

Title: Still Growing
Text: 2 Peter 1:5-7 pt.3
Theme: Christ is the means and the goal of growth
Series: 2 Peter
Prop Stmt. Christ is the means and the goal of our sanctification

Read Text:

Earlier this week, the Detroit News carried the story of a local Physical Therapist who was contacted by someone pretending to be from the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. She was told that her license to practice was about to be pulled because she had been tied to a drug operation and she was threatened with losing her license, or going to jail. It wasn't until after she wired her family's life savings for a bond, that she and her husband found out that the entire thing was a hoax. An official from the actual LARA department was asked to comment and she gave several things that should cause you to be suspicious so that you do not fall for a hoax like this. As I read the story, I thought, this sounds a lot like the book of 2 Peter.

Peter is warning us about the fraudulent teachers who infiltrate churches in an effort to take advantage of believers and lead them astray. But, the way he does it is by pointing us to a life that is marked by the grace of God. A grace-filled life is going to be a God-pleasing life. If your life is marked by God's grace and you are growing in that grace, then your spiritual Spidey sense is going to be active and you will identify false teachers. False teachers are generally marked by a lack of self-control. This reveals itself in the areas of moral purity, money, power and temper. In an effort to cover-up or excuse these sorts of things, false teachers then twist the truth and attempt to make the Bible say what they want it to say, rather than what it says. So, the average believer can be really intimidated or even skeptical because we think, how do I know if I am being duped or not? Which is why Peter emphasizes our growth in grace and our text identifies 7 areas of growth that a gospel-driven life will grow in.

The imagery that I have used is that of an engine that we are calling the train of faith. The first station we stop at is virtue (moral excellence). From there we go to knowledge, which speaks of our growing in knowing who God is and in relating to him. Our third stop is self-control. 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, growing in your knowledge of God and growing in your trust of God and love of God and joy in God enables you to relax in God. Self-control is a gift of and a fruit of the Spirit. When you are dependent on the Spirit and 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. The next stop on the train of faith is the station of steadfastness.

I. **Add steadfastness to your self-control.**

The word that Peter uses here for steadfastness means “to stand your ground.” When David was king of Israel, he had a group of mighty men who were known as “the 30.” Of those 30 there were 3 who were the best of the best. One of those was a man named Shammah who earned this spot in a battle with the Philistines at a place called Lehi. There was a plot of ground that was full of lentils and the men of Israel fled from the Philistines. 2 Samuel 23.12 says, “*But he (Shammah) took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines, and the LORD worked a great victory.*” The Philistines were notorious for going on raids into Israel at the harvest time and stealing the produce. It was a devious plan right? Let someone else do all the work then you go in and steal the fruit of their labor. Shammah made up his mind that this was not to happen, at least not on his watch. It is possible that this land belonged to him, or family, or someone he knew, but it didn’t matter if everyone else deserted, he was going to stand his ground and he did.

Standing your ground is the most challenging when others around you do not. Peter has just challenged us regarding self-control, which is moral restraint. You and I live in a world that lies to us and tells us that everyone is being unfaithful. Everyone is viewing porn. Everyone is smoking weed. Everyone is cheating. Everyone is watching this and doing that. No one believes that Bible stuff anymore. No one believes in the sacredness of marriage. That is absolutely not true. And yet, our challenge is that even if it were true, stand your ground.

This idea of standing your ground, of remaining behind and patiently awaiting is, as you can imagine all throughout the NT, and particularly in the epistles. Jesus talked about how the pressure will increase as the time gets closer to his coming back. In Matthew 24.9-14 he said, “*Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*”

James 1.3-4 says that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and that when we let steadfastness have its full effect then we will be mature in Christ. The same idea is in Romans 5.3-4 where suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character. Titus 2.2 challenges the older men of the church to be sound in faith, love and steadfastness. Do you remember the encouraging theme from Hebrews when we studied that book? It was “press on Pilgrim!” That is seen in Hebrews 12.1 where we are challenged to “*run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” How do we do that? We do that by looking to Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate example of what it means to stand your ground and this is what I want to press upon you. All of these qualities are qualities of Christ. He is the perfect and complete embodiment of them, therefore, he is the means by which we pursue them. Christ is the goal of our spiritual maturity and the source of our spiritual maturity. We look to Jesus. We depend on Christ. And of course, Christ has given us the Spirit, his Word and the church as gifts to help us.

In what ways or areas are you most tempted to give up? Your marriage? Praying for others? Being charitable? Fighting sin? What do you think has contributed to your temptation to quit or at the very least to your discouragement? I have found three things that tend to do it for me. 1) When others quit. It’s hard to be Shammah and hold your ground when everyone else has run because the assumption is, the crowd is right. Have others quit in their marriage and you are

tempted to do the same? Have others quit following Jesus well and this has profoundly discouraged you? Have others fallen back into bad habits and you are afraid that it is only a matter of time before you? When others quit we are vulnerable and really need to preach to ourselves AND intentionally spend time with brothers and sisters. This is one of the reasons why God has given us the invaluable gift of the local church. Look around you. You see brothers and sisters who are here in spite of adversity. I was explaining this to a guy this week. I said, we don't dim the lights when we sing because we are not a concert hall, we are a congregation. And as a congregation we sing to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. I look around and see brothers and sisters in seasons of loss and sorrow singing about the sweetness and goodness of God and my soul is fed. This goes a very long way of encouraging me, even though others may have quit. 2) When it feels like it isn't worth it. This is what happens when you give and give and give yourself and work on something and the plan does not come together. And you think, I am wasting my time. Now, there are certainly some things that I have attempted to do and it did not come together and it was right for me to change course. But, I am talking about being steadfast in faith, steadfast in courage, steadfast in love, steadfast in the gospel, steadfast in doing what is right. We will reap if we faint not. 3) When life is not fair. When you look around it is easy to think that a lot of people have it way better than you do. That is likely not the case, but in the moment, when we look at our hardships in comparison to others, we can really struggle with remaining faithful.

Are there some things you can do and perhaps should do that would encourage endurance? Think of a goal that you can set, that is reasonable and share that with a couple of people who will encourage you to pursue it. It could be to exercise 5 times this week, read your Bible 5 times this week, pray for the members in your class this week or small group, limit your time on Facebook or media, contact 2 people and encourage them. Little things add up to big things and these little things help cultivate a life where you are in charge and not being owned.

Jesus, for the joy that was set before you, you endured the cross. For the joy that was set before you, you despised its shame and you are now seated at the right hand of the Father and are preparing a place for me. On that day, when I am with you, faithfulness on this day will be worth it more than I can imagine. Give me grace to know that, believe it anew and with joy press on. The next stop on the train of faith is the station of godliness.

II. **Add godliness to your steadfastness.**

What is godliness? Godliness is God-likeness. What is God like? He is holy, merciful, true, faithful, joyful, loving, etc. Godliness is a summary of all of the virtues of Christ. Now, in chapter 3.10 and following Peter uses this word again and says that "*the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*" Then he says, "*since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness...*" We already saw back in v.3 that Christ has provided everything that we need in this life for godliness.

Have you ever washed your car and then ten minutes later have a bird or two or three use it for target practice? In that moment do you say, "I am so glad that I just spent 20 minutes washing

my car? Or, I am so glad that I just spent 8 bucks getting my car washed?” Of course not! You say, “well that was a waste.” Why invest your life into something that is going to be a waste? Peter is telling us that the earth as we know it is going to be dissolved. “*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine.*” We sing it but do you believe it? You have so much stuff that you spend all of your time and your life trying to manage it. There is a difference between owning stuff and stuff owning you and if your life is owned by stuff so that you have no time for gospel ministry in the lives of people or if you are constantly out of town because you have to check on things and you cannot commit to any kind of regular ministry to people because of that, then ask yourself the question that Peter does. In view of the fact that all of this will dissolve, what kind of people ought you to be? Godliness cares about people way more than stuff because stuff doesn’t last but people do.

Let me give you a couple of ideas to consider. Let’s say that you decided to get a season ticket package for the Tigers and you are thinking about a 20-game package for 2 tickets for you and your spouse or you and another family member. Instead of buying 2 tickets for 20 games, what if you bought 4 tickets for 10-games and you invited a couple of new people from the church to go with you, or you invited a couple of people you didn’t know real well and you used the evening to encourage them rather than be discouraged with what is going on with our baseball team right now. Do you see the value in that? Based on the Tigers’ record, you can expect them to lose 13 of the 20 games, right? Why frustrate yourself for those 13 games, when you can win all 10? What are you doing to invest in the lives of others?

Christ is the ultimate example of godliness because he is God. Look at the investment of his life into people. The only times when Christ is ever alone is his time in the desert when he is fasting and being tempted by Satan, when he is alone at night and praying to the Father and when he is being crucified. Godliness is being merciful, loving, gentle, truthful, encouraging, faithful and joyful. It is being all the things that God is, but God is those to us. Don’t waste your life on yourself. Exercise is fine, but what does 1 Timothy 4.7-8 say? “*Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*” Do you have a plan that helps you pursue godliness? Jeff Chamberlain is teaching on this on Wednesday nights in his class on spiritual disciplines. This is great stuff to discuss with one another today or in your small groups. How can I plan for godliness this week? What are some ways I can be focused on others, pray for others, encourage others? Which is why the next stop on the train of faith is brotherly affection.

III. **Add brotherly affection to your godliness.**

I have seen a number of personality profile tools used to analyze people, classify them and in theory, help them understand themselves and others. Right now the Enneagram model is very popular. Some of these can be helpful, but there is also a weakness with them, because we can hide behind a classification and if we are not discerning and intentional, we will excuse ourselves from doing some things we need to do. For example, Peter is challenging us to “make every effort” to supplement our faith with these virtues and one of these virtues is brotherly affection. And introvert may think that he/she is not naturally like this, and will leave it up to others to be like this. This is for all of us and it is so good. As you might guess, brotherly affection is the English translation of the Greek word, philadelphia.

It is a term that is used in Romans 12.10; 1 Thess. 4.9; Heb. 13.1; 1 Peter 1.22 and 1 Peter 3.8. Brotherly affection describes a family atmosphere where people belong together, take an interest in one another, do things together and for one another. Brotherly affection is an attitude of kindness, helpfulness, consideration, deferring and just plain charity. It is an orientation that takes a genuine interest in another person and treats them as having value because they do.

Here is what brotherly affection looks like. As I prepare to come to church I am asking God to help me meet people I can encourage, pray with and be a blessing to. As I get out of my vehicle I look for people whom I do not know, whom I can meet and introduce them to others. I look for people I do know and ask them questions about themselves. I look for people that I can sit with, buy them something from the café, invite to lunch or to some other event. Brotherly affection is looking out for others particularly in the church family. Brotherly affection is something that you choose to pursue because you love Christ and you love the people of Christ.

I was reading an article for church leaders that said that the number one question that parents ask their children after they get out of their class at church is, “did you have fun?” The point of the article was since parents ask that question then church leadership needs to make sure that kids have fun so that the parents are encouraged to bring their kids back. However, I was reading the article and shaking my head and saying that is the wrong conclusion. The church leadership needs to teach the parents to ask their kids different questions. If you ask them if they had fun, then they will think that is the goal of church. It’s all about me and having fun. Ask them, what did you learn and ask them, who did you encourage? Who did you help? When you ask them questions like that, you are helping them learn brotherly kindness.

There is brother in our church who retired and bought a truck. He bought the truck for a couple of reasons: 1) To pull a trailer because he also bought a fishing boat and 2) to have a truck to be able to help people with. And he does. This brother takes other guys young and not so young fishing all the time in order to encourage them. He also uses the truck to help all sorts of people move things, get things, and work on projects. This brother’s life is literally full of acts of brotherly kindness. I was in his truck the other day and he has like 215k miles on his truck because he does this all the time. And I thought, if Jesus had a pick-up truck, it would have a lot of miles on it too because Jesus knows better than all of us, that trucks don’t last, but people do.

- Ask God for help to have affection for others.
- Choose to have a disposition of kindness to people.
- Identify one or two ways you can bless people in the church – start today.

Brotherly affection is our Spirit-given and Spirit-driven response to people because we are loved by Christ, we are growing in becoming like Christ and we are being empowered by Christ.