

Title: Growing up
Text: 2 Peter 1.5-7 pt.2
Theme: The urgency of making spiritual progress
Series: 2 Peter
Prop Stmt: Pursuing these marks of godliness are graces from God.

Read Text:

A friend of mine got Covid-19, but not the virus. He got the 19 pounds that has come from too little activity and too much eating. So, he is on a mission to lose that weight and more and he has a plan. He is doing that intermittent fasting where you don't eat from 8pm until noon the next day, exercising a bit more, and not eating sweets. Now, we all know that life doesn't tilt toward being in shape, does it. It is easier to eat more, not less, do less, not more. But, if we do not do something about the tilt, then we deal with all sorts of consequences. The amount of attention and effort we give to diets, exercise is never ending because the battle never ends. I recently read that when you get my age you naturally add an inch or two or three or four on your waist, which is very discouraging to someone who hates to buy clothes. But, here is my point. There is a difference between a fad or crash diet and a healthy lifestyle. A fad diet tends to bring short term success but no long-term benefit. A healthy lifestyle, on the other hand reorients how you live.

In our text, Peter gives us 7 qualities that we need to pursue and keep pursuing. Someone asked me last week if there is an order to these. I think there is in a sense, but at the same time, we should look at these as a whole. So, one of the ways that we could look at these would be different markers of spiritual health. When you get a physical, there are markers that are checked like: weight, blood pressure, BMI, heart rate, cholesterol, sugar, etc. Your weight may be fine, but if that is because you never sleep and you only eat 2 donuts a day, you are definitely not healthy. We all know people who don't want to stop smoking because they will gain weight. You have to look at the whole picture. But, some things, like weight and blood pressure are a little more foundational. I think that is how we should view these 7 qualities. There is some order, but they also go together and we never stop giving attention to all of them.

The image that I am using is that of a train. Our lives as believers are like a train of faith. Without faith, there is no train. This is not a generic faith but actual saving faith. Ever since Covid became a deal, we have seen these signs that say, "Faith over fear." From the sign, it is impossible to know exactly what that means simply because you cannot fit all of your theology on a bumper sticker. So, when Peter says to supplement your faith with virtue, he is addressing people who have come to faith in Christ as their King and Savior. These are genuine believers. They have turned to Christ in belief and from their sin in repentance. They believe in Jesus because of what he has done for them by living the life they could not live and dying the death they could not die. The death of Christ is so infinitely sufficient to pay for our sins that there is nothing left for us to pay. When you trust Christ, you become a believer. Your life is now like a train of faith that is on the track toward becoming more and more like Christ. Each of these qualities is a fruit of the gospel and a reflection of Christ. I am responsible to grow up, but I didn't become a believer on my own and I am certainly not going to grow as a believer on my own. The Spirit who gave me the faith to believe gives me the grace to grow. So, point number one is...

I. Add moral excellence to your faith. (5)

But, I look to God for the grace to do this. I ask him for help to pursue moral excellence. After all, “his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (v.3). God gives you the strength to pursue this command.

We add to our faith, moral excellence. This is the first stop. The ESV calls it virtue. Moral excellence certainly includes moral purity that I emphasized last Sunday. But it is more. It is the quality of doing things right. In Mark 7.37, the people were observing Jesus and they said, “*He has done all things well.*” Now, we have not been given the authority to heal like Jesus did, but we can reflect that same quality of doing things well. The perfectionist is in bondage to attaining an impossible standard and constantly lives being frustrated and frustrating others. I am not talking about that. Moral excellence is not being a perfectionist and driving everyone around you crazy. This is the quality of doing a good job in what you do and keeping it in balance with everything else. When I was in seminary I had some courses that required thousands of pages of reading, which would have been fine and certainly useful, if that was all that I had to do. But, I was a husband, a father, and your pastor. So, I didn’t get all of the reading done. To the degree that you can, do a good job. Don’t cut corners. Don’t cheat your job. Don’t look to just get by. If you have to write a paper, do the work. Learn. Engage in the topic. Put in the effort. If you are a student, think like this: Does the quality of my work and my attitude reflect the gospel? Does it make Jesus appealing to my teacher? The next stop on our train of faith is knowledge.

II. Add knowledge to moral excellence. (5)

I am putting up some wall boards on a wall in my basement to recreate an accent wall. I did my research. Watched a bunch of YouTube videos. Bought the boards and watched the YouTube videos some more. Let them sit in my basement for two weeks and started in. Your experience is likely different than mine, but I have found that there is an enormous difference between the YouTube videos putting up wall boards and me putting up wall boards. The other night I had to stop because as we will see in a minute, we are supposed to grow in self-control and my experience with the wall boards was not encouraging me to go in the right direction. We all get this. We talk about book knowledge and street smarts. Book knowledge is seen as information in an ideal setting while street smarts is how life works. When the Bible talks about knowledge it is more like street smarts.

Knowledge is not mere information. This knowledge is referring to learning and trusting God’s ways as well as hearing and embracing God’s heart. This knowledge is not knowing stuff. It is knowing God. This has to be intentional and it has to be done in life. This means developing and being in communion with God. You can read books about how to read the Bible and how God speaks to us and forms our affections through his Word. But knowing that it should be that way is not the same as experiencing that. God wants your **relationship** with him to grow. Just as a good friendship deepens and good a marriage matures, we are to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” (3.18) Now, you cannot betray your friend if you want to keep that friendship and if you want that friendship to deepen. You cannot be unfaithful to your spouse if you want to remain married. That is why without moral virtue, you

cannot deepen your relationship with God. God loves you too much to share you with the devil. He is not going to pretend that you are good friends if you are whoring around with the world. God wants you to know him. He wants you to learn of him. He wants you to be merciful like he is merciful, loving like he is loving, holy like he is holy, happy, like he is happy, satisfied like he is satisfied, joyful as he is joyful. But just as a friendship is deepened by sharing time and experiences together, you and I are called to live in such a way that we are aware of and responding to the presence of God at all times. After all, what is eternity? It is God living with and enjoying his people.

You cannot begin to get bored with God. You cannot begin to exhaust your knowledge of God. And what you learn about God is intended to stretch your heart for God. I want each of you to be theologically grounded and competent not so that you can impress people with big words, but so that you can guard the gospel and grow your heart. God entrusts with big truths about himself because big truths about God are intended to give you deep thoughts about God so that you will have a big heart for God because a big heart for God will give you great love for God and for others. You can sing good songs in church because the songs are singable, enjoyable, and done with excellence. That's ok as far as it goes. But, I want you to sing as if your heart is going to explode if you don't. I want your love for God to be so real and your experience of God to be so fresh that the music becomes secondary to the words. I want the richness of the truths that we sing to be the music in your soul because you know from your own life how true this is.

So, how do we add knowledge to our train of faith?

A. You have to be intentional.

Couples, you know that if you are going to strengthen your marriage, you have to be intentional about it. You have to schedule time for yourselves. You have to block off time for a date night, for time away, even to have an important conversation. Life does not provide that for you automatically. There is always something in the moment that crowds out what you need to do, so you have to be intentional about it. That is why God has called the church to gather together weekly. Is it a habit? Sure, but it's a habit that is formed by love. It is a habit that is motivated by love and a habit that deepens our love. That is the goal of spiritual disciplines like reading God's Word. We intentionally set aside time daily to learn about God by reading what he wrote for us to know about him. We pray. We talk to God. We talk to God about what he said to us. If you are not intentional about it, it won't happen.

Let's say that I asked everyone to stand. How many of you read your Bibles every day this week, please be seated? How many of you read your Bibles at least three times this week, please be seated? That would be a terrible thing for me to do because I would be using embarrassment and the fear of man to try to affect behavior. I want us to have a culture in our church that encourages our growth in knowing God in such a way that we help one another be attracted to it.

B. Utilize your church.

Think of our spiritual growth, not just your spiritual growth. Think of our growing in moral excellence and knowledge, not just you. Your growth in knowing God is to help us grow in

knowing God. Beloved, this is not complicated. Those of you who are in small groups you know the benefit of listening to others talk about what they learned from a sermon. They heard something a bit differently than you did and it was helpful to you. This is a wonderful habit for us to cultivate. How can I share something that I have been learning about God with someone else and how can I encourage someone else to share with me what they are learning? Read the Bible with someone else. Pray with someone else. Read a good book with someone else. Share what you learn with someone else. The next stop on our train of faith is self-control.

III. Add self-control to your knowledge. (6)

Self-control is so out of fashion, we don't even know what it is anymore. I read an article the other day on the clothes you should get rid of or not wear because they just aren't in. I laughed because I didn't even have those! The idea of self-control is not even a gauge on our dashboard. How many public shootings have taken place in the last month? Random shootings are no longer random. They have become so regular that we don't even stop and glue ourselves to the event. There are so many people who are boiling just under the surface. Last weekend in Kenosha, WI, a man is in a tavern, gets angry, goes home and gets a gun and goes back and shoots three people. That day in Austin, TX another guy, a former cop, who you think would know how this was going to end, goes to an apartment complex and kills three people. Then there was the kid in Indianapolis, who went into the FedEx facility and killed a number of people. It feels like a preview of what is in store. It's like the Lord is removing some of his common grace of restraint and we are seeing examples of the human heart in its naked depravity. These are no longer isolated events. This is our culture. This is our world.

A. **Our world is out of control.**

People are out of control all around you. You need God's grace to drive your car. 2 Thessalonians 2 talks about the coming of "the lawless one." We used to think that everyone had a conscience that functioned like an emergency brake that would reign a person in from doing something really bad. It's like the cable of the emergency brake has snapped. When a person doesn't get what they want, you wonder if they are going to come back and start shooting. These are extreme reactions. But, this is not just the world that we live in, in the sense that these things happen, this is the air that we breathe and it influences us.

The message of the world is this: You should be able to have whatever you want, whenever you want it, and if you don't, then someone needs to pay. False teachers like the prosperity gospel mouthpieces sell that under the guise of Christianity. God wants you to have the life you think you deserve. Politicians sell it under the label of, "the other side is trying to steal from you" and the result is that many people are continually being stoked and kept in a rage.

B. **You may be out of control.**

This lack of self-control creates such a reactionary environment. We feel this tilt where we are expected to punish others, or call them out, or expose their hypocrisy if they do not agree with me on every little issue either in position or in whether or not to say anything about it. I want you to be aware that your world is squeezing you into its mold. The world, the flesh and the devil

want you to be angry, frustrated, boiling, on edge, feeling marginalized, disenfranchised, manipulated, taken advantage of, and victimized by conspiracies. This constant sense of being misunderstood, unappreciated, underrepresented contributes significantly to being reactionary. So, let's stop for a second and dissect self-control. We know what the lack of self-control is: rage, violence, cursing, abusive speech, feeding our glands, letting our desires rule our lives instead of ruling our desires – ok, but why? Why are we vulnerable to a lack of self-control? Why do we think that in the moment, choosing those words, choosing that response, having that drink, eating that food, buying that thing, is ok or we want it to be ok? I think it all stems from this. We get out of control when we try to play God because we didn't get what we wanted or we are getting what we want and we want it all. And like so much of sin, we are deceived into thinking that we are in control. Paul talked about people, whose god is their stomach. Let's think about that. If your god is your stomach, your stomach is ruling you and you are not ruling your stomach. You are not in control, your appetites are. And, besides, all little "g" gods are never satisfied. They demand your worship and sacrifice and it is never enough.

Anger, overeating, overspending, what are the areas where you need help with some self-control? Ask yourself these questions? What is it that I want so much that I am willing to give away the control of my life? Is it respect? Is it comfort? Is it entitlement? Identify your need for control and try to do some assessment. But, you don't have to figure out all of the why, before you start trying to grow in this area. And that is the funny thing about self-control. We (the selves) do a pretty lousy job at self-control. That is why need to...

C. Ask God for help – all the time.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5.22-23). Self-control is a gift from God that is part of his strength and grace to help you. Whenever the kids were in the car with me and we drove by Macomb County Jail I would say, that is where people go who do not learn self-control. But, we need the Lord's help. How does the Lord help us? He helps us when we ask. The Spirit responds to our request and literally empowers us to do the right thing in the moment. Here is why I think that there is some sequential relationship to these qualities. The more you grow in your knowledge of who God is, the more you are going to know that He is sovereign, infinite, eternal and unchangeable. You are going to know, trust in, experience and even love the fact that your, our Father is actively, intentionally, purposefully, willfully ruling over all aspects of his creation and that he created everything with a purpose and a plan and he oversees all aspects of that plan. Knowing God enables me to relax in God. Remember what the text means about knowledge. It means being in a relationship with God. When you are constantly communicating with God, you don't need to be out of control because you are being reminded that he is in control of all things. It really changes things.

What do I know about God? He is Creator. He made it all. It's all his. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The other day Cathi and I were in my car and were stopped at a light when a guy was making a left turn, lost control of his car and hit my car. Is that my car? Not ultimately. It's God's, right. And in that moment, when it is tempting to be angry, the fact that this really isn't my car, but it is God's and if he wants to treat it that way, well, then, that really is his business, right? One last thing...

D. Think congregationally.

Peter wrote this to the believers. Our growth in self-control is more than a good thing for you and for your family, it is a huge encouragement to your church. There is a brother in our congregation who has grown so much in the past year that his life is not only radically different, but it is a huge blessing to so many brothers and sisters. This brother has grown in so many ways, but there was one thing that he just felt powerless over and that was smoking. He really wanted to stop, but it just wasn't happening. Well, the Lord answered his prayer, but not like we thought. He developed an infection and had to go into the hospital. We thought that a couple of days of antibiotics and he would be good to go, but no, this infection was stubborn and it held on and held on and held on. Now, we are really concerned for him and we are praying and don't want him to get discouraged and make bad decisions, after all he can't have visitors, and we are really concerned for him. I forget how long it was. It may have been a couple of weeks, but he finally gets out and he is excited. He is excited because while he was in the hospital, he was not allowed to smoke at all, and because he was in so long, the Lord used that to take away his desire for it. The Lord answered his prayer, but because he had shared this with a number of people, there were a whole bunch of people who rejoiced with him. Every time I think about this, I smile. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Add to your faith, virtue, and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control. Let's keep growing up. We all have some adding to do this week.