

Make every effort to grow \* 2 Peter 1:1-11

April 23, 2023 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

As I was writing the Peter monologue that I did on Easter Sunday, I got to thinking how cool it would have been to be in Peter's shoes and to spend those three years walking around the Judean countryside with Jesus. Wouldn't that have been cool, to see Jesus' miracles firsthand, to hear His teaching straight from the mouth, to feel the presence of God – literally – right beside you. That would have been an amazing experience.

And then I got to thinking – wouldn't it be neat to sit at Peter's feet – to have him tell us what he learned 'on the road to the Cross'? Wouldn't it be neat to learn how to follow Jesus from someone who literally followed Jesus?

That thought sat with me for about ten seconds and then I realized - wait, we can! Peter wrote two letters to churches to share his insights into how to follow Jesus! A few years back, we looked together at Peter's first letter in a series called 'Everyday discipleship' (which you can find online). And today we're going to launch into a four-week series on Peter's second letter, called 'How to follow Jesus.'

The really neat thing here is that we have the opportunity to learn from a guy who followed Jesus, who heard Him teach firsthand, who sometimes got it wrong and was corrected and refined by Jesus, and ultimately went on to become one of Jesus' most effective spokesmen. As we listen to Peter, we can learn from a guy who first-hand followed Jesus all of his life.

So that's what we're going to do for the next month or so; today, what we're going to do is to dive right in and to look at the opening verses of Peter's second letter to the Church. Join me in 2 Peter, chapter 1, right at the back of your Bible, between the big books of Hebrews and Revelation. 2 Peter chapter 1.

Now 2 Peter starts off like one of those books that says 'So, you've [decided to do this or that]'. You've seen those before, right?

I did a quick search on Amazon; they have a lot of books like that, ranging from: 'So, you've retired, what next?' and 'So you've had a stroke, now what?' to 'So you have a sheepadoodle' to 'So you think you've married a warlock.' There's also one called 'So you have my secret baby: A Christian secret baby workplace romance (So you want to become a billionaire book 4.' (I have so many questions).

But you're familiar with the format. It starts off 'So this has happened...' and then by implication you want to know what to do next.

2 Peter 1 is kind of like that. 2 Peter 1 asks 'So you've decided to follow Jesus, what happens next?' The next eleven verses are his answer. Let's dig in and see what he says.

2 Peter 1, verse 1:

NIV 2 Peter 1:1 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: 2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Peter starts off by telling what it means to be a follower of Jesus. 'So you've decided to follow Jesus,' that means receiving from God a faith that makes you right with Him (it's through the righteousness of Jesus that we receive it) and a faith that is as precious as the faith the very first followers of Jesus received. Think about that – Peter, Paul, James, John – they were men of great faith, but yours is just as precious, just as powerful as theirs.

And notice how we gain that faith: we *receive* it – as a gift. It's not 'we make ourselves right with God' – it's right there in the text – we *receive* this faith through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus. What Jesus did on the Cross made us right with God, gave us peace with God and now, Peter says, may knowing our Saviour bring us overflowing grace and peace.

What a way to start a letter eh? This is who we are as followers of Jesus – people who through the righteousness of God have received by faith a precious gift of grace and peace through knowing Jesus.

So in deciding to follow Jesus we've been given faith; not only that though – look at verse 3 -

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.

Not only has God given us new life by faith; He's also given us everything we need to live out that life of faith!

4 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.

When you turn from sin to follow Jesus, when you receive the gift of faith from God, God transforms you into a brand new person. In fact, verse 4, *God actually invites you to share with Him in the divine nature* itself. God gives to each of us the capacity to be like Him in goodness and holiness and He wants us to join with Him in living out that goodness and holiness.

In fact, He has given us everything we need to live a life like that. Verse 4, He has given us everything we need so that we can be holy like He is holy and steer clear of the sin that used to tie us down – 'the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.' We are delivered from that and we stay away from it because not only had God made us new, He has given us the ability to live out that newness of life.

We can never say 'I can't be holy like that, I just don't have the willpower or the capacity to do it.' 2 Peter 1:3 begs to differ. You DO have the capacity to live a life like God's – God Himself has given you EVERYTHING you need to be like Him in godliness and holiness and character.

Awhile back we decided to try out these meal kits – HelloFresh, Chef's Plate – we've got a few boxes from Chef's Plate and the big selling point is 'we give you everything you need!' There are a few household staples that go into it but by and large, they give you everything you need to succeed. There's no reason for me to mess up a recipe because they've given me everything I need.

Same with holiness! God has given us everything we need to live lives that are consistent with the righteousness by faith that He has given to us through Jesus. We have everything we need to live by faith.

So back to my 'so you've decided to...' analogy; up to this point, we've been exploring what it means to be a follower of Jesus. You've decided to become a follower of Jesus; that means that by faith, God has forgiven your sin and given you life, PLUS He has given you everything you need to live a life that is consistent with His grace. So what? So you've decided to do this, what next?

That's the next verses – verse 5 -

5 For this very reason, (for what reason?) BECAUSE HE'S GIVEN YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO LIVE A LIFE OF FAITH.

make every effort to add to your faith...

In a sense, faith is like physio. Just going to physio is not going to solve the problem; you gotta do the exercises the therapist tells you to do. Just going to church is not going to make you a faithful follower of Jesus; it's a part of it, but you gotta do the exercises. You need to expand your faith and put it into action.

I think that's what Peter is saying here – 'Make every effort' – don't go about it half-heartedly or complacently – make every effort – do all that you can – to 'add' to your faith, to expand your faith, to grow your faith and put it into practice.

Frankly, I think what Peter is saying here is that as followers who Jesus, people who have received a 'precious faith' we need to put that faith into action and turn spiritual faith into actual virtue. We need to turn spiritual faith into actual virtue.

I think that's what Peter means by giving us this list.

Peter says 'You want to follow Jesus faithfully? Well take your faith and get it into its work-clothes. Roll up your sleeves and turn faith into action. Put your faith to work so that it becomes:

Goodness and knowledge and self-control and perseverance and godliness and brotherly kindness and love.

Cultivate your faith so that it becomes goodness, virtue, moral excellence.

Cultivate your faith to grow in knowledge – both in your understanding of God and His Creation and your knowledge of Him personally.

Take your faith and put it to work so that it becomes self-control – the ability to govern your thoughts and actions and emotions.

Take your faith and put it to work so that it becomes perseverance – a patient confidence that God knows what He's going.

Cultivate your faith so that it become godliness, holiness, Christlikeness.

Cultivate your faith so that it become brotherly kindness – love for others in the Church – and love – love for others generally.

Take your faith and put it into action.

So you've decided to follow Jesus, you've received grace by faith and all that you need to be like Him; what should you do? You should make every effort to grow your faith, to put it into action, to turn spiritual belief into tangible action. Make every effort to grow your faith.

Now there's a sense in which we could end there, because I think that's the big idea for today – that's what I want you to remember when you get home – make every effort to grow your faith. But Peter does take one more step and it's a helpful I think because it answers the question 'why?' Why should I make every effort to grow in faith? I have a lot of important things to do you know; why should I make exercising my faith one of them?

Well, Peter gives us three reasons.

1. This is verse 8 - 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.

Think about that. Peter's expectation (Jesus' expectation for that matter) is that our relationships with Jesus will bear fruit. John 15:5: 'I am the vine, you are the branches; anyone who abides in me will bear much fruit.'

Peter says 'if you keep on growing in faith, if you keep on becoming more and more loving and virtuous and self-controlled, that will keep you from being unproductive (unfruitful) in your knowledge of Jesus.' We grow our faith in order to bear fruit in our relationships with Christ. Think about that – your relationship with Jesus is not just for your benefit; your faith should be a blessing to others as you put your faith into action.

And notice – (and this I think is really neat) – the fruit that Peter expects when we grow our faith is not 'what we do,' it's 'who we are.' It's character. Peter expects that as we grow our faith, we will grow more and more in good and godly character.

Charles Stanley puts it like this: "Do you ever wonder if you are maturing in your walk with the Lord? Peter offers a surefire way to know if your relationship is growing deeper and becoming more fruitful. It is not by the works you do or the sacrifices you make, but by the quality of your character and whether or not you reflect God's glory in increasing measure (Rom. 8:29)" (*Life Principles Bible* notes, 2 Peter 1:8).

So reason number 1 – we make every effort to grow in faith so that we will be fruitful in our faith.

Reason 2 – verse 9 - But if anyone does not have them (that is, character in increasing measure), he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Peter puts it quite bluntly doesn't he? Failure to grow your faith is a failure to appreciate what God has done for you. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? But it makes sense. Through the righteousness of Jesus, we have received faith as a gift, we have been cleansed from our past sins and we have been given everything we need to live in light of our salvation. To take our faith then and do nothing about it would be to forget all about what Jesus has done for us.

It'd be like a guy whose wife got him a snow-blower for Christmas and yet first big dump of snow and he's out there still with his little plastic shovel. Why? Why would you do that? (Not a personal anecdote).

Why? Why would you not invest in your faith if it's been given as a gift? Reason 2 to grow, we make every effort to grow in faith as an expression of our gratitude for what God has done.

And three, verse 10:

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, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Listen to what Peter is saying. You have been called by God. God has chosen you to be His child. Think about what Peter's already said. You are wrapped in the righteousness of Christ, on the basis of faith, not works. You have been delivered from your past sins and been given everything that you need to live a godly life that is consistent with that deliverance.

Now listen to Peter again: be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. Be all the more eager to demonstrate that you truly believe. Peter doesn't call us to grow our faith in order to be saved; Peter says since you are saved, grow your faith. Grow your faith to prove that you truly do believe.

And look what happens when we do: 'you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Imagine the ticker-tape parade they'd have in Toronto if the Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup – it'd be off the hook! And yet that will look like a funeral compared to the rich welcome we receive as people who truly believe. So, grow your faith to authenticate your faith, in light of eternity.

SUMMARY: So, you've decided to follow Jesus? I.e., you've been delivered from sin and made like Christ by grace, through faith? And you've been given everything you need to live out that faith, in light of faith?

What should you do? Make every effort to grow in faith. Don't let faith stagnate. Apply it in life so that your faith becomes virtue.

Why? Why should you do that? Growing in faith: 1 makes you effective and fruitful in your faith, 2 it expresses our gratitude for what God has done and 3 it demonstrates that we truly are people of faith with an eternal home calling us forward.

Since God has given you everything you need to grow in faith, make every effort to grow your faith.

How do we do that? Here are two thoughts:

1. One of the best ways to grow your faith is to spend time with the author of your faith. Invest in your relationship with God and you will grow in prayer. Spend time in His Word, spend time in prayer. I would love for more people to join us in our Monday-Wednesday-Friday Bible reading group over on Facebook. We each prayerfully read through the Scripture for the day and then some people comment

on it. It's such a neat way to grow, knowing other people are growing in the same way. Invest in your own relationship with God.

And then 2. We're about a month away from my eighth year anniversary here at Langford. So I think that there are a couple of questions that we need to ask. Think about that list: Goodness; knowledge; self-control; perseverance; godliness; brotherly kindness; love. Peter says that "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."

Think back eight years and ask yourself 'have I grown in goodness? Have I grown in knowledge? Have I grown in self-control?' If the answer is yes, awesome! You have been putting this passage into practice. If you haven't, then I'd ask a second question – 'is it because I've failed as a pastor to encourage you to do this sort of thing or is it because you haven't put the effort in?' If it's the first one, let me know so I can work on it. If it's the second one, you know what to do.

I would encourage you to take a look at that list of character traits. As I look at it, there are a couple that I know I could really grow in. You might have the same ones or there may be different areas where you need to grow.

Whatever the case may be, choose one where you are weak and ask God to help you to grow in that area. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to exercise that virtue so that it will grow. And know, KNOW, that God IS going to help you to grow in it. He's given everything you need and frankly He's given you His Holy Spirit to help you to grow. Can you think of another list in the Bible that looks a lot like this? The fruit of the Spirit. When you make every effort to grow in these areas, the Spirit comes alongside to help you in it; the Spirit produces this fruit in you. Partner with Him. Grow with Him.

Make every effort to grow your faith.

#### BENEDICTION

1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

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<sup>i</sup> 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.