

NEW FOCUS

SERIES: PETER'S PROGRESS

By Danny Hall

On a recent Monday I had a break between the work of the afternoon and a meeting in the evening, so I decided to go out for a run. I was looking forward to this run, mostly because I felt I needed it to clear my head. Now, some days when you go out to run, or do almost anything, it all just clicks; your body feels like it's really ready to go, and you just cruise along. I have plenty of days when that's how I feel when I'm out running, and it's great. Then there are days when, five steps into the run I start thinking, "Why am I subjecting myself to this brutality?" And this run was definitely in that category. I didn't feel as if I could warm up, everything was hurting, and all the way through my 3½-mile loop, every step was laborious. It was killing me, and I kept saying over and over in my mind, "Why am I doing this?"

It reminded me of so many times in life when we wonder how we can go on. There are days when we don't know how we can even pick up one foot and put it in front of the other. Whatever is going on in our lives seems to be laborious and challenging, and we just don't feel like going forward, although we do, because we have to.

This is definitely true in our walk with the Lord as well. There are days when we just want to give up. We don't want to keep going. The idea of sustaining our walk with the Lord over the

long haul seems too hard. So how do we keep going forward? How do we make progress toward our goal? As this series of messages from the life of Peter comes to a close, we're going to look at that question.

Some of the last words that Peter wrote give us encouragement about keeping on going, about engaging in the process that God invites us to be a part of, in the face of the challenges that come our way. Last words are always considered special. In fact, someone's last words before they pass on are sometimes elevated almost to the level of sacredness. We don't know the last words that Peter spoke on earth, but what we do have in 2 Peter are his last recorded words. He concludes in 3:18: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

Peter wrote the book of 2 Peter to encourage the believers of the early church when they were being challenged in a very important way. In the book of 1 Peter he dealt primarily with the issue of living out one's faith in a world that was becoming hostile to faith in Christ, when persecution was beginning to rise against the early church, and he encouraged the early Christians in how to deal with that. In 2 Peter he deals with a totally different but equally important front of the battle: the intrusion into the church of those who have begun to teach falsely about who Christ is, to co-opt the message of Christ and use it to gain a foothold for their own agendas. Peter recognizes the danger, so he challenges the believers to remember the truth that they've been taught about who God is, and he warns them to stand against these false teachers. As he does that, he encourages these folks to continue to move forward.

Notice that in 2 Peter 3:18 he talks about growing in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The word “knowledge” appears a number of times in the book, several of which are in the passage that we’re going to examine. Peter understands that in order to live right, we have to think right. We have to have true knowledge of God at a deep level of our being, the correct knowledge *about* God and a true experiential knowledge *of* God as we walk with him.

Peter begins by giving a word of encouragement about moving forward. Our text is 2 Peter 1:1-11. I hope we’ll draw from it some insights into how we can go on in the face of all the challenges we have to our faith.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

**To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ
have received a faith as precious as ours:**

**Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and
of Jesus our Lord.**

**His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness
through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.
Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that
through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the**

corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I want to look at Peter's words of encouragement from two points of view. First, Peter is encouraging us to remember who we are in Christ.

Remember who you are

Notice what he says about those who are not progressing in their faith, who are not on the right

path in their walk with Christ. Verse 9: “If anyone does not have [these qualities in increasing measure], he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.” In the salutation of his letter, verses 1-2, he addresses “those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” He calls us to remember where we came from, to remember that we have been called out by God and have been forgiven in him. It is this foundational element of our forgiveness in Christ that we must never, ever forget. Peter says those who begin to get off the path of faith have forgotten that they have been forgiven of their sins, that the God of the universe sees every bit of their heart, right to the bottom of it, and all of the worthless things that are there, and he loves them just the same. That is foundational.

Then Peter goes on to explain in greater detail the glory of who we are in Christ. Verse 3: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” The word “glory” speaks of the full radiant beauty, the wonder, the totality of who God is as the King of kings and Lord of lords. And through who he is in this glory, he called us to something special. He also called us through his “goodness.” This word means virtue or moral excellence. It has the idea of purity of being that issues forth in life-changing power. It’s strength of character, if you will, in the heart of God. Out of the glory of who he is and out of the virtue of his heart, God has reached down and called us into relationship with him, and has given us every single thing we need for life and godliness.

Now, there’s a great deal of teaching about Christian living, and a lot of it tries to help us to find the key to the victorious Christian life. We’re told we need this experience or that experience, or

some other little piece of the puzzle. Somehow we're left thinking that we're missing something in our walk with God, and we've got to go out and find this missing piece. Peter says that's not true at all. God has placed in us, as those he has called and forgiven, every single thing we need for life and for godliness. None of us lacks anything that we need to be the person that God created us to be.

Flowing from this, there are "very great and precious promises." These promises, recorded for us in God's word, are of his unending and unconditional love for us, of Jesus' incredible work on our behalf, of our being drawn into his family, of the sure future we have because we're united with King Jesus. All of that is going to unfold in God's plan. These wonderful, precious promises have been given to us to meditate on, to learn from, and to draw strength from.

And out of that, Peter says, we participate in the very divine nature. The word "participate" or "are partakers of," is the word from which we get our word "fellowship." We have personal, deep, incredible fellowship with the divine nature, the living God himself, Christ who lives in us.

Then he says we escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires. The power that dominated our lives—our own flesh and the sinful world in which we live and all of its allure and enticements—has been broken, because of the resources of Christ's being in us, because his wonderful, saving grace is transforming us.

Peter reminds us, "This is who you are. You are forgiven. You have everything you need for life and godliness. You partake in the very divine nature. And the power of sin has been broken in

your life.” I believe he is saying these things to encourage his readers in the truth, in contrast to the false teachers he will describe later in this book. For one of their characteristics is that while they claim that they have the truth, the inside knowledge, the right message, and are trying to gather people who will follow them, their life betrays their message. They are driven by selfish personal agendas, often themselves falling into all kinds of corruption. So Peter reminds his readers, “Remember who you are in Christ, that the power of sin has been broken in your life, and you are free.”

But Peter doesn't leave it at that. He goes on in the verses that follow and invites them, and us, to participate in the process.

The process of spiritual growth

We are to remember who we are, but the first thing he encourages us to do is *become* all that God has saved us to be. Notice how he expresses this in verse 5: “For this very reason [because of who you are and what God has given you in Christ], make every effort to add to your faith....” God honors us by entrusting to us a role in our relationship with him. Yes, our relationship with God is one of grace, and we're totally dependent on him. But we are not puppets in God's hand. This relationship with God is a real relationship. He honors the integrity of who we are as human beings created in his image by inviting us to participate in this relationship at a real and important level. So we are not simply to sit back in our pews with nothing to do, expecting God to reach down and do everything. He asks us to join in the process, and he uses a strong term:

“Make every effort to add to your faith....” (Italics added).

Now, this process we are invited to engage in is one of growth. He begins by saying, “Add to your faith.” Faith is square one, the starting point. By faith we enter into a personal relationship with Christ. It is the point where we say we believe that Christ is who he says he is, and that we can enter into personal relationship with him, forgiven by God, trusting that his ways are right and his path is right. That is the foundational step of a walk with Christ.

“To your faith,” he says, “add goodness.” This word “goodness” is the same word that he has used of God a few verses before, meaning moral excellence or virtue. We are encouraged to add to our faith moral excellence, virtue, a goodness that issues forth from the very character of Christ being formed in us as he lives in and through us. That which is true of Christ becomes true of us. As we trust him and walk with him, what flows out of us is the very life of Christ and the power of a virtuous and righteous life.

Then he says, “Add to this goodness knowledge.” There is that word once again. Knowledge is part of the progress of our spiritual lives. I’ve been a believer for more than thirty years, and I’ve been in the ministry almost that long. You’d think I’d have figured all this out by now, wouldn’t you? I’ve gone to Bible school, I’ve gone to seminary, and I sit each Tuesday morning with a wonderful staff of people at this church and we study the Bible together. And you’d think we’d have it all figured it out by now—except for one small thing: God is unfigure-out-able! He is greater than we can ever imagine. What God invites us to do is to engage with him in an ever-increasing exploration of the wonder of who he is, in terms of both our mental knowledge and

our experiential knowledge as we walk by faith. We never give up the process of trying to discover and learn more of God. It is God's grace that opens our hearts and minds, it is in his word that we find him, and it is his Spirit who teaches us; but we ourselves engage in a lifelong pursuit of the knowledge of God.

To this knowledge, Peter says to add self-control. This is the ability, through the power of the Spirit, to choose the right thing at the right time, to control the passions that would rule our lives if we were left to our own devices, apart from the gracious work of God. As we become more and more aware of Christ and our knowledge of him increases, we're better able to trust him and to make the right decisions in life.

We add to that perseverance, because, you see, it's a lifelong process. God is unimaginably immense and wonderful and majestic, and our destiny is wrapped up in the very eternity of God himself. So we're invited to not give up, but to keep going. We persevere in trusting God and seeing him producing his character in us, and our knowledge of him grows, and we're able more and more to choose to focus on Christ and order our lives around him. We learn to trust God in the hard things of life and to keep going.

Peter says perseverance leads to godliness. People have struggled to come up with a good definition of godliness. Obviously, in some sense it is a reflection of God's character. When we use this word about other people, what we usually mean is that when we're with them, we sense God's presence. I think that's what Peter is talking about here. The more we walk with Christ and trust him for these things to happen, the more God's presence in our own lives is manifested.

People begin to see him in us.

After godliness, the next step is brotherly kindness. This is behavior toward others in which we are able, in all kindness, to love and serve each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, to extend ourselves, to give ourselves in service to each other.

This leads finally to the capstone of this progression: love itself, *agape* love, sacrificial giving of all that we are for the glory of God and for the needs of others.

This is a beautiful picture of the process of growth that Peter encourages us to engage in so that we might grow. But there's more to it than that.

Fruitfulness and assurance

He says this process will begin to produce something in us if we participate in it: a productive and fruitful life. Notice verse 8: "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure...." He does not say, "If you possess these qualities perfectly." Possessing these qualities in increasing measure means that it is part of your life to be continually growing in your knowledge of Christ and the perfecting of your life, through Christ's gracious work in you. If these qualities are ever-increasing in your life, Peter says, "they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive...." Now, when I hear those words, my mind immediately races to the things that I do for God: I'll be a more effective preacher, and so on. I think of the doing part of the Christian

life. But notice that Peter doesn't speak of being ineffective or unproductive generally, or in our work. He says it will keep us from being ineffective or unproductive "in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter's emphasis here is not on performance but on relationship. You see, performance in the Christian life flows out of that relationship. Notice the cyclical nature of this process: knowledge of Christ leads to growing in Christ. But as we grow in Christ, our knowledge of Christ increases. If Christ's character is being formed in us in this progression, and we're growing closer and closer to the Lord and our lives are being transformed by his grace, it leads us to a deeper knowledge of God. But it is precisely that deeper knowledge of God that leads us farther on the process of spiritual growth.

More than that, this growth gives us a deeper assurance of our relationship with him and our security in him. Notice verse 10: "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Now, Peter is not saying that if we do all these things, then it's going to get us into God's eternal kingdom. No, what he's saying is that as we walk in faith with God and observe him working in our lives, transforming us, which takes us into deeper and deeper relationship with him, there is deeper and deeper surety in our hearts and minds that we are indeed God's children, those he has called. And more than that, it gives us a great sense of anticipation of our entry into God's eternal kingdom, seeing the present as preparation for the future. As God works in us, we have a growing confidence, anticipation, and joyful expectancy of where he is taking us, where all this is going to end. We know there's going to be a rich welcome for us into his eternal kingdom. That sets us free! So we are able to joyously anticipate even the difficult things of the present,

seeing God use them to prepare us for eternal glory with him. This is Peter's encouragement to us as we seek to follow King Jesus.

What does this mean to us? It means we've been given an incredible gift—eternal life, and all that is involved in a relationship with God; and because it's a real relationship, we have a role to play, a responsibility to cultivate this relationship with him.

Seeking God deeply

After I got done with the laborious run I spoke of at the beginning, I was meeting with a group of men. We'd been getting together for a while, and now we were starting to read David Roper's book on the book of James, *Growing Slowly Wise* (1). We were discussing some of the issues in James 1. Verse 22 is familiar to many of us: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." One of the points in our discussion was this: Here we are, Peninsula Bible Church. We teach the Bible. And I've never been anywhere where more people studied the Bible. That being the case, why are so many of us struggling in our walk of faith? Why are marriages falling apart? We began to ponder that, and one of the things we came up with is that while most of us somehow find time to study the Bible, we don't have a lot of time to really connect with God. We don't have quiet places in our lives to let the Bible get inside of us, so to speak, times to meditate and think and let the Spirit of God speak to us deep in our hearts. We also have very little time to have the kind of relationship with other people in the body of Christ who can help us wrestle through what it means for our lives day by day to have a walk of

faith in Christ. The question we took home to think about was this: What would have to change in our lives if we were going to really connect with God at a deep level, to not just study the Bible, but to let it transform us, to have the time to listen to the voice of God, to sit down with other people who want to listen to the voice of God and share that experience with each other?

Peter encourages us to pursue the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, not just intellectual facts about him, but deep, personal experience of him. If we're not going to be constantly frustrated by life, or stagnate spiritually, but are going to truly be able to connect with God and go forward, we have to be men and women who will hear the voice of God, who will seek him at that deep level that Peter is encouraging, embrace the wonderful promises that we have because of who we are in Christ, and engage, as Christ has invited us to, in a vibrant, real relationship with him.

Carol Lind, our Community Life pastor and temporary High School pastor, came up with a little formula for people to think about: All of us need someone to learn from, someone to learn with, and someone to pass it on to. I've thought about that a lot as I meditated on the way we order our lives. I wonder how many of us can say we have someone to learn from—people who will impart to us truth that we need to hear that will help us to understand the Scriptures—and someone to learn with—partners in the faith who are walking alongside us, listening to the voice of God in each other and encouraging each other and challenging each other—and finally, someone to pass it on to. As Peter is passing on this truth to those who would follow him, we too have been given this task. Who are the people we're pouring our lives into?

I believe that if we will be a community of faith that engaged with the word of God at that level,

we will see transformation and growth. And as progress goes from faith to sacrificial love and everything in between on Peter's list, our spiritual growth will begin to shine forth from our lives and Christ will be manifest. What a wonderful thing he invites us into! I close with the same words of Peter's that we started with: "Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

Notes

1. David Roper, *Growing Slowly Wise*, © 2000, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI.

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2 Peter 1:1-11

Ninth Message

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[Back to Index page](#)

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