink deep/thirst for/earnestly desire pure spiritual milk.¹ Peter's original readers would have been familiar with the use of milk as a symbol for spiritual nourishment.²

Think about that phrase for a minute. Pure spiritual milk. How amazing does that sound? Imagine you could drink deeply pure spiritual milk every day. How much would you would benefit from that?

¹ "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—" 1 Peter 2:2 ESV

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation," 1 Peter 2:2 NIV

"You've had a taste of God. Now, like infants at the breast, drink deep of God's pure kindness. Then you'll grow up mature and whole in God." 1 Peter 2:1-3 MSG

"In the same way that nursing infants cry for milk, you must intensely crave the pure spiritual milk of God's Word. For this "milk" will cause you to grow into maturity, fully nourished and strong for life —" 1 Peter 2:2 TPT

² "The use of *milk* as a symbol for spiritual nourishment is found in Judaism and other religions; it would have been immediately familiar to Peter's readers. The author of the Qumran hymns described the "sons of Grace" as opening "their mouth as a ba[be to its mother's breasts] and as a child delighting in the breast of its nurses". THE IVP NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY SERIES, 20 VOLS. FOR E-SWORD. Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson Intervarsity Press. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:1-3.

This pure spiritual milk is a metaphor³ or word-picture for the nourishment that comes from drinking deeply of God and His Word (which are inseparable⁴). Once the baby has a taste for how good its mother's milk is it will intensely crave that milk. Peter seems to imply that once we have tasted how good God is, like the new-born baby we will intensely crave more.⁵

Interestingly breast milk is all a new-born baby needs for the first 6 months of life. It contains all a baby needs for health, growth, immunity and development.

“Human milk also contains hundreds of invaluable substances, including:

- antibodies and white blood cells
- probiotics (as many as 600 different species!)
- hormones
- growth factors
- antibacterial properties
- oligosaccharides (special carbohydrates that encourage the growth of friendly bacteria in the digestive system)
- long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (important for the development of their brain, eyes and nervous system)
- cytokines (special proteins involved in cell communication and immune system formation)
- and many, many more.”⁶

Breast milk provides all the nutrition a baby needs and it's available on demand (pre-heated) day or night and free of charge.

³ “The word *spiritual* shows that he is using a metaphor. Literally it means "belonging to the word or reason" (Gk, *logikos* from *logos*, "word"). This may mean "reasonable," as opposed to material, or "metaphorical," as opposed to literal. So the phrase may simply mean "the spiritual equivalent of milk." THE IVP NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY SERIES, 20 VOLS. FOR E-SWORD. Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson Interspersary Press. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:1-3

⁴ “First of all, verse 3 identifies the nourishment with the Lord rather than with his Word or with teaching about him. This reflects the common Christian belief that in the Word we meet with the Lord himself.” THE IVP NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY SERIES, 20 VOLS. FOR E-SWORD. Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson Interspersary Press. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:1-3

⁵ “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” **Psa 34:8 (ESV)**
“if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” **1Pe 2:3 (ESV)**
“Peter enjoins his readers to crave spiritual nourishment on the assumption that they have already tasted it and know that it is good—so good that it is worth getting more. They have already proved that the Lord is good by personal experience. There is perhaps more in this statement than meets the eye.” THE IVP NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY SERIES, 20 VOLS. FOR E-SWORD. Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson Interspersary Press. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:1-3

⁶ The Benefits of Breastmilk | Happy Family Organics

However, all the benefits of breast milk are only available to a baby if they first latch on correctly. This means the baby must get a good attachment in order to get enough milk.

God has given us this picture of breastfeeding and how a new-born survives and thrives to help us understand how we as children of God are to survive and thrive spiritually.⁷

Like new-born infants we are to long/crave/drink deep/thirst for/earnestly desire pure spiritual milk.

How God has designed breastfeeding is that while the baby is feeding and receiving its milk it is also intimately close to the heart of the mother. In order to feed properly the baby is intimately close receiving not only life-giving milk but life-giving love and adoration of its mother. While the baby is feeding often a loving mother will touch and speak words of love and affirmation.

“WAIT and listen, everyone who is thirsty! Come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Yes, come, buy [priceless, spiritual] wine and milk without money and without price [simply for the self-surrender that accepts the blessing].”⁸

⁷ “The word Shad is the Hebrew for “breast.” It is used invariably throughout the Old Testament for the breast of a woman. It is the place from which the baby derives the food that gives it strength. The life of the mother flows into the babe. Her strength, love, solicitude, and care all flow into the life and body of the sweet little bundle that came from her and is always a part of her. Thus an eternal God wrapped up an infinite truth in picturesque words and gave it as a gift to Abraham—and to you and me. What God meant was “Draw from Me, Abraham, all the strength and sustenance you need. I am the Strong One, the Nourisher, and the Life-Giver. Draw for your weakness from the fountain of my strength, even as a babe draws from his mother’s breast the milk of life. No need to stumble over unbelief, Abraham, just walk before Me and be perfect. That’s the lesson. God is the unfailing and unlimited source of all that we need: grace to cover all our sins, love that pardons all our iniquity, stripes sufficient for all our healing, strength for all our weakness. We believe that, but herein we’ve failed. We believe that God gives it, but we haven’t learned how to receive it. The mother gives the milk to her babe, but the little one must receive it. The infusion of the divine strength and nature is dependent upon two things: your knowledge that God is willing to give, and your learning how to receive. As unfailing and irrevocable as the law of the seedtime and the harvest is the great truth that God is always ready to meet your every need, if only you are ready to receive His supply. Praise His Name, He is still El Shaddai! Paul admonished us to become “partakers of the divine nature,” and Christ Himself said, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” The God who was mighty enough and sufficient for every need of Abraham, longs for us to learn the lesson of drawing from Him all that we need for every moment of every passing day.”

— The Real Faith for Healing by Charles Price
<https://amzn.eu/8KDoYI4>

“It is not possible to know the original meaning of Shaddai, or its derivation...The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, translated *El Shaddai* as ‘the Sufficient’, and this makes excellent sense when we see that *El Shaddai* is almost always used in the Old Testament in the context of God’s extravagant covenant provision. Indeed, this ‘trunk’ name reveals God as all-providing. It was first used in Genesis 17:1-5, when God introduced himself to Abraham and covenanted to provide him with a large family. It is used about fifty times in the Old Testament, mainly in books like Genesis, Ruth and Job which focus on the issue of God’s covenant provision.” Dye, C. ed. 2008 *Knowing the Father - Sword of the Spirit series*. 2nd ed. P41-42

⁸ Isaiah 55:1 AMPC

“Then he said to me, “It has been accomplished! For I am the Aleph and the Tav, the beginning and the end. I will give water to all who are thirsty. As my gracious gift, they will continuously drink from the fountain of living water.”⁹

Jesus also invites the thirsty to come to Him. God revealed himself to Abraham as God Almighty or in Hebrew “El Shaddai”.¹⁰ The word Shad is the Hebrew word for breast. God was showing Abraham that all he needed for life, strength and sustenance would be found in El Shaddai, God Almighty. Abraham needed to learn to latch on or draw all he needed from God Almighty. He is the Strong One, the Nourisher and Life-Giver. *El Shaddai* points to the nature of God as being all-providing, as ‘the Sufficient’ one. Like breast milk is all providing and sufficient for a new-born baby so God is for His children. Sufficient means, “enough to meet the needs of a situation or a proposed end.” *El Shaddai* points to the fact that God is enough to meet the needs of any situation his children face.

“God is the unfailing and unlimited source of all we need.”

Latching On

We believe God is all we need for surviving and thriving but we have a latch on problem in the church today. Our busy lives mean we often don’t stop frequently enough or long enough to latch on and feed properly. Latching on involves stopping everything else. A baby can’t project manage on the lap top and latch on at the same time. A baby can’t run on the treadmill and be intimately close to its mother at the same time.

This is where we have failed.

Many Christians are experiencing a form of spiritual “Child Attachment Disorder”.

“Normally babies develop a close attachment bond with their main caregiver (usually their parents) within the first months of life. If they are in a situation where they do not receive normal love and care, they cannot develop this close bond. This may result in a condition called attachment disorder....

The effect of not having this bond is problems with behaviour and in dealing with emotions and new situations.”¹¹

God as our heavenly Father wants us to live in a close relationship with him so we can receive his love and care. If we live distant from him this close bond does not develop fully and we can suffer a form

⁹ Revelation 21:6 TPT

¹⁰ “When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless,” Genesis 17:1. ESV

¹¹ <https://patient.info/childrens-health/child-attachment-disorder-leaflet>

of spiritual Attachment Disorder causing us to struggle with our responses, emotions and new situations.

We believe God is the source, can give all we need yet we have failed to learn how to receive pure spiritual milk, how to latch on to God.

We must know there is a plentiful supply of spiritual milk on tap waiting for us. We must know that we cannot survive or thrive without it.

David from the Psalms reveals to us that he understood how to latch on:

*“But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.”*¹²

*“I am humbled and quieted in your presence. Like a contented child who rests on its mother’s lap, I’m your resting child and my soul is content in you.”*¹³

*“Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child [resting] with his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me [composed and freed from discontent].”*¹⁴

*“I’ve kept my feet on the ground, I’ve cultivated a quiet heart. Like a baby content in its mother’s arms, my soul is a baby content.”*¹⁵

To wean in the Bible covers the whole period of nursing and care and in ancient Israel this lasted until the child was around three to four years of age.¹⁶ David describes his soul like a weaned child with its mother. What is a weaned child like with its mother? A weaned child has all its needs and care met. The baby is well fed, cleaned, dressed, comfortable, intimately held close and loved and cared for. The baby is calmed and quieted. The baby is not distressed or crying because it is not hungry, is not uncomfortable, is not cold, is not lonely. The picture being created is of a baby who is contented and resting. But the baby is not resting in its cot or in its pram. Where is the baby? It is where it always wants to be. The baby is with its mother. It is intimately close. It is on its mother’s lap. That place where it is warm, soft, comfortable and where the mothers soothing heartbeat can be felt. This is the picture David gives us to describe his soul.

Let me ask you a few questions.

- Is that how your soul feels?
- Imagine your soul could feel like that every morning before you started your day?
- Is it possible for you to experience this like David did? If so, how? What would you need to do?

¹² Psalms 131:2 NRSV

¹³ Psalms 131:2 TPT

¹⁴ Psalms 131:2 AMP

¹⁵ Psalm 131:2 MSG

¹⁶ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/wean/>

David tells his soul and directs his soul using words to remind his memory of truth:

*“Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.”*¹⁷

His soul at this point has wandered from rest. Yet David tells his soul to return to rest. And what is the reason he gives. Because the LORD has dealt bountifully with you, he tells his soul. It’s quite incredible that the word chosen here translated as bountifully is גָּמַל - gâmal¹⁸ and means to treat a person well.¹⁹ It’s the same Hebrew word that is used for weaned in Psalm 131:2. Why should his soul return to rest? Because the LORD has dealt bountifully – the LORD has treated you well – the LORD has weaned your soul like a baby being nursed and cared for. This is the same reason David gives why he can now sing. Why should he now sing? Because the LORD has dealt bountifully with him and he has been weaned like a child with its mother.²⁰

Why does a mother nurse and care for its baby so well? Because of the mother’s unfailing love for her child. How much greater is God’s unfailing love, mercy and kindness for his children? The unfailing love of a mother is strong in her heart, mind, feelings and emotions and yet this is expressed through her weaning actions taking care of the baby’s needs. God’s lovingkindness is no less. Yes, it is in his heart, mind, feelings and emotions yet it is expressed in dealing with his children bountifully. When this is believed and received by latching on it leads to a soul which is satisfied or satiated. This is a soul that is completely satisfied that is does not need any more. What is the result of a soul that is satiated?

*“Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”*²¹

We can sing because the LORD has dealt bountifully with us and weaned us like a child with its mother. We can rejoice and be glad when we latch on and allow his steadfast love to satisfy us in the morning.

God’s unfailing love brings us great comfort in our distress allowing our souls to be cheered up despite our circumstances. Like a mother’s presence and love can comfort, calm, soothe and delight a distressed, anxious baby so does God’s presence soothe and delight our troubled soul. God is “the Father of tender mercy and the God of endless comfort” who “always comes alongside us to comfort

¹⁷ Psa 116:7 (ESV)

¹⁸ "Surely^{H518 H3808} I have behaved^{H7737} and quieted^{H1826} myself,^{H5315} as a child that is weaned^{H1580} of^{H5921} his mother:^{H517} my soul^{H5315} is even as a weaned child.^{H1580}" **Psa 131:2 (KJV+)**

¹⁹ **H1580 (Strong)**

גָּמַל

gâmal

gaw-mal'

A primitive root; to *treat* a person (well or ill), that is, *benefit* or *requite*; by implication (of *toil*) to *ripen*, that is, (specifically) to *wean*: - bestow on, deal bountifully, do (good), recompense, requite, reward, ripen, + serve, wean, yield." Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Abingdon Press, 1890.

²⁰ "I will sing^{H7891} unto the LORD,^{H3068} because^{H3588} he hath dealt bountifully^{H1580} with^{H5921} me." **Psa 13:6 (KJV+)**

²¹ Psa 90:14 (ESV)

us in every suffering”²² The key to soothing is to draw near to His presence. The baby is only soothed once it’s close to its mother. Similarly, it’s when we come into the presence of our Father of tender mercy and comfort that we find comfort and delight for our anxious souls.

"When I thought, “My foot slips,” your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.
When the cares of my heart are many, **your consolations cheer my soul.**"²³

'When I screamed out, “Lord, I’m doomed!” your fiery love was stirred, and you raced to my rescue. Whenever my busy thoughts were out of control, the soothing comfort of your presence calmed me down and overwhelmed me with delight.'²⁴

"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy."²⁵

The Passion Translation really emphasises the heart of the message here. ‘The soothing comfort of your presence calmed me down and overwhelmed me with delight.’ We need to latch on because as we draw near to His presence, we come into His soothing comfort that transforms us from the inside out.

Have you ever noticed that when trying to sooth a distressed baby or child the mother will sing soothing songs to the child? The gentle, sweet noise and gentle vibrations all help to soothe the child. Similarly, as you learn to draw near to Father with your anxiety and troubled heart, be silent and allow him to sing over you to soothe you with the quietness of His love:

*"The LORD your God is with you. He is mighty enough to save you. He will take great delight in you. The quietness of his love will calm you down. He will sing with joy because of you."*²⁶

Imagine you had a daily “atomic habit” (tiny changes, remarkable results)²⁷ of latching on to your loving Father and allowing your soul to be completely satisfied with his steadfast love. Imagine all you needed for your joy and contentment and fulfilment was his steadfast love. This means you could go into your day already satisfied. This means the source of your joy is not external like the weather or the mood of your colleagues but internal. This means you can be the joy ‘thermostat’ in your workplace setting the culture and tone for the day.

Failure to Thrive in the natural is a condition where a baby or child is slow to develop physically because it does not have enough nutrition.

²² 'All praises belong to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he is the Father of tender mercy and the God of endless comfort. He always comes alongside us to comfort us in every suffering so that we can come alongside those who are in any painful trial. We can bring them this same comfort that God has poured out upon us. '2 Corinthians 1:3-4 TPT

²³ Psa 94:18-19 (ESV)

²⁴ Psalms 94:18-19 (TPT)

²⁵ Psa 94:19 (NIV)

²⁶ Zep 3:17 (NirV)

²⁷ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Atomic-Habits-Proven-Build-Break/dp/1847941834>

We have a Failure to Spiritually Thrive problem in church leadership and in the church today. I know because often that's been my experience. Many are walking through life with a failure to thrive because we do not have enough spiritual nutrition. We have not been feeding frequently or long enough. We have not been latching on properly. The busyness and stress of our lives means we want everything instantly and quickly.

Ruth Haley Barton puts it like this:

*“But one of the things I know for sure is that those who are looking to us for spiritual sustenance need us first and foremost to be spiritual seekers ourselves. They need us to keep searching for the bread of life that feeds our own souls so that we can guide them to places of sustenance for their own souls. Then, rather than offering the cold stone of past devotionals, regurgitated apologetics or someone else’s musings about the spiritual life, we will have bread to offer that is warm from the oven of our intimacy with God.”*²⁸

“The central question is, Are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God’s presence, to listen to God’s voice, to look at God’s beauty, to touch God’s incarnate Word and to taste fully God’s infinite goodness?”

HENRI NOUWEN, IN THE NAME OF JESUS²⁹

Buy have you noticed a baby does not feed quickly. It takes time to become full. And the baby does not feed once per day but multiple times per day.

Jesus invites the weary and burdened to come to him to find rest. It’s amazing how sleepy a baby is after a good feed. A good feed makes the baby so satisfied and content, it’s completely rested. When was the last time you felt like that?

So how do we latch on?

First, we must stop and come to Him. We are told if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us.

We must learn to wait and receive. Those that wait receive the new strength.³⁰ Not old strength but new strength for each new day and challenge.

²⁸ — Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry (Transforming Resources) by Ruth Haley Barton

<https://amzn.eu/a0075ba>

²⁹ — Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry (Transforming Resources) by Ruth Haley Barton

<https://amzn.eu/a0075ba>

³⁰ “but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:31 ESV

The question is, how do we receive? What does waiting look like? Often, we are not good at receiving and silence. Often our times with God we speak or sing all the time almost striving to get close to God. Communicating with God is good and worship is good and essential and we should include these. But we must learn to simply receive. Practice silence. Start with a few minutes and even try up to 20 minutes of silence. And simply receive. Receive His love, His comfort, His healing.

Yes, your brain will struggle to rest and not be distracted but train your mind to come back to thinking of God. Ruth Haley Barton says this about stillness:

“On any given day, stillness can be hard. Even awkward, frustrating. We come to each day like a jar of river water that has been shaken. The water is murky, impossible to see through. But as the jar sits still—unmoved—the silt and sediment begin to settle. Clearer waters emerge. So too, in the stillness that enables solitude and silence, the mud and mire of our souls begin to settle and clarity emerges. In solitude and silence, we become aware of the inner needs and desires that we bring to the day. Then we can talk to God, our good and loving Father, about what it is we actually need for that day, asking for his wisdom, his guidance, his grace to prevail.”³¹

Now that you are resting and silent you are now getting ready to hear the still small voice. Like the baby that is feeding believe by faith you are receiving the living water and bread of life to nourish your soul. This reminds me of the song *Daily Bread* by Elyssa Smith:

*“You are my daily bread
I never have to beg
You keep me hungry
And you keep me fed”³²*

As you are feeding you are intimately close to Father. Hear his voice of affirmation and love and encouragement. Real faith comes as you hear His voice.

Mark Batterson in his excellent book *Whisper* describes the Tomatis effect discovered after a renowned opera singer had mysteriously become unable to hit certain notes. Many thought it was a vocal problem but Dr Tomatis, an otolaryngologist, diagnosed it as a hearing problem and he had become deafened by the sound of his own voice:

“In Dr. Tomatis’s words, “The voice can only reproduce what the ear can hear.”³³

Batterson questions if we are living in an age where our ears have become deafened to the voice of God and as a result of our inability to hear, we lose our voice and lose our way. If the voice can only

³¹ Barton, Ruth Haley. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (Transforming Resources) (p. 10). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

³² <https://www.praisecharts.com/songs/details/76583/daily-bread-chords>

³³ Batterson, Mark. *Whisper* (p. 1). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

reproduce what the ear can hear, for those who's career involves speaking, how important is a hearing ear?

*“The best way to get people to listen to us is for us to listen to God. Why? Because we'll have something to say that is worth hearing.”*³⁴

*“Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.”*³⁵

When a baby is latched on and feeding it is completely at rest and peace. It cannot feed and speak at the same time. This time of feeding and silence creates the perfect opportunity and proximity to hear the loving voice of the baby's mother speaking words of love and affirmation.

As we learn to spiritually latch on to God, we need to find that place of complete rest, peace and stillness. From this place of proximity and intimacy, we create an opportunity to simply listen in stillness to the voice of our loving Father. From this place of hearing we rediscover our voice, in the words of Dr. Tomatis: “the voice can only reproduce what the ear can hear.”

We need to re-learn and re-discover how to receive from him by grace. No matter how weak you feel or how much of a failure you feel, just learn to receive his love.

Don't just read the Bible. Hear His word. Let the Spirit be your teacher to bring illumination and understanding. What is God saying to you personally through his word. Let the word read you and don't just read the word. There are many tools to help you do this.³⁶ But focus on a small portion of scripture. Ask the Spirit to illuminate and speak to you through it. Chew it over. Meditate and ponder it. Pray back to God and ask what this means for your life. This is how you receive. And what are the results?

“but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.”

Psalms 1:2-3 NIV

³⁴ Batterson, Mark. *Whisper* (p. 2). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

³⁵ 1 Samuel 3:9

³⁶ <https://www.vineyardchurches.org.uk/resources/spiritual-exercises/>