

**New Series: "Last Days" – 2 Peter
Faith Brings Spiritual Growth – 2 Peter 1:5 - 7**

Big Idea – A valued precious faith will result in growth spiritually.

We started studying this book last week and learned that Peter wrote his second letter to those who had a "precious faith." Do you have a precious, valuable faith? How valuable is it to you?

This faith was in the person of Jesus Christ, it involved the power of God, and it included all the promises of God.

So if you have true biblical faith in Jesus Christ, and have been "born again" into God's spiritual family, you have eternal spiritual life, then there ought to be spiritual growth. It's not the end, but the start of a whole new life and others should see you growing in the "grace and knowledge of Christ."

God gives His children all that they need to live godly lives, but we must apply ourselves and be diligent to use the tools, aka the "means of grace" He has provided. What are those tools? The Bible, to study, Prayers to be prayed, Good works God prepared for you to do, witnessing to others, worshipping with fellow believers, fellowshiping in God's house with others, to name a few.

Spiritual growth is not automatic. It requires cooperation with God and the application of spiritual diligence and discipline.

"Work out your own salvation.... For it is God which worketh in you" (Phil. 2:12-13).

Peter listed **seven characteristics, or qualities, or graces of the spiritual godly life**, but don't think of them as seven beads on a string or even seven stages of development.

The word translated "add" really means "to supply generously."

2 Peter 1:5-7 5 In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Add to your faith a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge,
6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness,
7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

In other words, we develop one quality as we exercise another quality.

These graces relate to each other the way the branch relates to the trunk and the twigs to the branch.

Like the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23), these qualities grow out of life and out of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not enough for the Christian to "let go and let God," as though spiritual growth were God's work alone.

Literally, Peter wrote, "Make every effort to bring alongside." The Father and the child of God have to work together.

The first quality of character Peter listed was **virtue**.

1. Virtue - aka "moral excellence"

Same word is in 2 Peter 1:3,

To the Greek philosophers, it meant "the fulfillment of a thing."

When anything in nature fulfills its purpose, that is "virtue—moral excellence." The word was also used to describe the power of the gods to do heroic deeds.

The land that produces crops is "excellent" because it is fulfilling its purpose. The tool that works correctly is "excellent" because it is doing what a tool is supposed to do.

Philippians 1: 10 that you will see the difference between good and bad and will choose what is excellent; that you will be pure and without wrong for the coming of Christ;

11 that you will do many good things with the help of Christ to bring glory and praise to God.

A Christian should glorify God because he has God's nature within; so, when he does this, he shows "excellence" because he is fulfilling his purpose in life. 1 Corinthians 10:31

True virtue in the Christian life is not "polishing" human qualities, no matter how fine they may be, but producing divine qualities that make the person more like Jesus Christ, someone of virtue, or moral excellence.

Faith helps us develop virtue, and virtue helps us develop knowledge (2 Peter 1:5).

2. Knowledge – aka “discernment”

St. Paul, the apostle, prayed this for his friends in Philippi.

Philippians 1:9 “This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and discernment with your love”

The word translated "knowledge" in 2 Peter 1:2-3 means "full knowledge" or "knowledge that is growing." The word used here suggests practical knowledge or discernment.

The ability to handle life successfully requires discernment, being able to figure things out, to know what's good and what's best, to know what's true and what's false.

We hear a lot of chatter today around the term “my truth”! What is that?

There's no such thing! Truth is truth. Period. Truth doesn't change depending on your point of view, your perspective, etc. etc.

It is the opposite of being "so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good!"
This kind of knowledge does not come automatically.

The biblical Christian life, must not separate the heart and the mind,
character and knowledge.

3. Temperance – aka “self-control”

“Better to be slow to anger than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city.” Proverbs 16:32

“A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls.”
Proverbs 25:28

In biblical times, walls provided protection against enemy attacks. This is why James 1:19 says “let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to get angry; because the wrath of man does not produce right living for God.

Paul in his letters often compared the Christian to an athlete who must exercise and discipline himself if he ever hopes to win the prize

1 Corinthians 9:24 Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

25 All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

26 So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.

27 I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.

Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Philippians 3:13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,

14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

1 Timothy 4:7 “Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives’ tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly.

8 "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come."

4. Patience - aka endurance or perseverance.

the ability to endure when circumstances are difficult, to continue, to not quit, to keep on keeping on!

Self-control has to do with handling the pleasures of life, while patience relates primarily to the pressures and problems of life.

The ability to endure problem people is "longsuffering." Often, the person who "gives in" to pleasures is not disciplined enough to handle pressures either, so he "gives up."

Patience is not something that develops automatically; we must work at it. James 1:2, 3 gives us the right approach.

Tells us to rejoice when trials come because the trying of our faith creates endurance.

We must expect trials to come, because without trials we could never learn to patiently endure. We must, by faith, let our trials work for us and not against us, because we know that God is at work in our trials.

Nobody enjoys trials, but we do enjoy the confidence we can have in trials that God is at work, causing everything to work together for our good and His glory.

5. Godliness – aka God-likeness

Right with God. In the original Greek, this word meant "to worship well." It described the man who was right in his relationship with God and with his fellow man. Perhaps the words reverence and piety come closer to defining this term. It is that quality of character that makes a person distinctive. He lives above the petty things of life, the passions and pressures that control

the lives of others. He seeks to do the will of God and, as he does, he seeks the welfare of others.

We must never get the idea that godliness is an impractical thing, because it is intensely practical. The godly person makes the kinds of decisions that are right and noble. He does not take an easy path simply to avoid either pain or trial. He does what is right because it is right and because it is the will of God.

6. Brotherly kindness

(Philadelphia in the Greek) is a virtue that Peter must have acquired the hard way, for the disciples of our Lord often debated and disagreed with one another. If we love Jesus Christ, we must also love fellow believers.

We should have an "unfeigned [sincere] love of the brothers"

1 Peter 1:22 and not just pretend that we love them.

"Let brotherly love continue" Hebrews 13:1

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love" Romans 12:10

The fact that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ is one evidence that we have been born of God

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too.

2 We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments." 1 John 5:1-2

But there is more to Christian growth than brotherly love; we must also have the sacrificial love that our Lord displayed when He went to the cross.

7. Love aka God's love/divine supernatural love

The kind of love spoken of in 2 Peter 1:7 is agape love, the kind of love that God shows toward lost sinners.

This is the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 - Paul's great love chapter.

It is the love that the Holy Spirit produces in our hearts as we walk in the Spirit

“...this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” Romans 5:5

The fruit, or first result of being filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit of God is love

When we have brotherly love, we love because of our likenesses to others; but with agape love, we love in spite of the differences we have.

It is impossible for fallen human nature to manufacture these seven qualities of Christian character. They must be produced by the Spirit of God.

Certainly there are unsaved people who possess amazing self-control and endurance, but these virtues point to them and not to the Lord. They get the glory. When God produces the beautiful nature of His Son in a Christian, it is God who receives the praise and glory.

Because we have the divine nature, we can grow spiritually and develop this kind of Christian character. It is through the power of God and the precious promises of God that this growth takes place. The divine "genetic structure" is already there: God wants us to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). The life within will reproduce that image if we will only diligently cooperate with God and use the means He has lavishly given us.

And the amazing thing is this: as the image of Christ is reproduced in us, the process does not destroy our own personalities. We still remain uniquely ourselves!

One of the dangers in the church today is imitation. People have a tendency to become like their pastor, or like a church leader, or perhaps like some "famous Christian." As they do this, they destroy their own uniqueness while failing to become like Jesus Christ. They lose both ways! Just as each child in a family resembles his parents and yet is different, so

each child in God's family comes more and more to resemble Jesus Christ and yet is different. Parents don't duplicate themselves, they reproduce themselves; and wise parents permit their children to be themselves. Jesus Christ wants to be reproduced in our lives, in your life and mine!

As we take communion together, thank the Lord Jesus Christ for His sacrifice on the cross to make you righteous, to make you like Him.