

# The Believer's Spiritual Growth

*2 Peter*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Peter 1:1-11  
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Our Scripture reading this afternoon is found in the second epistle of Peter. 2 Peter 1. We read the entire chapter. Our text is found in the first 11 verses. 2 Peter 1.

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. 13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; 14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. 15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. 16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received

from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. 19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word.

The text that we consider this afternoon is the first 11 verses of 2 Peter 1, 2 Peter 1:1-11. I'm not going to read all of those again at this time, but I will reread verses 5 through 7. I'm going to be referring to the various verses throughout this sermon. 2 Peter 1:5,

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

Beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ the question we may ask ourselves this afternoon is: are we growing spiritually? Are we growing spiritually? Every believer ought to strive to grow spiritually. That's the message of the inspired apostle in 2 Peter, the entire epistle. At the beginning of the epistle, we have that passage that we read and then the very last verse of the epistle, 2 Peter 3:18, we read, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen." Grow in grace. That's not merely a suggestion; the Holy Spirit puts that in the imperative making that a command, grow in grace.

But before the inspired apostle comes to that command to grow in grace, before he arrives at this duty to grow, he first indicates the divine source of all our spiritual life. Verse 3 of 2 Peter 1,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

God is the giver of life even as he is the one who causes us to grow.

When by God's grace we give ourselves to grow spiritually, the text informs us that we also gain the assurance of our calling and election and that's verse 10 and 11,

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure:

The Apostle Peter inspired by the Holy Ghost, wrote this epistle to warn the believers against damnable heresies that led to godless living. To live like the wicked while claiming to be children of God, while claiming that Jesus Christ is one's Lord, is really to deny Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 2:1, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." They claimed that the Lord bought them with his precious blood but they proved otherwise by their lives. They did not grow in grace.

Instead of allowing us to live godless unthankful lives, the Holy Spirit would have us grow spiritually. Spiritual growth. That spiritual growth will lead to godly living and that's the message that we consider in our text in verses 1 through 11. Let's consider the text under the theme "The Believer's Spiritual Growth." In the first place, let's note the divine source; secondly, the human striving that is involved in that growth; and lastly, the gracious assurance that God gives to his people. The believer's spiritual growth: the divine source; the human striving; and the gracious assurance.

When we talk about spiritual growth, it only makes sense that growth is possible only where there is already spiritual life. Even the children can understand that principle. If something is going to grow, if a plant is going to grow, it must be alive. Try taking a seed and heating it up in the microwave and planting that dead seed and it will not sprout and it will not grow and it will not bear fruit. That tree will never get taller. It will never grow leaves. It will never bear fruit. And the same applies with spiritual growth. If someone is spiritually dead, then it is impossible to grow and it is impossible to bear fruit.

Our text makes it abundantly clear that the spiritual life of believers comes from God. The introduction to the letter indicates that already when it addresses those who "have obtained like precious faith." Verse 1,

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

They didn't obtain it, beloved, by their own searching. They didn't obtain it by their own wisdom. The very word that is used in the original indicates that this obtaining was a gift. The Greek word translated "have obtained" has the idea of, it's used in the case of casting lots, but here it refers to "a divine allotment," something that God did to give to these people the faith that they had. They had obtained it from God. A precious gift of God is the faith of believers.

That precious faith holds onto the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord. Notice how the inspired apostle says, "that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Through the righteousness of God. It was not their own merits that gave them salvation, but the favor of God that came through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The way that verse is laid out in the original, the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ, that same God and our Savior are the same person. They are the same one. It is his righteousness that has been given to us, that in the first place, that indicates divine life is from God; in the second place, the Holy Spirit implies that the believers addressed by Peter were already recipients of grace and peace. He was not addressing unbelievers, so he says in verse 2 of the text,

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God,  
and of Jesus our Lord,

For something to be multiplied requires that there be something there in the first place. The inspired apostle recognizes that God has already given the saints grace; he has already given them peace; he has already reconciled the saints to himself through the death of Jesus Christ, through his precious blood poured out on the cross; and the Holy Spirit has already planted in their hearts a new life, and by faith, they have been made partakers of Christ's perfect righteousness. They have received that grace already and they have peace with God already.

They are happy and joyful in God's favor and now the inspired apostle says, "Grace and peace be multiplied." Well, how is grace and peace multiplied? He says, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." By God's grace we already have the knowledge of God, but grace and peace is increased as we obtain a fuller and more intimate knowledge of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through the knowledge of God, grace and peace is multiplied.

Now, to pray that it be multiplied means that we are praying that grace and peace would be increased, and we said already, for there to be an increase, there must already be grace and peace. It must already be in the possession of the saints. All of this comes through God's divine power. That is indicated in the very next verse, 2 Peter 1:3,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain  
unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us  
to glory and virtue:

Notice that here all things that pertain unto life and godliness have already been given, and if that were not true, there would be no possibility of spiritual growth. Without God's divine power, we never would have spiritual life and we never would exhibit godliness. But God has "given all things that pertain unto life," that's talking about spiritual life, "and godliness."

How did God give these things to us? Again, through the knowledge of himself. God blesses us with spiritual life and spiritual gifts through the knowledge of himself. He causes us to hear the Gospel and then he causes us to believe the Gospel by his irresistible grace. God is the one who called us and it is God who clothes us with spiritual

clothing. He clothes us with glory and he adorns us with virtue, he "hath called us to glory and virtue."

Well, verse 4 reinforces that very same truth. Notice the parallels between that glory and virtue in verse 3, and then in verse 4 we read,

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

By his divine power, God gives to his people life and godliness. He gives to his people life and godliness. When God clothes us with glory, he makes us partakers, that's the same idea, makes us "partakers of the divine nature," and when he adorns us with virtue, he works in us so that we escape "the corruption that is in the world through lust." But the point is, and these first four verses to the entire epistle, make clear that God is the source of our divine life and there can be no spiritual life without God, nor can there be spiritual growth. This is the foundation of our spiritual growth.

But knowing that God has given all things that pertain unto life and godliness, and knowing that he has caused us to be partakers of the divine nature, and knowing that he has made us to escape the corruption that is in the world, that very thing becomes the motivation to strive for spiritual growth. Notice how verse 5 begins, "And beside this." That could also be translated, "And because of this." But it points to the motivation either way for spiritual growth.

So we go back again and we say the bond of faith, the connection that brings us life, that connection to God that brings us spiritual life, that is the foundation. God has graciously connected us to Jesus Christ and given to us a new life, but having given us faith, then he says to us,

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

Add to your faith. Notice the manner in which the Holy Spirit urges the believers to carry out this command. The Spirit does not say, "You have been given all things that pertain unto life and godliness, you have been given these things by grace, and now sit back, relax and wait for God to make you grow." The inspired apostle does not say that. What does the inspired apostle say? He says, "giving all diligence." Giving all diligence, literally bring to bear all haste, as if we were running a race; and if somebody is running a race, imagine everybody running and that person walking slowly, looking all around, and hardly paying attention to the race.

No, the apostle says, "giving all diligence; make every effort." That's the command which the Holy Spirit gives to every believer. Make every effort. It's not just a good suggestion, it's a command given to the saints by the Holy Spirit. A duty given to believers. Sometimes people imagine that duties destroy the Gospel. They think that duty destroys

the sweet truth that we are justified by faith alone without works. And to be sure, there are those who preach that we are justified by faith plus the works. There are people who teach that, the federal vision is one example that young people and young adults saw a lecture on that last week. They teach that we are saved by faith and works. The idea is that those who perform their duties, these heretics teach those who perform their duties, they are the ones who earn their justification; they are the ones who earn a place in heaven; they merit a place in heaven, at least in part by their good works. They declare and teach that our being declared righteous on the judgment day will be based on the merits of our good works, whether we have performed our duties or not. That is a Gospel destroying heresy. Scripture, however, teaches just the opposite. That's not the teaching of Scripture. Galatians 2:16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Scriptures do not teach justification by faith and works, but that still does not erase the fact that God assigns to his people certain duties. We're not talking about our justification here. God assigns his people certain duties. The duties, I skipped ahead here. Let's go back. God assigns his people certain duties. A duty is simply an obligation, an obligation to pay something that is due. A duty is something that we owe to God. We owe thankfulness to God for what he has done. Luke 17 speaks of us in the doing of duties.

Luke 17:10, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Jesus is telling his disciples, "There are duties, but when you perform those things which are commanded you say, We are unprofitable servants." We can't earn anything by doing those duties. That's the point. Jesus says that's the point. We are unprofitable servants. We cannot earn anything by that and yet doing what God sets before us, doing what God commands us, is doing our duty.

Now, does that mean that once we have been saved, once we have been given eternal life, that we don't need a Savior anymore? Does it mean that God begins a good work in us, and that's how the epistle starts out, it tells us God has begun this good work in us, is the apostle now saying, "Well, now you have to go and complete the work that God has begun"? Is that what the apostle is teaching? Not at all. Not at all. Philippians 1:6, we read, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." In other words, the God who has started the work of salvation will bring it to completion.

We most certainly need a Savior. Even though God has already saved us, we still need a Savior. Every second of our lives we need a Savior. We need our Savior to preserve us in the life he has given us. If he removes our physical breath, talking about our physical life now, if he removes our physical breath, we die. If he removes our spiritual nourishment and our spiritual oxygen, if you will, we die. We need a Savior every second of our lives. Just as the beginning of salvation is God's work, so is the perfecting of it his work.

But here is the point: when God saves us, he doesn't save us a stocks and blocks. He doesn't save us as inanimate creatures and carry us around as puppets. He saves us as rational, moral creatures. God never says, "I am your Savior, everything is all set, don't bother striving in the race." He never says, "I am your Savior, relax and everything will be just fine." That's not what Scripture says. You'll never find that in Scripture, instead you find over and over again to the people of God who have been saved by grace and who are carried through that salvation by grace, over and over the Holy Spirit says, "Give diligence." 2 Peter 3:14, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Be diligent. Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Then Philippians 2:12, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." That's the same idea, give diligence. Then notice the very next verse. Why give such diligence? Verse 13, Philippians 2:13, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." In other words, the diligence that believers give, we can look back at and say, "That's God's work." But we don't sit there and wait and say, "Well, God's not making me diligent so I'm just going to walk around the track. I know it's a long race but I'm just going to walk. He hasn't given me diligence yet." No, God says, "Give diligence. Your labor is not in vain."

What should we give diligence to do? What should we work for and what should we pray for? We must never forget that praying. What should we work for? What should we pray for? The apostle gives us that list in our text. 2 Peter 1:5,

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue;

If we truly believe, then we should also seek to exhibit that moral virtue, that moral excellence that gives evidence of that faith. The faith doesn't just sit there dead, but it bears fruit. Give diligence to add to your faith virtue. Show our faith by being conscientious in the performance of our duties. That's what virtue is, a manifestation of the power of God's work in us.

Luther puts it this way, and remember Luther is the champion of justification by faith alone, but he says this commenting on this very passage. He says, "Let your faith break forth before the people in order that it may be helpful, busy, powerful and active." Then he goes on and he says, "You have a good inheritance and a good field, but seek ye that you do not let thistles or weeds grow in it."

Add to your faith virtue, and to our virtue the Holy Spirit says, add knowledge. Add knowledge. We should seek a greater understanding. If we want to grow, we ought to seek a greater understanding of God. Well, where do we learn about God? We don't learn about him by going out and relaxing. We learn from his word. To virtue, add knowledge. Read God's word. Meditate upon God's word. Pay attention to the preaching and meditate upon the contents of that. Philippians 3:8 we read this, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

The more we grow in the knowledge of God our Savior, the less precious the things of this world will become to us. That's what the apostle indicates, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." They don't compare.

Grow in knowledge and to our knowledge add temperance. Temperance. God would have us hold the world, as it were, at arm's length. He wants us to be moderate in the use of the world; control our emotions; control our impulses. We want to do this but temperance says we ought not to do that so that we are not carried away with worldly lusts. If we are going to grow spiritually, we ought to avoid the spiritual poison of this world. Hold it at arm's length. Don't think that we can mix with the world, keep company with the world, watch the programs of the world, read the literature of the world, enjoy the music of the world, and don't think that that's not going to affect our spiritual life as all that poison pours into our hearts.

To knowledge add temperance; keep the world at arm's length; and to our temperance, add patience. We may be discouraged in the midst of this world as we are perhaps persecuted, as we face trials and difficulties. To our temperance we ought to add patience. We must know that God is in control. We must know that God gives to us everything that is for our good. "Why did God set this trial upon me?" Patience says, "He did it for my good. I don't know why or how this is going to work out for my good, but I know he did it for my good and he is doing it for my good." And so we submit to God without complaining.

We have patience, and to our patience add godliness. Work at obtaining an awesome respect of God. Labor to understand just how great God is. Godliness means we will seek in all of our life to live in a way that glorifies God. Because he is a great God, he deserves all the glory. Another word we could use for "godliness" is "piety." Piety. Everything we do ought to be for God's sake. That's what piety is all about, framing our whole life for God's sake.

And to our godliness, add brotherly kindness. Remember that other saints are also children of God. Most of us don't find it that difficult to be charitable and kind to our blood relations and even so, as we have that kindness towards our blood relations, we ought to have that brotherly kindness towards the saints, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are the same family and that extends to our friends and it even extends to those who are not friendly towards us.

To godliness add brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness we ought to give diligence to add charity. Charity, of course, is just another word for love. It's the kind of love, however, not just that is attracted to someone else, but it's the kind of love that gives of one's self; that seeks the highest good for others.

To brotherly kindness, add charity. Add these things together. The idea of the original word is of a chorus and one thing is added on top of the other and they all together make a beautiful sound. Add to the chorus of virtue, and the more we add to that chorus of



virtue, the more wonderful will be the fruit. That's the idea that the text brings out in 2 Peter 1:8,

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved, do we bear that kind of fruit? Do we give diligence to grow in that way? That's what the inspired apostle tells us to do: add, give diligence to add to your faith virtue and so on.

Verse 9 continues,

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

When we give diligence to grow and, of course, that's all God's grace, we don't deny that. When we give diligence to grow and produce these virtues, God will also give us the assurance of our calling and election. That's because you would never expect these fruits, you would never expect that kind of growth in somebody who was dead, somebody who was unregenerate. Somebody who is dead spiritually would never produce those fruits. I'm not talking about look-alikes, I'm talking about the real fruit. It's true, there are unbelievers that might appear to display some of these things, but that's only outward appearance.

God looks at the heart but as we examine ourselves, we have the advantage, beloved, that we can examine ourselves and our hearts in the light of God's word and see that we do display these fruits. Not perfectly by any means, but the fruits of the Spirit displayed in our lives. Yes, they are always tainted with sin but we do display the fruits of the Spirit if we have the Spirit, if we have the life of the Spirit in our hearts. And if we display spiritual virtues, it can only be because God has called us to glory and virtue, using the words of verse 3. God has called us to glory and virtue. That's the reason why we would display these virtues.

So displaying these fruits proves that God has called us out of darkness, he has brought us into his marvelous light, and if God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, it must be that we were also elected. Some people say nobody knows whether a person is elect or not, but we can know our election. We can know our own election. We can be sure of our own election by these means. Make your calling and election, if we make our calling sure, we know that we have been brought into light, then we also know that we have been elected.

Generally speaking, the more we display these fruits of faith, the more diligence, and this is generally speaking, but the more we display these fruits of faith, the more assurance God will give us. Verse 10 again, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make

your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." If ye do these things, ye shall never fall. If you show these virtues and give diligence to add to the chorus of virtues, then it will be impossible for you to fall away. Not that you strengthen yourself in the way and that you secure your own salvation, but it's talking about the assurance of our salvation. When God is faithful, he who has called us brings us along the road and we see ourselves along this road growing spiritually, we can know that God is faithful and he that has begun a good work in us will not desert us. It is impossible, then, for us to fall away. That's the idea of verse 10, "if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."

In the way of making our calling and election sure, our path will be free from many stumblingblocks, and that's the idea of verse 11 of the text. "For so," that is, as we make our calling and election sure,

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The entrance that the apostle is talking about, into the everlasting kingdom, is an entrance into heaven, and the verb translated "ministered," an entrance shall be ministered, is the very same word used in verse 5 when it says, "add to your faith virtue." It's the very same verb so we could translate it this way, the idea is this, "When you add to your faith virtue, when you do these things, when you add to your faith, an abundant entrance will be added to you." Calvin puts it this way, "God by supplying you abundantly with new graces will lead you to his own kingdom."

The figure that's been used to give a picture of this abundant entrance is a picture of two ships. Both ships make it into the harbor. Both make it to the haven where they would rest. But one of those ships is tipped over sideways. It's leaking oil. The motor is barely running and yet it arrives in the harbor. That one didn't have an abundant entrance. But there's another ship, brightly painted, upright, sails into the harbor with its flags up high. That's an abundant entrance. Both of them made it but the one that gave diligence was ministered an abundant entrance. That's what the apostle says, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

That's the question, then, we may ask ourselves that we asked at the beginning: are we growing spiritually? Are we giving diligence to grow spiritually? Are we using the means that God has given to us? And are we praying? Are we praying for the grace even to do these things because it is God, after all, who works in us? Are we giving diligence to add to our faith? May God bless us that we would, indeed, grow spiritually for his sake. Amen.

*Our Father with art in heaven, we thank thee for spiritual life and we thank thee that thou dost also work in us both to will and to do. Father, we ask that thou wouldst indeed work in us that we would give diligence. May we give diligence to grow that we may glorify thee. May we give diligence to grow and may we, therefore, be assured of our calling and election. May we give diligence to grow and so may we know that thou wilt*

*minister to us an abundant entrance into heavenly glory. Grant that to us, we pray, not because we are worthy, but grant them to us because we stand in Jesus Christ our Lord. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*