

# Cultivating Christian Character

*2 Peter*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Peter 1:5-7

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I am going to ask you to take your Bible tonight to the second letter that Peter wrote in your New Testament, 2 Peter chapter one.

Pastor leaned over to me and said, “You know, it might be fun if you asked Peter to come up and preach tonight.” I thought about that, Peter, but I am so eager to preach this message tonight we will have to wait till next time.

You know, there are times in the life of a nation, there are times in the life of a culture where God, it seems, raises up an individual or a group of individuals and somehow, whether or not they are believers or not he chooses in his sovereign grace to use that person to make a profound impact, a profound difference in the entire world around them and around those that follow them. I think of Winston Churchill as such an individual. I obviously was born well after Winston Churchill’s life and occupation, but over the years as my family has some background in Europe and in particularly English politics through my dad, my father was a very big Churchill fan. And so we grew up in a home where he was spoken of in sainted terms. And I can remember even as a boy as my dad would talk to him, just having this impression about what this man must have been like.

Later on, after the advent of the internet I actually had the opportunity to go online and listen to some of his speeches. You can still hear them today. Without a doubt, few individuals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have had the kind of impact, the kind of global world impact that Winston Churchill had.

Somebody described him as the lion who roared when the British Empire needed him most. He has been named by historians in many occasions as the greatest statesman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was an effective leader and a great statesman because of his unusual ability to inspire people regardless of seemingly ominous circumstances. In fact, most of his biographers comment on or at least make mention of his ability to inspire an entire nation who rose up to victory and that victory was sourced in his inspiration.

And there are more than a few of them who know that that inspiration actually came from the strength of Churchill’s character, his perpetual enthusiasm, his indomitable determination, in his unshakable optimism. All of these things that were who he was

came out in his words and in his deeds and in the course of a world war changed the outcome of that war.

When you think about the trait of character, there are many, many ways to define it. There are many ways to describe it. Probably one of the best ways that I have come across to define character is this. It is the qualities and traits that make up who you really are when no one is looking and regardless of the consequences.

You have all heard the little statement that reputation is what people think you are. Character is what you and God both know you to be. Character is not something that is a western idea that was generated by western ideology. Character is something that is foundational. It is endemic to healthy relationships. And it is essential if we desire to have influence on other people. And so it is not surprising that this quality, this topic of character is going to be something significant that occurs in the writings of the New Testament.

I want to take us to one place in our New Testament that speaks to the cultivation of this sort of character. If you and I desire to have healthy relationships as a body, if you and I desire to have influence for the gospel, then we are going to have to have a certain kind of character and the kind of character that God calls us to have is a character that is cultivated in a specific way. And I would suggest to you that as you come to 2 Peter chapter one Peter is writing to a group of people that have been scattered throughout the Roman Empire and they are called to cultivate a certain kind of character that will produce in them a certain kind of life. In fact, before we even get to 2 Peter, Peter has already talked to these people in his first letter and he has said this to them in chapter two verse 12.

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter is looking at a group of people and he is observing that they are living in the midst of a very hostile environment and he is calling them to the kind of life that will cause the observers of that life who initially are slandering them as evil doers, to come to a place where they glorify God in the day of his visitation.

And I would submit to you that such a life, such a behavior is the product of a character that is cultivated in the life. And I think that is what Peter is getting to when he talks to these believers in his second letter. He is talking to people who desperately need to display the kind of life that will represent the Lord Jesus Christ accurately and attractively to a watching world that is bound up in darkness. And I would submit to you that is precisely what we are called to do.

Twenty centuries or more later we are living in precisely the kind of world, in many ways, that these believers to whom Peter is writing were living out their faith. The kind

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 2:12.

of world in which they lived was marked by many of the same things that mark our world, the hostility toward God, the hostility toward the world view that Peter and the New Testament writers are presenting. It is precisely the same hostility that we experience today in our own culture and in our own world.

And Peter is calling for believers to live in such a way that through their light they would display the transforming power of the gospel, the incredible and immeasurable value of Jesus Christ by representing him accurately and attractively to a watching world.

Now you can read how Peter suggests and actually does more than suggests how he sets forth the cultivation of this sort of character beginning in verse five and going all the way down to verse 13 of this passage. And we are going to be spending the next several Sunday nights in that passage and so I thought tonight before we actually get into the passage where Peter calls for the cultivation of this kind of a life, that it might be good for us to make some initial observations from the writings of Peter about the cultivation of Christian character in our life.

When Peter instructs us and his readers to add to our faith the virtues that he lays out in verses five, six and seven, for the reasons that he lays out in verses nine through 12, when Peter speaks this way I would suggest that there are a number of statements that he has made already in the book that he anticipates the reader will bear in mind as he comes to this passage. In other words, we are dropping in to a discussion that Peter is having with his readers and we are dropping in to that discussion in the middle of the discussion. And as he has the discussion with his readers, he is anticipating that they will be thinking about and bearing in mind things that he has articulated before he gets to this portion of the text. And not just in verses one through four, but really things that he has said even in the first letter.

So when you and I think about the cultivation of Christian character in our own life, when we think about cultivating the kind of life that Peter is talking about that will accurately and attractively display the Lord Jesus Christ, let me give you at least five initial observations that we need to bring to this text.

Ready? The first of them is this. The kind of Christian character that Peter is calling for in our life is grounded in the nature and in the character of God. In other words, when Peter is talking to us and to his readers, he is not just exhorting them to strive to be better people. He is calling for a heightened level of certain kinds of behavior. He is actually talking to them in terms of a reality that ought to be front and center in their life, the kind of life that they are called to live is grounded in the nature and in the character of the God who called them.

And I think the place where Peter probably articulates this best is actually in his first letter. So if you have a Bible tonight let me ask you to flip over to 1 Peter chapter one and look at verse 14. You may not have your Bible. You may be looking at it on an iPhone or an iPad. So find 1 Peter chapter one and look at verse 14. Peter says this:

“As obedient children...”<sup>2</sup>

He immediately highlights the relationship that his readers have to the person he is going to be pointing to in the verse which is God the Father.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."<sup>3</sup>

When Peter talks to believers about cultivating Christian character, he is grounding that call, in fact, that they have been called. And the one who called them is a certain way. And he identifies exactly what he has in mind in the first letter in the text we just looked at when he points to the character of the one who called them as holy. He is unique in every way. When you think about holiness in the Bible it is not primarily—although certainly it includes the idea of moral purity—it is the idea that God is unique in every category. When you think of God, he is set apart and he is unique in every conceivable category. There is no one like God.

And so it seems odd that Peter would say about that sort of an individual, that sort of a being, be like him. And the point is that even though God is unique, there are parts of God that we can emulate. We can't emulate them to the degree that God exhibits them, but we can emulate them. We can be like God in certain areas. There are qualities and attributes of God that he reserves to himself and there are qualities and attributes of God that he expects us to emulate, that he shares with us.

And so Peter looks at this side of God, the side of God that can be shared by believers and he says to them, “Now, as God is in this way, you are to be.” Whatever Peter is going to talk about in 2 Peter chapter one verses five through seven is grounded on the nature and the character of God. It is not just that we are trying to be better in the eyes of the world. It is that we are trying to be like the one who called us in our own character.

So the first observation that we need to make as we come to 2 Peter chapter one verses five and following is this, that whatever is being called for in those passages, the character that we are to cultivate is grounded in the nature and in the character of God.

Secondly, this activity, the cultivation of this kind of character is possible because we are made in the image of God and we are designed to bear his glory. And I think there are two texts that Peter calls attention to that lay this reality out for us. And one of those is the one we just looked at in 1 Peter chapter one verse 14 where he describes us in a unique relationship to the one who has called us and who is calling us to be holy. We are obedient children. We exist in a relationship to him as children and Peter is exhorting us to be a certain kind of child, an obedient child, a child that is conformed to the will and to the character of his Father.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 1:14.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 1:14-16.

There is a second text. It is in 2 Peter chapter one and it ... right before verse five. In verse four Peter talks about precious and magnificent promises that have been given to believers and he notes that these are promises that have been given so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Peter is saying to us that we exist because of the transformation that has happened to us through the gospel. We exist in a unique relationship to God. That relationship to God is initiated by the gospel and it involves a restoration of something that was marred by sin at the very beginning of our history as a race.

You will remember that back in Genesis we are told that we were created in the image of God. Every human on the planet was created in the image of God. And we can argue about what that image is exactly, but at the end of the day what is clear to everybody is that that image was irreversibly marred at the fall. In fact, when you get to Romans chapter one it wasn't just marred a little bit. The people who bear that marred image are described as having a broken mind.

Romans talks about the fact that we have fallen short of the glory of God. A little bit later on as Paul continues to discuss the effect of the gospel and the benefit of the gospel to the life of a person who has received it, he talks about the fact that we have attained, again, the glory of God that we fell short of in Romans chapter three. So by the time we get to Peter we begin to discover that we were made in the image of God and that image was marred and destroyed by sin. But the fact that we were made in the image of God gives us an unusual ability that nothing else in the created order has and that is this. We have been designed by God as we were created in his image to bear his glory. And God has been on a mission and we have been reading about that mission. By the time we get to 2 Peter 1:5 we have been reading about that mission all through 1 Peter and that mission is this. God is redeeming fallen sinners and restoring them to the image of Christ for the praise of his glory.

So when Peter comes to chapter one verse five and he starts talking to us about the responsibility that we have to diligently endeavor to add to our faith the virtues that will cultivate a certain kind of life, he is assuming that we understand that God has made it possible for this to happen because he created us in his image when he called us by his glorious grace. He restored that image in us. And according to Romans chapter five, he is in the process of using all things to bring about in us progressively the image of his Son.

Here is a third truth that Peter lays out for us. Whatever he is talking about in chapter one verses five and following is grounded in the nature and character of God. It is possible for us, because we were made in the image of God and designed to bear his glory, but it is enabled and empowered by the Spirit of God. Whatever Peter is calling for in chapter one verses five and following is not something that you can do in your own strength. I mean, when we get down into that text and we see exactly what it is that God is calling for us to cultivate in our life, we are going to consistently find ourselves coming up short on the ability side.

How in the world am I going to get the ability to do what is called for in this text? And the answer is, you can't. You don't have the ability in your own strength to do this. And Peter has been very up front about that all through his first letter and he comes right back at it in 2 Peter chapter one verse three by saying to you that you have received divine power.

Look at verse three.

“...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.”<sup>4</sup>

That phrase life and godliness is a way that Peter expressed the idea of living a life that pleases God. How am I going to live in the midst of a world that is corrupt? How am I going to live in the midst of a world that is hostile against God? What hope do I have of cultivating the kind of character that we are talking about when everything around me is pushing me the other way? What hope do I have for that? And Peter's answer to that is you have received divine power. God's divine power is granted to you everything that you need to live a life that pleases God. And it has been granted to you through the true knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and excellence.

There is a divine enablement that God gives through his Spirit as we grow in our knowledge of his Son so that we can cultivate and display the kind of life that pleases God. And I think that is an important thing to remember. The source of this power is not in us. Just like the righteousness that comes to us in the gospel is not something that comes in us, it is alien to us it is native to God. It is the same thing with his power. The power that we are talking about isn't a power that comes out of us. It is alien to us. It is native to God.

And if we had time tonight we could take Ephesians chapter one and we could look at the last few verses of that chapter and you would see a description of that power in the prayer that Paul prayed for his readers. He wanted them to know, among other things, the incredible power of God that was available to them. And the best illustration that he could come up with to help them to understand the immensity of this power.... I mean, he actually heaps up seven different terms in that passage to help us understand and come to grips with the immensity of the power, but even after explaining it that way, he wanted to show us a picture. And the best picture he could come up with was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, he is talking about a power that can literally bring back a dead person to life. And he is saying to those readers—and Peter is picking up on this—that all of this power that God has, the immeasurable, insurmountable mega greatness of God's power is made available to you. And we access all of this power through the true knowledge of his Son.

You say, “Well, how in the world am I going to get to know Jesus Christ.”

Well, drop down to verse nine and just kind of follow along in your Bible. Peter is talking

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 1:3.

about the kind of person who neglects to cultivate the virtues that he has called for in the preceding verses. And he says this:

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.<sup>5</sup>

Look at verse eight.

“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.”<sup>6</sup>

So when we think about the cultivation of Christian character in our life, I am saying it this way. When we think about cultivating the kind of life that represents the Lord Jesus Christ accurately and attractively to a lost world, that life is grounded in the nature and character of God. It is possible because we are made in the image of God and it is enabled and empowered by the Spirit of God.

I think when we get into the text beginning in the weeks ahead in chapter one verse five we are going to discover that there is a similarity and a connection between the virtues that Peter is calling for here in chapter one verses five through seven and the fruits of the Spirit that Paul articulates in Galatians chapter five. There is a significant overlap between these things.

Here is the fourth thing that we need to bring to this text. This life that we are talking about will be shaped and formed by the Word of God. This life, this behavior that we are talking about that springs from who we really are, not just from something that we put on, the kind of character that Peter is calling for is shaped and formed by the Word of God.

Let me give you two texts from Peter that speak to this. In 1 Peter chapter one verse 22 and 23 listen to Peter talk to readers and make the connection in your mind that he is trying to get them to make.

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.<sup>7</sup>

And then he is going to identify the seed that he is talking about and the process of birth. Your life, your spiritual life began and was initiated by the Spirit’s working in your heart through the living and enduring Word of God. Peter calls attention that your responding to the gospel was, in fact, obedience to the truth of the gospel, to the truth about what

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 1:9-10.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Peter 1:8.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:22-23.

God has said about his Son, to the truth about what God has said about your sin and how it is to be atoned for. There is an obedience to the truth and that obedience is basically this. God told you to believe it. God told you to embrace it.

So your life in Christ began when you responded to the demand of the gospel to believe it. And then he notes in 1 Peter chapter two verses one and two:

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.<sup>8</sup>

The Word that birthed you is the Word that grows you. So it is not just that we are able to do this because it is grounded in the nature and character of God and we were made in the image of God and we are enabled and empowered by the Spirit of God. It is intimately and foundationally connected to the Word of God.

I would say it this way. We will never accomplish what Peter is calling us to accomplish in 1 Peter chapter five or chapter one or 2 Peter chapter one verses five and following, we will never accomplish that apart from a personal, active, persistent engagement with the Word of God.

This is not just a casual acquaintance with the Word. This is not just an affection for the Word. This is not just us saying the right things about the Word. This is not just us coming to the place where we affirm the right things about the Word, that it is inspired in every part, that it is accurate in every way, that it is authoritative to everything that it speaks. Those are all right affirmations that you and I ought to make. What Peter is talking about goes beyond just making the right affirmations. This is more than just having the right affection for the Word of God. This is more than just respecting it as God speech above all other speeches. We certainly ought to do that. This is more than just sort of saying, “You know, I really love the Bible.”

You know, we can affirm the right things about God and we can feel the right way about the Word of God. We can articulate the right statements about God. Peter is actually talking to us about the fact that we have to actually engage with the Word of God, that the Word of God has to become that which we obey. And he speaks to it in those terms.

So whatever Peter is talking about in the formulation of Christian character, it is intrinsically and foundationally connected to the Word of God. Our life that Peter is calling for in 2 Peter chapter one is a light that is shaped by and conformed to the Word of God.

And then here is the fifth statement and that is this. It is necessary in light of God’s calling and purpose for our life. Whatever Peter is calling for in 2 Peter 1:5 and following is not incidental. It is not just something that would be nice and maybe some day as we kind of grow in our walk with God and over time we can think about kind of

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 2:1-2.



getting to that place where we can get around to this. Peter is actually saying that this is essential to the Christian life. It is necessary in the light of God's calling and purpose for our life.

I mean he talks about it in verse eight that a person who cultivates this kind of life will not be useless or unfruitful. He won't be barren when it comes to the knowledge of God. He warns about the kind of person who neglects these things and basically says that a person who refuses to cultivate this kind of a life will eventually return to living the kind of life that he was delivered from when he embraced the gospel to start with.

But there is an even greater reason for this and Peter has already talked about that. And that is why I say, I think there are some things that Peter assumes the reader will have in mind by the time he gets here. And one of those things is in 1 Peter chapter two verse nine. And I would like you to look there. Peter said it this way. You are... and he is talking there about the believers to whom he is writing.

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION.”<sup>9</sup>

That is who you are. He is certainly not making a case that we as New Testament believers are the replacement for the Old Testament Israelites, but he is intentionally using the kind of language that God used for his Old Testament people to help us understand the incredible responsibility and the incredible gracious place that we enjoy that was never ours by right. He talks about that in verse 10.

“...for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.”<sup>10</sup>

This is who we are. And the whole reason that God has done this is in the back end of verse nine.

“...so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”<sup>11</sup>

You and I are to cultivate a certain kind of light that springs naturally out of a certain kind of character because of who we are. And the way we got there was by mercy, not by merit. And in light of the mercy that we have received God says, “Now, the reason I did this was so that you could be a people who would proclaim my excellencies, my glory.” And the way that we are to do this is in verse 11.

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers...”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 2:10.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 2:11.

In other words, you are not going to do this until you come to the place where you embrace the reality that you are not of this world anymore. And if you are not of this world, then don't live like people in the world live.

“...abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”<sup>13</sup>

I would suggest to you that that is one of the primary missions of the Church and it really is the job description of your life and mine. This is who we are. This is how we got there. And this is what God wants us to do with our life. It doesn't matter if you are a doctor. It doesn't matter if you are lawyer. It doesn't matter if you are seminary professor. It doesn't matter if you are an educator. It doesn't matter if you work as a blue collar worker out in a factory somewhere. It doesn't matter what you do. God has called you to use that place as a platform to proclaim his excellencies.

Peter describes it in those terms. Paul describes it in a very familiar text in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 31.

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”<sup>14</sup>

And when Peter and Paul talk about the glory of God as something that we are to elevate, as something that we are to call forth and display, I would suggest to you that a very simple way of thinking about that is this. My job description, your job description is to cause other people to come to right opinions of God, who he is and what he is like. It doesn't matter what our circumstances are. It doesn't matter what is going on in our life, our mission is to cause other people to come to right opinions of God, who he is and what he is like so that they at the end will give to him his proper place.

That is why my marriage matters. That is why the kind of parent I am matters. That is why responses in trial and in affliction matter. All of those things matter because the main thing that God is trying to do through me and through you and through his Church collectively is to create a group of people who are living in such a way in the midst of a world bound up in darkness, that that world would come to right opinions about God, who he is and what he is like.

Now how do we become that way? And I would suggest that Peter's answer to that is the cultivation of consistent Christian character. Now let me end with this. You say, “Well, what is the take home from all of this? So you have been talking to us about what Peter has been saying about the cultivation of Christian character and that is our mission in life. So what is the take home for this?”

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 2:11-12.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31.

I would say that any serious and sober minded attempt to think through what Peter is saying in 2 Peter chapter one verses five and following, the cultivation of the kind of character that is going to help us live a life that represents Jesus Christ accurately and attractively is going to demand that we think seriously about a number of things.

Let me give you a few of them. Here is the first. If I am really serious about cultivating the kind of character that displays itself in this way, here is the question. Am I truly cultivating a Christ like life and spirit in my own life and in our church? In other words, am I really interested in cultivating this kind of a life or am I just interested in finding out what it is like and analyzing it theologically and being informed about biblically? Or am I really driven by a desire to manifest and to cultivate this kind of a life?

I need to give some serious attention to that and I would suggest that it would be wise for you to do so as well.

Here is a second question. Is my life marked by the internal graces that marked Christ? And there is a pretty good list of them in Matthew chapter five. You know them as the Beatitudes. Is my life marked by a consistent display of the internal graces that marked the life of Christ? And I would suggest to you that the best way to think about that question is to think about it in community. Do the people you live with, do the people you work with, do the people that you worship, you know you to be marked by the internal graces that mark Christ? Or are you just marked by a lot of information about Christ? Are you just marked by an unusual ability to instruct others about that information? Or are you really a person that is marked by those graces?

Here is the third question. Am I really striving to actively display that Christ like grace and the virtues that Peter calls for by engaging the world around me, or have I retreated into a safe place. I mean there is no question that when Peter is writing he is encouraging these people to live out their faith in the hostile world where he has placed them.

The metaphor that Paul uses more than any other metaphor to describe the Church—and there are many that he uses—but one of the primary metaphors is the metaphor of an army. And when you see the army, at least in Paul's imagery, the army is always in hostile territory. The army is always out on the front line engaging in the work of the ministry, engaging in the advancement of the gospel. And I think sometimes churches like ours think of ourselves primarily as a place where we come to learn more about the Word of God or we think of ourselves as a hospital where we can come to help people fix their problems or we think of ourselves as a fort where we can protect the purity of the gospel. But the number one image in Paul's writing, or a primary image in Paul's writing is the image of an army. And that army is on the move engaging the enemy in hostile territory.

Are we driven by the things that concern Christ or are we driven by the things that concern us?

Pastor can speak, I am sure, of his own experiences, but after 25 years of ministry I find myself and not just me. I am speaking for others as well who probably share these same ideas. You know, we tend to be driven by spiritual comfort. We tend to be driven by the preservation of a spiritual environment that we are comfortable with or we have certain ideas about how things should look like. I could tell you stories as a pastor of the things the people would come to talk to me when I was the senior pastor of a number of churches. They would come and they would express concerns. And you could just imagine the kind of concerns that people would make an appointment to come see the pastor about.

You know, often times those concerns were certainly valid and certainly you needed to listen to those concerns, but I just... you know, started think over time about the kinds of things that the Christians communities in which I was a part tended to be concerned about. I mean, to the point that somebody would actually take time out of their day to make an appointment to come and see me to talk to me. And it is typically something like this. If something was sung by the choir that was a concern. Boy, I would have people come in to talk to me about that.

Or just let a visitor come for a number of times and they are not dressed like we think he ought to be dressed.

“Pastor, I know that you want us to be friendly to lost people, but I mean, we do have to protect the testimony of our church. And I don’t know that somebody walking up to church and coming to church every week I shorts and flip flops is really what our church is about.”

I had people that were very concerned at times over something that happened in the youth group. I remember one time we had sort of a harvest activity as a replacement for Halloween and our youth pastor took our teens to a grave yard and I had somebody come in the next day and say, “What would the world think of teens going to a grave yard?”

And you probably shouldn’t say this to people, but I said, “Well, actually we are all going there.”

It didn’t help. Honestly, let me just tell you. It was very, very rarely if ever that somebody came to me and said, “Pastor, do you know what I am concerned about? I am concerned that we aren’t seeing people saved in our church.”

You know, it has been a long time since we have seen somebody born again, birthed into the gospel and coming into our church and growing. It has been a long time since we have seen that.

I have had people lining up to tell me about a song that we sang or I had people lining up to come talk to me about a preacher that came in and preached out of a certain version or I had people telling me about the dress code or whatever, but I rarely had somebody

coming in and saying, “You know what, pastor? I am burdened that we are not seeing people coming to Christ in our church.”

I have people that come to talk to me about the youth group, but I rarely if ever had somebody come to me and say, “You know, pastor, it is real concern to me that in 20 years as a church we have had a youth group that looks outwardly like the perfect youth group, but we haven’t had one person out of that youth group that has gone to full time Christian service.”

I pastored a church that for 20 years had a youth group that nobody in that youth group had ever responded to the call for Christian service. And that wasn’t a concern to very many people in our church. And I remember somebody actually coming and hitting me with that and I remember immediately getting defensive and then going though and trying to name them and coming to the conclusion that this person was right.

And I would suggest to you that when we think about the virtues that Peter is calling for us to cultivate and the character that he is calling for us to establish in our life, we are going to have to let Peter talk to us that way. We are going to have to let Peter talk to us very directly and very personally because the intent of all of this is that we really would be a church in this town that is causing other people to see the Lord as he truly is. And if they are truly seeing this, then the evidence of that ought to be showing up in our body. It ought to be transforming the way that we live with each other and it ought to be transforming the way that we live so that people are attracted to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the truth of that gospel as they see the transformation in us.

May the Lord help us to do that.

*Father, thank you for these verses, for this Word, for the things that Peter has said even prior to getting here that remind us of the immensity of what you have called us to do and not just the immensity of it, but the fact that you have given us the power to accomplish this through your Word. Lord, we desire to be people. We desire to be a church that would be marked by this sort of character so that all around us in our homes, in our families, in our ministries and in the marketplace of life other people would come to the true knowledge of who you are and what you are like and that as your Spirit draws them they would give to you your proper place. And we will pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.*