

Our Highest Priority

2 Peter 1:3-15

As we begin this new year I want to spend a couple weeks studying some of the things Peter wrote in 2 Peter chapter 1 that have to do with personal goals and direction for our lives. That will give us time to prepare for a winter sermon and small group series during which we encourage you to join or start a small group to discuss the themes of the sermons. Maybe you had a good experience in a small group during our fall sermon series, and we encourage you to make the effort to do it again. With all the holiday celebrations I'm still working on the plan for the series, but I hope to have that done this week. If you are interested in trying a new small group or starting one in your home, I encourage you to talk to Kent to get some tips and more information.

Anytime we start a New Year it seems we're doing a little bit of a reset. You have the sense that another year of your life is over and a new one is just beginning and it's a good time to evaluate and consider making some improvements in areas in your life that are important to you. The hard part is that these improvements can quickly become overwhelming because there are a lot of ways we could improve and a lot of people telling us how important it is that we improve them.

Health improvements are always a big one, especially after holiday feasting. All kinds of people are trying to push their workout programs on social media or diet plans to help you lose weight and feel like you're 30 again. Then there are financial management improvements that sound really good especially in a world where everything just keeps getting more expensive. We can always use help to improve our marriages and parenting. And then there's the wide world of hobbies and interests and a never-ending push to be better and better at the things you enjoy.

We can quickly be flooded with all these opportunities and messages about what we should be doing and why they're all so important, and you can try to wade your way through them and decide what you want to do. But as Christians the question we should really be asking ourselves to help clear away the clutter is: "How does God want me to grow and improve this year?"

If you think about it, that's what really matters most, and not what everyone else is telling you or even how you feel.

So we're going to spend a couple weeks looking at a passage written by Peter about what he thought was most important as he reached the end of his life. Peter was one of the most well-known disciples and leaders in the early church and we have two letters that he wrote to some churches in the region of Asia Minor. The second letter was written near the end of his life when he was expecting to be put to death. He was likely in prison in Rome in the late 60's A.D. when Christians were facing a lot of persecution. So the passage we're going to study was written after a lifetime of following Jesus and spiritual leadership in the church.

The churches he was writing to were in a society kind of like ours where there was a lot of moral corruption and wickedness and all kinds of false teachings that tolerated and encouraged immorality. To the churches in that situation, he wrote about what he thought was vitally important for them to focus on and pursue. So as we begin this New Year with all our thoughts and feelings about ways we could improve, I hope these things bring some clarity and direction.

After a customary greeting, Peter begins by reminding them of what God's will is for their lives.

Read 2 Peter 1:3-4.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Now, this is a long and complex sentence with a lot of ideas woven together and after studying and reflecting on it for quite a while, I want to break it down a little bit and summarize what he's saying. The basic structure is that in the first part he makes several statements about what God has done for us, and

then, in verse 4 he says, “so that...” and gives the reason why God has done them.

He begins by saying that by his divine power, God has given us everything we need for godliness in this life. This began when he gave us knowledge of him and the eyes of our hearts were opened to seeing who he is in his glory and excellence and sensing his call and desire for us to join him in that. It was through that knowledge of him that he has granted to us his precious and very great promises – promises regarding his awesome gift of salvation and the spiritual blessings he gives along with eternal life and glory.

So God has done all these things, and Peter says in vs. 4 he did them so that as he carries out his promises in our lives we may become partakers of the divine nature, which is another way of saying that we would become more like Christ. Having escaped the corruption in the world due to sinful desire, the goal and purpose God has for our lives and the direction he is taking us in and working toward is that we would become more like Christ. We’re undergoing a life transformation, and he’s given us everything we need to do that.

So you can see that Peter is emphasizing God’s desire for our lives and the purpose for which he revealed himself to us and saved us. What is that purpose? Is it so that we will look and feel like we’re 30? Is it so that we’ll have financial security and build a lot of wealth? Is it so that we’ll be the best at our career or have the best-looking home or the best hunting property in the neighborhood?

No. As he reaches the end of his life and looks back at what he’s learned, Peter helps us clear the clutter and remember what matters most. And that is not all these things that are vying for our attention right now at the beginning of the New Year. God’s purpose for our lives and calling for us to pursue as our highest priority in 2026 is that we will grow to become more like Christ. That doesn’t mean other things aren’t important or that you shouldn’t pursue them or try to improve in other areas of your life, but it does mean that they should be far less important and take a back seat to the pursuit of Christlikeness. And in some cases, we will have to just let go of some of them for the time being.

Now, Peter doesn't just give a general appeal that his readers would become partakers in the divine nature. He follows it up with some specific, intentional instructions for qualities they were to grow in. As we read these things we need to realize that Peter has put a lot of thought into them and come up with an intentional list. These are the qualities he would have seen in Christ and we need to seek to grow in them and we're going to look at them in greater detail next Sunday.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-7.

For this very reason, (because God's desire and purpose for your life is to become like Christ) make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Next Sunday we will look at these in more detail. But you can see the priority that Peter gives them: "make every effort." These were the qualities he urged them to pursue. And they were to be added to their faith. Faith in Christ came first but faith was not the ultimate goal or the end, which is imperative for us to hear in our Evangelical context where faith is so highly emphasized and sometimes to the point of devaluing all other virtues. There are good reasons to emphasize faith, but faith by itself in the absence of these other qualities is a faith that's no better than unbelief. And we see that in what Peter writes next.

Read 2 Peter 1:8-11.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter is writing this to people who have faith in Christ. They believe the gospel that was preached to them – is that faith all they need in the Christian life? Is it

all they need to have confidence they belong to Christ's kingdom? Peter makes it clear the answer is "no." Faith is critical, but faith is only the beginning of God's work in their lives. "Faith without works is dead," is how James puts it. Peter is urging his readers to make every effort to add these qualities to their faith because if they do, it will keep them from being ineffective and unfruitful in their knowledge of Christ.

And if they don't, he says in verse 9 that the person who has knowledge of Christ but is lacking these qualities has totally lost sight of the gospel of Christ and their cleansing from sin. They may have believed the gospel at first, but their faith is having no effect on them and if these qualities are not increasing, their faith is worthless.

But the person who has knowledge of Christ and the gospel and is increasing in these qualities has incredible assurances. They will be effective and fruitful in their knowledge of Christ. They will confirm their calling and election and never fall away. And they will have a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom.

Do you see how important your pursuit of Christlikeness is? When I see these things, I'm reminded once again of what's most important in my life and what I should pursue as my #1 aim in 2026. And that's why Peter wrote about them. That's basically what he says in the last few verses.

Read 2 Peter 1:12-15.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Remember these things... very important words for us to see from the pen of a disciple and eyewitness of Christ who was about to die. Peter was going to make every effort to remind them of these things so they would never forget. Even though they already knew them and were established in the truth, they needed to be reminded.

And so do we. We have so many things demanding our attention and trying to convince us they are most important. So many ways we could improve and grow and get better. But none of them are nearly as important as this one. They are important, and you will have all kinds of decisions this year about where to focus your time and effort. Whatever you do, make every effort to not get so busy and focused on other things that you forget and neglect what's most important.

And here's some good news: Remember what Peter said at the beginning of this passage – we are not in this alone. God has given and is giving us everything we need to grow in becoming more like Christ: a new heart, the written Word to read and study, the fellowship of believers to support, serve, and grow together, and most importantly his indwelling Spirit to convict, guide, teach, and empower. The journey will not be easy, but God will always be with us to see us through.