

## **Practice These Things**

### **2 Peter 1:5-7**

We're back in 2 Peter this morning to finish looking at a vitally important challenge from the apostle Peter. Next week I'm planning to start a winter sermon and small group series based on the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is going to help us see and discover the hidden life of joy in the kingdom of heaven that he wants us to live and experience. That series will go to the end of March, and I encourage you to look into joining or starting a small group if you are able. Several of you did that during the fall series and found it to be very helpful. If you need help finding a group or starting your own, contact Kent and he will help get you the information you need.

Today we're going to look at the same passage as last week and the challenge we saw from Peter is to make our pursuit of becoming more like Christ our highest priority this year. Peter showed us that becoming like Christ is God's purpose for our lives, it's what he's doing in us and what he's called us to join him in. And Peter said that as we join him in that, we can know that our faith will be effective and productive and we will have confidence in our calling and election and receive a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom.

But he also said that if we don't join him and there is no spiritual fruit in our lives, we have completely lost sight of the gospel and all Christ has done for us. Our faith will be worthless. And the implication is that we will have no assurance of salvation or a rich welcome into Christ's kingdom. So growing in Christlikeness is vitally important – much more important than anything else in your life this year.

That's what we looked at last week and today we are going to look at the qualities that Peter gives us to strive for. I believe this is an intentional list that Peter thought through and that these are qualities he saw and heard in the life and teachings of Jesus. I think it would be a good idea if you were to set these as goals for your spiritual growth – things to work toward and pray about. So I'm going to briefly define each quality and talk about what they look like in our lives.

2 Peter 1:5-7

*For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.*

### #1 Virtue

Peter uses the same Greek word 2 more times in his letters and both times he's talking about the "excellencies" of God. After looking at various definitions, I think what Peter has in mind are the qualities in Christ and his followers that are good, excellent, and praiseworthy. The Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 would be a good example: "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control.*" These are the things Peter would have seen in Jesus, and this is the kind of "virtue" we need to grow in.

You have probably noticed that people are often naturally drawn in the opposite direction – they admire and emulate sinful qualities they see in other people. Things like arrogance, rebelliousness, bad language, boasting, disrespect, selfishness, violence, greed, etc. In our sinful nature we are naturally drawn to those things. But when you come to Christ, you must no longer live like that. You are called to put those things to death, not admire them, and pursue virtue and goodness instead. "Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue."

### #2 Knowledge

Peter uses this word in 2 Peter 3:18: "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" And I think he has exactly the same thing in mind in chapter 1 – knowing and understanding Jesus. If you think about what happened in Peter's life, he underwent a massive shift in knowledge and understanding from what he had learned growing up in a culture of corrupted Judaism to becoming a mature disciple of Christ. Jesus' teachings rocked his world and changed everything he knew.

The same thing needs to happen in every disciple of Christ. We are born into a world that's filled with ignorance, lies, and deception. And when we come to Christ we already have a base of knowledge and a worldview that is incomplete at best, but more likely very tainted. And this applies to everyone

even if you grew up in a Christian home. Peter basically did. I grew up in a Christian home, went to a Christian school, went to church and youth group every week, and as I look back at what I knew as a young man I can see that my knowledge of Jesus was lacking and flawed in many ways. 20 years from now when I look back at what I know today, I'll think I'll see the same thing.

We need to grow in our knowledge. One of the challenges of our day is our smart phones. They are designed to draw and keep our attention. Look at what happens in your home this afternoon. And I can speak from experience that they are a huge barrier to growing in the knowledge of Christ. We have to put our phones away or whatever else is dominating our time, and spend more time studying the Word of God.

Here's a simple plan: Get a study Bible and a notebook and set aside 30 minutes a day at a time that can become a habit (That's only 2% of your time). Make this a priority in your life. Then go to the book of Ephesians (or any book). Read the introduction – very important – that will help you immensely in your understanding. Start reading and studying the first paragraph in chapter 1. Use the study notes to help you learn until you understand what he's saying. It's going to take a long time. Write down what you learn. And then go to the next paragraph and do the same thing. Take your time so that you understand what you're reading. To make it even better, find someone else who wants to do the same thing and get together once a week to compare notes and share what you've learned. Make every effort to grow in knowledge.

### #3 Self-control

This is a quality that has to do with learning to master and control the passions and desires of your flesh that well up inside you – desires related to eating, drinking, buying things, sex, speech, fear, worship, anger and so on. We naturally try to fulfill these desires by seeking some kind of instant gratification that oftentimes leads to sin. Eph. 2:3 says, "*we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind.*" But that's not who we are anymore.

Rather than giving into our natural impulses, we need to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, practice self-control and abide by the standard God has set for us in his Word. That means we have to put a leash or a muzzle on our fleshly

cravings and then yield to the Holy Spirit and the commands of God. This requires self-denial, discipline, submission to God, obedience. Some of these impulses are so powerful and addictive, like food or drink or sex, that we may need to take extra measures outside of ourselves to help us in the battle – accountability groups, filters, fences, etc.

Jesus was tempted in every way like we are, yet Peter saw him live a life of self-control, yielded to the Holy Spirit.

#### #4 Steadfastness

When Peter wrote these things, he was likely in prison in Rome, and he could see what was coming – he was going to be put to death by crucifixion. He was going to suffer and die for his faith. And that was after facing many other trials and sufferings throughout his life. Being a Christian wasn't about health, wealth, and prosperity for Peter. And it wasn't about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There was a lot of struggle, difficulty, and suffering. But he had learned something from watching and listening to Jesus. Suffering was normal and expected for disciples. And the response to suffering that Jesus taught and modeled in his life was this word Peter uses: steadfastness, patient endurance, faithful waiting.

This one is really hard for us as Christians in America because we think the Christian life should be relatively easy. We haven't known a lot of persecution and suffering for our faith, so when things don't go right and we suffer in other ways, we can think something's wrong and that we shouldn't be suffering. But the Bible is full of stories and teachings that show us God actually uses our suffering in many different ways to accomplish his purpose of making us more like Christ.

So if you're a Christian, you should expect to suffer and learn to grow in steadfastness. It's when we're steadfast in suffering, and we patiently endure, that God brings about further and deeper spiritual growth in our lives. Romans 5:3-4 says, "*we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*" James 1:2-4 says, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing*

*of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

Make every effort to supplement your faith with steadfastness. Take a different approach to the struggles and hardships you face this year. Don't bail out or give up and waste the suffering you're going through. Patiently endure and in the end you will see a harvest of righteousness.

#### #5 Godliness

A helpful definition I found was: “A God-centered way of life marked by reverence, devotion, and practical obedience.” At first I was having a hard time understanding the difference in Peter's mind between godliness and virtue but then I thought about what he would have seen in Jesus. He would have seen a lot of wonderful character qualities that were good, excellent and praiseworthy – that's virtue. But he would have also seen a deep and serious devotion and reverence to the Father, and that was godliness.

Jesus' attitude and behavior that corresponded to his relationship with his heavenly Father was godliness. He was constantly demonstrating his reverence for the Father in prayer – “hallowed be thy name,” in teaching – only what the Father told him, in miracles – both what he did and didn't do as led by the Father, and in obedience to the weighty calling of the Father's will – like you see at the Garden of Gethsemane and his suffering on the cross. His devotion and commitment to the Father was a demonstration of godliness.

Here too we probably have a lot of room to grow. It seems that what is encouraged in Christian experience right now is more of a comfortable and friendly interaction with God who loves and accepts us “just as we are.” But in doing so we lose the awe and reverence that is fitting for his holiness and transcendence. You never see Jesus treating the Father with a laid-back attitude. Always reverence, devotion, and serious obedience. That's godliness, and we need to grow in that.

#### #6 Brotherly Affection

This is a quality that addresses our relationships with one another in the church family. Through our adoption into God's family, we become brothers and sisters in Christ forever. There needs to be a covenant loyalty toward one

another, even with those siblings that rub us the wrong way. Brotherly affection demonstrates the warmth and tenderness that is proper to siblings. It includes helping one another, supporting one another, showing kindness and hospitality, friendship. It also includes forgiveness and a willingness to try to work through our differences. Peter saw the way that Jesus treated him and the other disciples and it would have been marked by brotherly affection. If you watch *The Chosen*, I think it demonstrates this really well.

We need to grow when it comes to this quality in our lives – intentionally connect with, help, support, and build relationships with other believers. Forgive, and seek to be at peace with each other. Some of us are more loners and introverts and content with being alone. And it can be easy to just let this slide, but we can't if we are going to be obedient to Christ. We need to grow in this area more and more.

#### #7 Love

This is agape, or, the love of God. A holy, self-giving disposition that originates in God. Different than romantic love or brotherly affection. I believe Jesus would have demonstrated this day in and day out by serving the disciples and the crowds of people that gathered to hear him. But there are two stories where we see it very intentionally and clearly, that Peter probably had in mind: when Jesus washed their feet in the Upper Room, and then suffered and died on the cross the next day – the ultimate expression of love.

Love is a quality that supersedes all other qualities in how we treat other people. It leads to brotherly affection in the body of Christ, and ministry and service to the unbelieving world. Love is why Peter was sitting on death row. He chose to keep doing ministry and telling people about Jesus even when his life was threatened and he faced imminent danger.

In a world saturated with selfishness, hate, and people more than willing to take advantage of you, love will be costly. But that's what love is. And this, more than anything else will demonstrate who Christ is through our lives. It is the greatest of all the qualities and they all actually move us toward and feed into the development of love in our lives.

So Peter's given us a very helpful and practical list. And I realize this is way, way more than you can take in one sitting. There's not one thing to apply in this sermon, there's 7, and many more applications within each of them. This is a list you will need to work on for the rest of your life.

What are you going to do with this list? Peter has said, "Make every effort to practice these things and grow in them in your life." He's also given us very compelling reasons to do so – reasons that directly relate to our confidence and assurance in salvation. What are you going to do with these things?

If you are struggling with spiritual apathy and finding direction for how to grow in your relationship with God, why not take this list, type it out on some kind of notecard, and put it somewhere to remind you to grow while giving you practical ways of growth? Nothing is more important in your life in 2026 or beyond and I urge you to put this first before you make and carry out plans for anything else.