

Title: Grow-up!
Text: 2 Peter 1:5-7
Theme: Taking responsibility for your spiritual growth
Series: 2 Peter
Prop Stmtnt: Spiritual growth is the only legitimate alternative to the corrupting effect of sin.

Read Text:

Michigan International Speedway is a superspeedway tracks because at 2 miles long with highly banked corners, cars can average over 200 m.p.h. and on the straightaways hit speeds of over 220. It's pretty impressive. A few years ago, I had an opportunity to drive a NASCAR car on the course for about 4 laps. I can drive a manual transmission, but I have never driven a car with 700 horsepower before, so I was more than a little bit over my head. I had a professional driver who was riding along with me and coaching me, but the fastest I went was about 140. Every time I approached a corner, even though it was banked, I let off the gas. I was told, trust the car. It will hold the corner. It is built for that. But, it was so counter-intuitive. About the time I worked up the nerve to stick the corner and hold the line, I had used up my four laps and my turn was over. If I had to do it over, I would like to think that I would be more aggressive. Trust the car.

In this text, Peter is calling us to be aggressive, spiritually. C'mon, grow-up! Take responsibility for your spiritual maturity. Trust the promises of God, they are designed for that. Hit the accelerator of spiritual growth because, (here is your purpose statement) spiritual growth is the only legitimate alternative to the corrupting effect of sin. You are either on the road toward becoming more like Christ or you on the road of being deceived by and drowned by sin. There is no middle road, middle ground or being on the fence.

Let's review. Peter wrote his first letter to believers who were experiencing persecution because of their faith in Christ. These believers were facing threats from without. But, now in this 2nd letter they are facing threats from within. There were certain false teachers who were attempting to infiltrate the congregations and lead them astray. And one of the dead giveaways of a false teacher is when he uses his influence to try to convince people that God's Word and God's standards do not apply to him. He is above God's Word. He is an exception to God's Word. This will come up in chapter 2, but when you see greed, anger, arrogance, a toleration for immorality, then watch out! And in particular, watch for how people like this will seek to exploit vulnerable people. So, how do you (personally) and how do we as a church (corporately) be on guard against being duped? In the Spiderman movies, Spiderman has spidey sense. He is alert to when something is wrong and something bad is about to happen. God has given us a plan for how to develop spiritual spidey sense. This all begins with recognizing that God has provided by means of his promises, all that we need for a godly life. "*For this reason*" links verses 3-4 with verses 5-7. Because God has given us all that we need for growing spiritually, mash the accelerator! Let's go. Act on it. Grow up! Take responsibility and grow up! But, the challenge of this text has specific steps to take. But, the way Peter presents these steps causes us to ask a couple of things before we start looking at them.

I. Am I really a believer? (5)

This letter is written to believers (v.1). A genuine follower of Christ is indwelt by the Spirit and has a new heart, which means we have new affections and new desires. We still struggle with sin and there are seasons when we feel like we are losing the struggle, but even in those seasons there is in our heart of hearts a desire to please God that we can't get away from and in fact we don't want to get away from. Peter admonishes us, "*Make every effort.*" A good question to ask is this:

A. **Do I even have a desire to grow spiritually?** – "make every effort"

Each of our kids took piano lessons. For us, it was a skill, a knowledge base and a discipline that we thought would serve them well in other things. But, there comes a point when taking piano stops being a good thing for them and starts to be something they have to own and want for themselves. With each of them I had that talk that went something like this. You don't have to like piano and you don't have to continue to take piano lessons. But, if you do, it has to come from inside of you. Your mom and I can encourage you, but we can't make you love this and if you are going to play well, it has to be a love. You have to want this.

That is even more true in regards to the gospel. There are many benefits to being part of a group of people who follow Jesus. There is a general sense of community and care for one another. There is a level of honesty and helpfulness. There is generally the absence of backbiting and gossip. There are some good people who have a good influence on you. But, do you love Jesus? We can all love what Jesus does for us and what others do for us who love Jesus, but that is not the same as loving and following Jesus. One of the ways in which I know that I love Jesus and not just what Jesus does for me is how I answer this question: Do I even have a desire to grow spiritually? How do you respond to this command to "make every effort"? Is this a, "yea, whatever", does this feel like a weight or some kind of frustrating demand, or does this resonate with you? Is there a desire to really engage your heart and life in following after Christ?

B. **Do I have faith?** "supplement your faith with..."

The following 7 qualities are not steps on a ladder toward becoming a Christian, but are qualities that we are called to grow in because we are a believer. Peter says to supplement your faith with, that is add to your faith that is already there. This is a roadmap for growing in Christlikeness, but without a foundation of faith in Christ, then these are only points of self-improvement.

Here is a great example of what I mean when I say that the indicative drives the imperative. Now, here is a good time for a confession. When I was in high school, I was never accused of, nor confused with academic scholarship. My role in life was to keep people laughing not to get good grades, which I discovered to my dismay was not helpful in college admissions. So, if I was in high school and I ever heard someone say, that the indicative drives the imperative, I would have had no idea of what that meant. It wasn't until I started seriously studying the Bible that I realized that I was a grammatical idiot. I didn't even know what the parts of speech were, much less what verb tenses and cases were. Halfway through college I had to learn all of this stuff because I wanted to know God's Word and be able to teach it well. All that to say, I am not

going highbrow on you. Good theology comes to us on the wings of grammar, so here is some good grammar. The indicative case is the case of being. It is the verb tense that you use to refer to what you are. When the Bible presents the gospel it tells us the good news of what Christ has done. The focus is NOT on what we do because we are sinners who on our own just sin and we can't please God. The gospel, however is the good news of what Jesus has done. Jesus died as the perfectly righteous sacrifice in my place. He paid for my sins. When I recognize that, embrace that and trust in Christ then I am declared righteous in the eyes of God. I am justified. I am adopted into the family of God. I am made a Christian. I become a follower of Christ. I am, my being (the indicative) speaks of my identity, my standing in Christ, my relationship to God. That is the indicative. My identity as a follower of Christ motivates, drives, engages me to obey God and follow his commands. The imperative case is the case of commanding. Jesus is Lord and my Lord and he commands me to obey him. That's fine with me because I am in Christ. The fact that I am in Christ (imperative) motivates the imperative (my desire to obey Christ). Verses 3-4 talk about our relationship to Christ which is based on what God has done for us, not on what we do for God. Now, verses 5-7 talk about how we response to that. Verses 5-7 talk about what we do. Our life of godliness is the fruit of the root of faith in Christ. The gift of salvation comes before the commands to live it out. Again, this is hugely important because almost all religions and many facets of Christianity put the imperative before the indicative. That would mean, if you do these things, then you will become a Christian. But that is not the gospel. The indicative drives the imperative. Whenever we have studied the book of Romans, we have been reminded of the foundational truth that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But, what kind of a faith is it? It is a living faith. It is a faith that produces good works. It is a faith that is seen in desiring to and following after Christ's commands. That is what the book of James addresses. It is similar here. Here are the evidences of saving faith, meaning here are the things that you need to pursue and you will want to pursue because they will help you look like Jesus. How do I know if I am a believer? How are you responding to this? Is this grabbing your heart? Is this stirring some affections? Is this grabbing your interest? I can't make you love this and love Jesus. That has to be the response of your heart. I pray that it is. Now we are ready to ask the second question.

II. **How do I grow as a believer?**

A. **Growing demands the right attitude.** (I am responsible for my spiritual growth)

Again, look at that phrase, "make every effort." Stop making excuses. Expect progress of yourself. Embrace the fact that spiritual growth demands your engagement, your focus, your desire, your resolve and sacrifice. Spiritual growth is not an option that you can take or leave. Spiritual growth is not optional. If you treat it as optional, then it may the case that the Spirit of God is not part of your life, because the Spirit of God does not treat spiritual growth as a side job but as the main event.

B. **Growing demands the right actions.**

The word translated "supplement" is rather interesting. We are accustomed to major events having sponsors. The Tigers play at Comerica Park. 5k's and 10k's are sponsored by sporting

goods stores and Physical Therapy clinics. This is also true for community events like fireworks and parades. In exchange for doing something good for the community, the sponsor gets favorable attention from the citizens. But, the point is, in order to make this even happen, the sponsor has to make a significant contribution. Without a big commitment, donation even sacrifice, this will not happen. Do you see why Peter uses this word? Spiritual growth is not going to happen without your engagement and commitment. You need to act on what God has provided for you by taking the responsibility of furnishing your life with the necessary qualities that reflect your participation in the nature of God. Are you satisfied with just being saved and that's it? Because God isn't. Neither should you, and no matter what your age, or how long you have been a believer, you need to grow and keep growing.

One of the members that we lost recently was Bernie Howard. Bernie was in her 90's and could not learn enough. She was hungry to know God and his Word and the sweetness of the fruit in her life revealed it. For those of you who are young, you are tempted to think that you have the rest of your life to get serious about God, but you don't need to worry about that now. That is a very popular and appealing lie. But make no mistake, it is still a lie. Those of you who are fewer miles ahead of you than you have already traveled it is easy to believe that you are what you are, that you can coast from here on. Take it easy because you have earned some laziness. Again, that is a very popular and appealing lie. But make no mistake, it is still a lie. Every single one of us needs to identify the map, or the game plan and follow it. Look at this list with me. Treat it as a train ride that has 7 stops.

1) Stop #1 – Moral excellence (virtue) - add to your faith, virtue (moral excellence)

Virtue is moral excellence. Do you see with the eyes of your heart and hear with the ears of your soul what this is saying? We are commanded to make every effort all the time to pursue moral excellence. This is the same word that is used to describe Jesus at the end of verse 3. Immorality is the norm. It is the flow of the cultural stream. It is expected and assumed. It is also the reason why so many people have so much depression, despair, anger and hurt. Immorality is the expression of betrayal and you cannot build anything that lasts and is true on that. Immorality promises so much and delivers so little. The first stop is moral virtue, but the last stop is love. This is where God wants to take you. He wants you to look like him. He wants your heart to be full like his. Immorality pokes holes in your heart and drains you of your God-given capacity to care for others because immorality is based on caring for yourself. That always makes your heart smaller. Start with asking God to help you have an honest assessment of yourself.

Are there sins that you give yourself permission to commit? In other words, do you try to tell yourself that you have earned the right to sin because of other good things you do, or because you are not appreciated and affirmed for the fact that you are not as bad as others? Are there weaknesses that you have been willing to accept failure in? Are there habits of cutting corners that you have become accustomed to tolerating? Have you let down your guard and like a frog in a kettle become accustomed to and even agreeable to the slowly changing temperature that will inevitably cook you to death. Sin is not your friend. Stop #1 is Moral excellence. Before your train can move on, there may be some things that you need to unload at this station. What do you need to unload? When are you going to do it? Who is going to help you? That is very important. Who is going to help you keep those commitments? You may be saying, "are you serious?" Yes!

Isn't that what the text says? Make every effort! Use every tool at your disposal. God has given you a church of brothers and sisters who care about you and the gospel. Our elders are here to encourage you, pray for you, pray with you and help you. They would be a great resource. But, if you talk with them, they will tell the rest, right? Absolutely not! That is not loving and helpful for you. Shame is a terrible and ineffective motivation for godliness.

But moral excellence is not simply the absence of impurity, it is the pursuit of that which is good. Pursue goodness. Surround yourself with people who encourage you to pursue goodness and moral excellence will affect your speech. Examples of this would be always speaking in a wholesome and encouraging way. A virtuous person speaks the truth. Moral excellence speaks of honesty and integrity in all areas. Make every effort to do the right thing all the time. Pay your bills. Keep your promises. Keep your commitments. Acknowledge your failures. This pandemic has had a lethargic effect on a number of people. It has, to some, become the occasions for being focused on ourselves. And you are not better for it. You can play solitaire for 4 hours a day on your phone or other mindless apps. These help you waste your time and your life. You were made for more. Think of 1 or 2 specific changes you need to make in order to pursue virtue.

Consider your life. Think about how you spend a day. Is it oriented around God? We talk about our devotional life where we intentionally spend time reading his Word and talking with him, which is good and necessary. But even in that, we are not squeezing in time for a quick phone call because it is expected, like calling your mom or grandparents. Adding knowledge means to grow in your knowledge. This means to live aware of God. Verse 8 speaks of these qualities and says, *"if these are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being ineffective."*

Here is my desire for you. Your heart is tilted in a such a way that when you have the opportunity to have some freedom of thought, even like a daydream of sorts, your thoughts travel in the direction of that tilt. It may happen when you are driving a long distance, or cutting the grass, or cleaning the house, or sitting on the porch, or drinking some coffee and looking out the window. It may happen when you are looking in the mirror or what you think about before you go to bed. But, what are thinking about is a reflection of how your heart is tilted. If you are giving yourself to your children, then the tilt of your heart is toward them and of course, your mind will constantly go toward them. If you are giving yourself to your job or career, then the tilt of your heart is toward that and your thoughts will constantly drift in that direction. If you are giving yourself to a project, to a status in life, a goal, then the tilt of your heart is toward that and your unintentional thoughts will flow in that direction. I want that space in your thoughts to go to God. I want the tilt of your heart to be toward God, so that he occupies all of the space around the details of life that we have to do. That, I believe is what the Christian life looks like. Beloved, this is something that we can pursue and we must pursue.

I spent a couple of summers as a lifeguard, which meant that I gave kids swimming lessons. One boy (probably around 7) was jumping off the diving board in the deep end and got scared. He wasn't that far from the edge of the pool and started to say, "help" and wanted me to jump in and save him. I didn't need to save him. He just needed to do what he had been trained to do. I went over to where he was, bent over and yelled, "SWIM!!" He promptly put his head down, started kicking his feet and swam right to the edge. Beloved, trust the promises of God. You have what

you need. This life is like 4 short laps and I don't want you to get to the end with regret. Take responsibility for your spiritual growth. Let's grow-up and not quit growing up. We will continue with the rest of these next week.