

In the spring of 2002, Denise Banderman left work early so she could have some uninterrupted study time before her final exam in the Youth Ministry class at Hannibal-LaGrange College in Missouri. When she got to class, everybody was doing their last-minute studying. The professor came in and said he would review with us before the test. Most of his review came right from the study guide, but there were some things he was reviewing that she had never heard. When questioned about it, the professor said they were in the book and we were responsible for everything in the book. We couldn't argue with that.

Finally, it was time to take the test. "Leave them face down on the desk until everyone has one, and I'll tell you to start," our professor, Dr. Tom Hufty, instructed.

When we turned them over, to her astonishment every answer on the test was filled in, and her name was even written on the exam in red ink. The bottom of the last page said: "This is the end of the exam. All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an 'A' on the final exam. The reason you passed the test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did in preparation for this test did not help you get the 'A'. You have just experienced...grace."

Dr. Hufty then went around the room and asked each student individually, "What is your grade? Do you deserve the grade you are receiving? How much did all your studying for this exam help you achieve your final grade?"

Then he said, "Some things you learn from lectures, some things you learn from research, but some things you can only learn from experience.

Last week, as we began our study of Peter's second letter, we talked about knowing Christ through our experiences. If you recall, I explained that knowing Christ is more than just head knowledge or book knowledge, it's more than knowing the right things about Jesus – knowing Christ is also knowledge that is gained by our personal experience with Him, being committed to His will, identifying with Him, and by putting His Word into practice in our lives. This is all part of having a knowledge that is grounded in a personal intimate relationship with Christ – which begins the moment we first believed, and like any healthy relationship, it deepens over time and experience and yes, effort.

As I have said on a few occasions, it's difficult to trust someone you don't know, and since our faith is grounded in a Person, our faith is in Jesus Christ – He is the object of our faith, it is vital that we grow in our personal knowledge of Him.

Our salvation experience is just the beginning with God, and as we learned last week, at that moment we first believed, God gave us everything we would need to live out the Christian life. God has given us divine power, divine provision, and divine promises so that we may grow in grace and knowledge. When we first believed, God gave us everything we would need, but with that said, there are things we need to do as well – for spiritual growth is not automatic. It doesn't mysteriously happen on its own. It requires effort.

Using the analogy of a garden – God has given us a garden, and He has even fertilized it with “Miracle Grow”, but we still have to tend to it, we have to pull the weeds, we have to fight the insects, and we have to water it. So, as you see, spiritual growth is accomplished in a partnership which requires our cooperation with God. God does His part – He does the *impossible*, and then we do our part – we do the *possible* by applying and putting to use what God has given us – plus we can never forget that for our part, God has even graciously given us a Helper. The Holy Spirit was given to us at salvation to help us do our part in this divine partnership – and it's our part that we are going to look at this morning.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **2 Peter 1** beginning with **verses 5-7**.

⁵ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶ and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, ⁷ and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

Since God has given us everything that we need to live out the Christian life, since He has given us the ability to reach our full potential as godly people – for that **very reason**, Peter now says let's take advantage of what God has given us, and make every effort to do our part to cultivate and develop what He has already started in us.

God wants you and me to focus on who we are in Christ – being the people He means for us to be. God wants to make a new person with a new character out of each one of us, and we are to make every effort to be that person – to do our part, and for our part, Peter listed seven qualities of a godly character which grow out of an abiding relationship with Christ, and Peter tells us to apply these qualities to our **faith** – for faith is the starting point for every believer. It's by faith we entered into a personal relationship with Christ, and it's our faith in Christ which serves as the foundation for these seven character-related qualities given to us by Peter.

Now before we look at these seven qualities, I want to say something about my approach to this passage. As I prepared for this message, I learned that people read this passage differently. At first glance, there appears to be a hierarchy of sort, a ladder, a stairstep arrangement, where one quality is built upon another. I can see that point of view, but I am concerned that one might read it in this way and get the idea that before he or she can work, for example, on the third quality, they must first master the first one and second one. That doesn't seem right to me. Others see this list of seven qualities like equal branches of a tree, all connected and working together. I like that view much better, plus that view seems to be more consistent with the presentation of fruit of the Spirit listed in **Galatians 5**, as some of the same qualities are mentioned in both passages.

Now, there is another way that some view this list of qualities which is a play on a word in **verse 5**. If you noticed in **verse 5**, Peter used the word “**supply**” or in some translations the word “add” is used. I won't even try to pronounce the Greek word here, but it is a verb that originally meant *to supplement the expense of a chorus*. In ancient Greece, the state established a chorus, and the director was responsible for all the expenses of the chorus – he provided everything. So, in context, we are told to supply, or better yet, to supplement our faith.

How many of you take a supplement like a vitamin? I suspect most of us do, and as you know, supplements are not intended to be our diet, they only provide to us what our diet is lacking. Vitamins supplement our diet. For example, if your diet is low in vitamin D, you might take a vitamin D supplement. We take supplements when we need them, so when considering these seven qualities listed by Peter – I like the idea of seeing them as spiritual growth supplements. Our main diet is our faith. Faith is the foundation – and it comes from knowing God in a personal intimate relationship, but it needs to be expressed in something concrete like our character. And in our character, there are some areas of our life where our faith is strong – our faith is evident in our character, but in other areas of our life our faith is not as strong, so Peter gives us a list of spiritual growth supplements to apply to our faith to help us grow and develop a balanced Christ-like character.

Okay, let's look at these seven spiritual growth supplements. The first supplement to apply to our faith is **moral excellency** or in some translations it might read *virtue* or *goodness*, and it speaks of moral strength and the courage to do what is right, even to stand alone, if necessary. It speaks of doing what is right – even when no one is watching which really says something about one's character. Someone put it this way: “*Your ideal is what you wish you were. Your reputation is what people say you are. Your character is what you really are. Your character*

is who you are when no one is looking.” So, in this pursuit of moral excellence, we need to walk away from those things that bring us down and entangle us morally – those things we should not be doing when no one is watching, and we need to surrender to the Lord, submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, rely on what God has already given us, and work hard to do what is morally right.

The next supplement on Peter’s list is **knowledge**, and this speaks of a functional or practical knowledge of God’s Word. It’s a knowledge that comes from a diligent study of God’s Word and a pursuit of truth, and then it is applied in our lives. We don’t want knowledge just for the sake of knowledge – we have to do something with it. We don’t want to be one of those people who seem to know a lot about the Bible, and they quote verse after verse, but when you look at their lives – you don’t see the Bible in them anywhere. So, Peter is speaking of a practical knowledge where a Christian is able to make the distinction between what is biblically true and what is not true – what is right and what is wrong, and this knowledge should have a practical impact in how they live by faith.

Then we come to **self-control**. That’s a tough one, especially when it comes to my favorite two people – Ben and Jerry. Self-control literally means “*to hold one’s self in*” and it’s the opposite of self-indulgence. As Christians we are to control and master our passions and our desires. We are to control these things, instead of them allowing them to control us – and they will if given a chance. Fortunately, self-control is also a fruit of the Spirit listed in **Galatians 5:23**, and as we abide in Christ, He produces this fruit, and we bear it in our character. Again, we see this divine partnership with God with help by His Spirit.

Peter also mentions the supplement of **perseverance**. That word means *to walk under the load* or *to bear up under* the trials. If self-control has to do with the pleasures in life, then perseverance has to do with the pressures and the problems and the pain of life. Perseverance refers to the courage to endure and persist when circumstances are difficult and challenging. It’s the quality of not *giving in* and not *giving up* when the natural tendency is to do just the opposite and flee from the problem. We know that tests and trials will come, Peter has already told us this in his first letter, but we also know by faith that God is at work in us, so it is important that we persevere. Think about this:

- *The nail that doesn't remain under the hammer will never reach the goal.*
- *The diamond that doesn't remain under the chisel will never become a precious jewel.*
- *The gold that doesn't remain under the fire will never be refined.*

Likewise, the Christian who doesn't remain under the hand of God – who does not persevere, will never see the purpose for the test and trial accomplished in their life. God is doing something, causing everything to work together for our greater good and His glory. Don't *give in* and don't *give up* – have faith and persevere.

Then we come to **godliness** and this refers to practical religion or as one commentator puts it, “practiced religion.” It can literally be translated “*to worship well*” and maybe the words *reverence* and *obedience* come closer to defining this word godliness. It's been said that godliness is a love for God, a love for the things of God, and an attitude and an action that is consistent with that love. To be godly is to do what is right because God says it is right.

Peter also mentions the supplement of **brotherly kindness**, which we know comes from the Greek word *philadelphia* – a common word used to describe relationships of love within a family. It refers to treating others as if they were members of our own family where we bear one another's burdens, feel each other's joys and pains, and we make room for other's opinions, and feelings, and ideas. **That's not always easy is it?** It's been said, “*To dwell above with saints we love, that will be our glory. To dwell below with saints we know, well that's another story!*” Brotherly kindness is a quality that requires some effort.

Last but not least, Peter gives us **love**. We are to possess brotherly kindness, but this supplement takes things one step further. The Greek word here for love is *agapē*. This kind of love seeks the highest good for others – putting their needs above your own. This kind of love is unconditional, it's unmerited and it's never-ending. *Agapē* love is the love that Jesus has for us. It is the love that motivated Him to go to the cross on our behalf, and this is the kind of love that we should have for God and toward others. Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**,

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Everything that we do must be rooted in love – love for God and love for others.

So, because God has already given us everything we will need to live out the Christian life and to develop a Christ-like character, we now have to do our part to cooperate with Him and to make every effort, with help from the Holy Spirit, to add these character-related qualities to our faith. These qualities work together, and in **verse 8**, Peter reveals the purpose for them.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a couple of thoughts I have about this verse. First, we don't strive to develop these qualities to earn our salvation – that's already ours by grace through faith in Jesus Christ – plus nothing else. This is not about salvation or keeping our salvation; this is about spiritual growth after our salvation, and what Peter is saying is that if these qualities are present and increasing in our character, being lived out in our lives, then we will be *useful* and *fruitful* which is the purpose.

Secondly, maybe your mind is racing about the things you'll strive to do for God because you don't want to be **useless** or **unfruitful**, and I get that, but notice that when Peter speaks of being useless and unfruitful, it's in relation to the **true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**. In other words, Peter's primary focus here is not on performance but on our personal relationship with Christ – for our performance naturally flows out of our relationship with Him. Striving to develop these character-related qualities is motivated out of His love for us and our love for Him, and if you miss this, you can easily become legalistic, and that will suck the joy right out of your relationship with Christ.

As we considered the list of character-related qualities, I have questions for you. **Are they increasing in your life? Are you more knowledgeable now than you were a year ago? Do you have more self-control? Are you more loving?** If we become idle, if we become stagnant, if we cease to do our part, we become useless and unfruitful. We know that gardens which are not tended will become a garden of weeds. Things that are not cleaned become corroded. Unexercised bodies tend to become unfit. It's the same truth in our spiritual lives.

Spiritual growth is an ongoing, never-finished process, and we got to make every effort to do our part, to develop these qualities, and to put them into practice so that we become more Christ-like in our character.

Then Peter said something interesting in **verse 9**. He said,

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

A lady of society was gazing upon an image she had never seen before in the city's art museum. "My dear fellow," she said condescendingly to the Curator, "I have never seen this painting before. I find the image shallow and rather crude in

appearance. **What do you call this piece?**” The Curator answered without giving the slightest expression, “That madam, is a mirror.”

This lady didn’t recognize her own condition when looking in the mirror, and in a roundabout way, that’s what Peter is describing. In so many words, Peter has held up a mirror, and has said to his readers, “*You think you know what you look like, but take a look into this mirror. **Do you see these qualities in your character?***”

If you **lack these qualities**, if they aren’t increasing, if you are not making every effort to develop these qualities in your character, if you are no longer motivated to grow, then Peter says you are **blind**, being **short-sighted**. You are blind to the spiritual realities and the consequences of a wasted life, and Peter says this is because you have forgotten your **purification** from sin – you have forgotten the truths of the gospel.

You have forgotten that you are loved by God. You have forgotten the sacrifice that was paid for your sins once and for all. You have forgotten that because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, you are eternally saved, completely forgiven, and made right with God. You have forgotten His grace and His mercy towards you. You have forgotten that you have been made a new person in Christ and He has given you everything you need to live the Christian life. You have forgotten this is not your home. You have forgotten you have a heavenly home and an inheritance that’s imperishable. You have forgotten what Christ has done for you – and the result is a life that is useless, unfruitful, wasted and stagnant.

There are two major bodies of water in the land where Jesus walked. One is the Sea of Galilee, a beautiful lake 13 miles long and 7 miles wide filled with fish and surrounded by lush foliage.

The other body of water is the Dead Sea, 50 miles long and 11 miles wide, the shoreline of which is 1300 feet below sea level. Seven million tons of water evaporate from the Dead Sea every day. The saline or salt content of the water of the Dead Sea ranges from 26-35%, making it 10 times saltier than the oceans of the world. There’s no seaweed or plants of any kind in or around the water. There are no fish or any kind of swimming, squirming creatures living in or near the water. As a matter of fact, what you’ll see on the shores of the Sea is white, crystals of salt covering everything. Fish that accidentally swim into the waters from one of the several freshwater streams that feed the Sea are killed instantly, their bodies quickly coated with a preserving layer of salt crystals and then tossed onto shore by the wind and waves.

Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are fed by the same Jordan River. There is really only one difference between these two bodies of water, really only one thing that causes the Sea of Galilee to be beautiful and alive while the Dead Sea is barren and lifeless. The Sea of Galilee has an outlet; the Dead Sea does not! Water flows through the Sea of Galilee. Water flows into the Dead Sea but not out!

Spiritual input without spiritual output equals stagnation. If you and I have spiritual input but no spiritual output, we will become stagnant, lifeless, bitter, and toxic.

What God has given to us, has to come out of us in our character. God desires that we become more Christ-like in our character, and that is accomplished through a divine partnership which requires our cooperation with God. God did His part – He has given us everything we need to grow spiritually – and now we have to do our part by applying and putting to use what God has given us. It is not automatic. It requires effort, and this effort is motivated out of a loving personal relationship with Christ. Consider what He has done for you. Christ died for you – **will you live for Him?**

Source Material:

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