

Cultivate your faith \* 2 Peter 1:1-11 - Title slide as I go up  
September 25, 2016 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

I want you to imagine that you went to the doctor and the doctor sent you on to a specialist. As you go into the specialist's office, you can't help but notice that the diploma on the wall is yellowing. There's bottles of castor oil lined up on the shelves. As you talk to him, you get the distinct impression that he hasn't read any medical literature since the 70's. How would you feel about that doctor? How confident would you be in that doctor's ability?

Hopefully you haven't run into any doctors like that – and theoretically at least, you shouldn't. The College of Physicians and Surgeons has in place rules that to maintain your doctor's licence, you have to have a set number of credit hours every year, taking courses, attending conferences, reading scholarly articles. I know this because Julie is always looking into learning opportunities and we often get self-directed learning packages in the mail. Later on in December, she'll be headed down to Florida for a family medicine conference. The College of Physicians and Surgeons recognizes that consistent growth is vital.

The same is true for pilots. I don't know if you know this – Jim Bergsma is a pilot for UPS – and every year he has more training. Every year he has to attend ground school plus he has flight simulator training – to make sure that he continues to grow as a pilot.

The same should be true for Christians – God intends for us to grow as believers. That's why one of the reasons that we exist as a church is to 'Grow in God.' We're on week two looking at our mission statement here at Langford which is what? Know, Grow, Show, Share.

That's what we exist for. That's what you tell people if they ask, 'hey, what do you do out in that church out on the highway?' Oh, we know, grow, show, share –

We exist to be a safe environment where people come to know God  
To Grow in Him  
To show Him at work in our lives  
And to share His good news and His good gifts.

That's why we exist as a church and this week we're going to focus on the 'growing' part. We exist as a church to grow in Him.

To talk about that this morning, I want to look with you at the opening verses of Peter's second letter. Peter at this point was convinced that he would not live much longer and so he wanted to leave his friends and disciples some final words to live by and here's what he tells them – Grow in your faith.

God has given us all we need for godly life and eternal life so cultivate your faith.

Now the nice thing about Second Peter is that it allows us to pick up where we left off last week. Last week we talked all about knowing God – didn't we? God is this radically forgiving father who welcomes home even the worst of sinners – and when you are I came home and confessed that we had sinned against Him, He forgave us and made us His children.

Now that's true, but God did more than just forgive us – and 2 Peter 1 fills in some of those details.

Join me at 2 Peter 1, verse 3.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him

-that is – when we came to know God as our Father – He gave us all we would need for living a godly life. Camp on that for a minute – if you have trusted Jesus as your saviour, then God has already given you all you need for a godly life. How can that be? Let's keep going -

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 promises, so that through them, you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Peter has told us something tremendously profound here – God has enabled us to participate in the divine nature. Not that we become God but we become LIKE Him in a couple of crucial ways – we become like God in terms of morality and immortality. That is to say – He enables us to act like Him and He enables us to live forever.

Let's take the first one – morality. I heard in the last couple of weeks about a father in upstate New York who was jealous of the attention his toddler, who was recovering from eye cancer, was receiving. The father killed the child and later confessed. I think that there were some mental health issues going on too but this is an illustration of the corruption in the world caused by evil desires that Peter talks about. Because of our twisted sin nature, people naturally desire to be the centre of attention. We want our own selfish desires fulfilled and what often ends up happening is a corruption of the good that God intended.

God though has given us a way to escape from that corruption and that's through trusting Jesus. When we trust Jesus, God gives us the ability to act morally – to act like He would – how? By allowing us to share in the divine nature. By giving us the capacity of moral living. How'd He do that? By taking on OUR nature!

Do you see – we were corrupt, self-centred and by nature children of wrath – Jesus came and took on our nature in what theologians call 'the great exchange' – He who knew no sin became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus took on human nature so that we could participate in the divine nature.

WE receive that by faith – by trusting Jesus – that’s the very first line of Peter’s letter – 2 Peter 1:1 - To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours (2Pe 1:1 NIV).

By faith, we begin to participate in the divine nature. We begin to Act as God would – with His morality – but we need to keep growing. We’ll catch up with the ‘immortality’ part of the divine nature in a minute, but for now, let’s keep going with Peter.

Look at verse 5 -

“For this very reason” – for what reason? For the fact that God has given us faith, for the fact that God has given us all we need for godliness, for the fact that God has allowed to share in his divine nature – for those very reasons –

make every effort  
to add to your  
faith goodness  
and to goodness, knowledge;  
6 and to knowledge, self-control;  
and to self-control, perseverance;  
and to perseverance, godliness;  
7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness;  
and to brotherly kindness, love.

God has given us all we need for godly living but we need to cultivate it. We need to ‘make every effort’ Peter says. Notice, he doesn’t say ‘if you have time, invest in your faith.’ Or ‘this is optional for believers’ – he says ‘make every effort to add to your faith.’

If you are following Jesus, then you need to cultivate your faith.

Now I admit that I struggle with the language of ‘adding’ to your faith because Peter has already told us that God has given us EVERYTHING we need! And the word that Peter used here has a nuance of providing or supplying – he actually uses it again in verse 11 – literally it says ‘a rich welcome will be provided to you’ – that’s the same word as in verse 5.

I think it’s best to think in terms of cultivating – in giving us faith, God has given us all that we need in seed form; we need to partner with Him to see those grow into healthy virtues. And Peter gives us a list of those virtues.

Now, I distinctly remember in grade 6 getting the worst mark of my life – not that it's stuck with me or bothered me through the years – but the teacher wrote on my assignment that I had simply written a list – not actually something meaningful. Well, if Peter could talk to my grade 6 teacher, he would explain that lists were actually well-recognized modes of moral teaching in ancient literature (Green, 190). So there's that –

So here's the list –

In giving you faith, God has given you the potential for goodness – cultivate goodness in your life. Peter borrows a word from pagan philosophers here to say Jesus' followers should cultivate 'excellence of character, going beyond the normal bounds of duty' (Green 192). What does that look like in real life? Be known in your workplace or school or neighbourhood as a good-hearted person, always trustworthy, always polite. Cultivate goodness.

In giving you faith, God has given you the potential for knowledge – cultivate that in your life. Get to know God better and apply what you know about God to the way that you live. To use last week as an example; knowing that God is a forgiving father is one thing, take that a step further and forgive others the same way. Cultivate knowledge.

In giving you faith, God has given the seed of self-control – cultivate that in your life. When you face temptation, pray, absolutely, relying on God's Spirit – but know too that you play a part. You may feel like you are unable to stand in your own strength, but remind yourself – God has already given you all you need to live a godly life – and He is with you, helping you. Cultivate self-control.

In giving you faith, God has given you the seed of perseverance – cultivate that in your life. Become the person who can stand confidently on God's provision, whatever the circumstances. Cultivate perseverance.

In giving you faith, God has given you the potential for godliness – cultivate that in your life. Godliness, or you could say piety – these are ideas that are not well known in our culture, but for Peter, this meant having respect for God's will and His ways. So a person today is godly when he or she tries to be faithful to God and to live by doing His will. Cultivate godliness.

In giving you faith, God has given you the potential for brotherly kindness – cultivate brotherly kindness in your life – that's a Greek term to describe the love that exists between family members – Christians often borrowed that word to describe the relationship between believers – so here Peter is encouraging us to grow in relationship with others in the church and then....

In giving you faith, God has given you the seed of love – that's the word more commonly used for universal love – cultivate love in your life. Love others the way that God loved you. Cultivate love.

Let me make one comment about this list – should you start with goodness and then once you’ve mastered it, move on to knowledge, and then once you’ve got that down, you move on to self-control? No, of course not – this is a life-long pursuit isn’t it? There’s a cumulative effect of adding goodness and knowledge and self-control to one another. Cultivating virtue is not like a staircase, one step at a time; it’s more like making a meal – you’re grilling the burgers and at the same time you’re husking the corn and at the same time you’re boiling the water for the corn and at the same time you’re cutting tomatos for the burgers – cultivating the virtues is similarly an all-at-once task.

That’s not to say though that you can’t give special focus to one of those virtues – one of those might have jumped out to you as we read and you realized – oh – I gotta work on that. Do that – invite God to help you to cultivate that particular virtue, even as you grown in the rest.

And this is really important – so important that I’m embarrassed that I preached on this text five years ago and totally missed it – God has already given us all we need to succeed in this. He has given us all that we need to live a godly life – that’s what verse 4 says, doesn’t it?! He has given us the faith, He has given us the potential, He promises that He will always be with us, never forsaking us, promises that He who is in us greater than He who is in the world. Partner with God to grow your faith.

Now I’m saying that – in part because that’s the whole point of this sermon – but also because that’s what the Bible itself tells us. Growth actually reveals how serious you are about your Christian convictions.

Look at verse 8 -

For IF YOU POSSESS THESE QUALITIES \*in increasing measure\* they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive (literally unfruitful) in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you hear that? It’s possible to know Jesus and yet be ineffective and unfruitful in our lives.

I don’t know about you but I want my faith to be effective and fruitful. I want God to know that I am grateful that He took on MY human nature, so that I could participate in HIS divine nature!

verse 9–

If anyone does NOT have them, he is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

That’s pretty blunt isn’t it? But what a statement! Not cultivating the faith that God has given us is like forgetting that God has given us faith at all.

If you are a Christian, God has cleansed you from your sin SO THAT you would grow and be fruitful.

How are you doing in that? Is your faith growing and effective? Or would Peter say that you had forgotten what God has done for you?

Now as you answer that question, the language of verse 8 is helpful – ‘if you possess these qualities in increasing measure’ – think about yourself five years ago – is your goodness greater than it was five years ago? Is your self-control greater than it was five years ago? Is your perseverance greater than it was back then? If so then your faith has grown and I’ll bet you’ve been fruitful for the Lord. If not, may I encourage you to invest in your faith because God has given you all you need to do it and there’s something great ahead.

That’s where Peter goes next - as Peter finishes his comments, he turns our attention to the payoff – God has given us all we need – make every effort – here’s why – because God has shared with us not just His morality, but also His immortality. God has allowed us not just to live like Him, but to live FOREVER like Him.

Look at 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 Saviour Jesus Christ.

God has promised us eternal life – that’s a part of the divine nature – and Peter gives us a final call to press on towards it. “Be all the more eager to make your calling sure” means – you know the prize is waiting for you; you know how good it is – press on to claim it!

I’ve seen Julie at the end of half-marathon races – she’s been running, plugging away for two hours and she comes around the final bend. There’s excitement in the air – I’m waving my sign and yelling and cheering her on – Go Julie, go Julie! What if she just stopped at sat down 100m from the end? Or worse, rewind it back – what if she just stopped at sat down 100m from the starting line?! That’s what Christians do when we stop actively seeking to grow.

But Peter here gives us a final encouragement – remember what’s at the end. Eternal life. Remember that God gives us the power to get there. Go for it.

Let’s revisit our illustration – there’s Julie, running down the track, plugging away for hours, coming around the final bend – there’s excitement in the air – I’m waving my sign and yelling and cheering here on – and she crosses the finish line – she gets her medal – I run over and give her a big, sweaty hug – according to verse 10 – that’s what awaits us when we cultivate our faith. God provides for us a rich welcome into His eternal Kingdom.

God has given you all that you need for a godly life and for eternal life, so cultivate your faith to live it out.

Let's talk about that for a minute as a church – we exist as a church to help each other to grow in faith. That's what we are here for. How can we grow as a church?

I've already started meeting with the youth group and I want to invite you to pray for them – that they would grow in faith and that they would grow as people and followers of Jesus. Just to throw it out there, we're thinking about ways to get some older generations involved so if that's of interest to you, let me know.

In a few weeks we'll start up another round of Bible study and I really want to encourage you to come and to be a part of it. The best way to grow in the knowledge of God is to spend time in His Word – so I want to encourage you to have personal devotional time, and I also want to encourage you to come and be a part of our group Bible studies. When you study the Bible in the community of believers, it's a real bonus.

That's a couple of corporate applications – here's a final one that's a bit more personal –

I really want to encourage this week to be thinking about these various virtues. You'll probably run into a situation where you can exercise self-control or perseverance or godliness – remember – God has given you all that you need in that situation – knowing that you will live into eternity just like God, make every effort to live like Him now.

God has given us all we need for godly life and eternal life so cultivate that faith.

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

(Phi 3:13-14 NIV).