

The late Ray Stedman told of asking a boy how old he was. Quick as a flash he said, "I'm twelve, going on thirteen, soon be fourteen." That boy was eager to grow up!

Most Christians want to grow in the Lord, especially when they are new in the faith. But often, as time goes on, the enthusiasm to grow begins to fade. We settle into a humdrum routine and grow spiritually complacent.

We're like an old farmer I read about ("Our Daily Bread"), who often described his Christian experience by saying, "Well, I'm not making much progress, but I'm established!"

One spring when he was ploughing the ground, his tractor wheels sank down to the axles in mud. As he sat there viewing the dismal situation, a neighbour who had always felt uncomfortable with the farmer's worn-out testimony came by. He called out, "Brother Jones, I see you're not making much progress, but you must be content because you're well established!" It was a way of pointing out, "You're stuck!"

If you're stuck spiritually, God wants you to grow. Even if you've been a Christian for many years, each year should be a year of growth in godliness. Until you're perfectly like Jesus Christ, which won't happen until you see Him, you still have room to grow. In our text, Peter gives us some wise counsel about growing in godliness.

But you won't grow without deliberate discipline and effort. It's interesting that Peter, a man known in the gospels for his impetuosity, here sets forth a deliberate, disciplined approach to spiritual growth. If Peter the impetuous fisherman could become a disciplined, godly man, then anyone else can do the same.

He's saying, Because God has imparted new life and spiritual riches to us in Christ, we should be diligent to grow in godliness.

You and I cannot begin to grow as a Christian until we have received new life from God through

faith in Jesus Christ. It is the life of Christ in you and me that gives us the motivation and power to change and grow spiritually. The instant you trust in Christ, God graciously gives you the key to the unfathomable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8), which supplies you with everything you need for life and godliness.

In the list of qualities that follow (2 Pet. 1:5-7), some writers refer to eight virtues, with faith being the first. But I think that is mistaken. Peter does not tell us to supply faith, as he does with the other things on the list. Rather, he says, “in your faith supply moral excellence,” etc. He assumes faith as the foundation on which the other virtues rest and from which they grow. We receive faith in Christ as God’s gift (1:1), but then we supply the other qualities, which are the fruit of faith (1:8). So, to grow in godliness, make sure that you have trusted in Jesus Christ and His gracious promises. Faith is the essential foundation for growing in godliness.

Faith begins as saving faith and then becomes the faith without which it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6); whatever does not originate through faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Our faith is based upon the revealed word of God (2 Peter 1:4; see Romans 10:8, 17). Our faith is tested, proven, and strengthened by the trials and adversity God allows to come into our life (1 Peter 1:6-7). Faith is not only the basis for belief but also the basis for our behaviour (see Hebrews 11).

Our Lord Himself is the object and the source of our faith; Christ is also the model for our faith. It is easier to think of the Lord Jesus as the object of faith than to think of Him exercising faith. But His faith was exercised when He submitted to the will of the Father by taking on human flesh and suffering and dying at the hands of sinful men.

23 And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23, emphasis mine).

To grow, you must apply all diligence.

Peter says (1:5), “Applying all diligence....” The word “applying” occurs only here in the New Testament and means, “to bring in besides.” The idea is, “God has given you His life and all of His promises. Now, you bring in diligence so that you may grow.”

D. A. Carson explains (Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church [Zondervan], p. 228), "... the dominant biblical pattern is neither 'let go and let God' nor 'God has done his bit, and now it's all up to you,' but rather, 'since God is powerfully at work in you, you yourself must make every effort.'"

As Paul said (Phil. 2:12-13), "... work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." In other words, spiritual growth involves God's resources as the foundation, but also our responsible effort in addition.

"Diligence" sometimes has the meaning of haste or speed, but here it probably means, "eagerness, earnestness, or zeal." Peter is saying, "Make every effort to add" the qualities that follow.

The word "supply" is an interesting Greek word from which we get our words "chorus" and "choreography." It referred to a wealthy man who would give everything necessary to put on a stage play or musical performance. It meant to give lavishly, because such donors did not want people thinking that they had been stingy in supplying the chorus. So putting it all together, Peter is saying, "Make every effort eagerly and lavishly to supply these qualities on the foundation of your faith in Christ."

What are these qualities? Peter now lists seven that we are to make every effort to grow in.

1. Moral Excellence. We need to turn to 1 Peter 2:9 to understand what he means.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR [God's] OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

It was used "to denote the proper fulfillment of anything. The excellence of a knife is to cut, of a horse to run" (Michael Green, The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude [Eerdmans],

p. 67). Since Peter uses it just two verses before to refer to Jesus Christ, we could say that here he means, "Christlikeness." We are to grow in the character qualities that marked Jesus. Just as He always obeyed the Father and lived to glorify Him, so should we.

Action: We spend each day in the presence of God where we worship Him and obey what he reveals to us..

2. Knowledge

This refers to practical wisdom that is gained in the exercise of moral excellence (Green, p. 68). We gain the knowledge of how God wants us to live through His Word. It tells us how to think, how to use our tongue, and how to behave in just about every imaginable situation. This "knowledge" must also be understood as contrasting and contradicting the false knowledge of the false teachers who would undermine both the truth and the faith of the saints if they could: As we put this knowledge into use, it helps us to grow to know Jesus Christ better (as verse 8 says).

Action: We spend each time not just reading the Bible but applying it to our lives.

3. Self-Control

This quality is also the final item in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). God works it in us as we walk in the Spirit, but we must also work to practice it. Paul uses the word in reference to an athlete, who exercises self-control in all things so that he might win (1 Cor. 9:25). It is also a necessary qualification for elders (Titus 1:8). By definition, self-control means that you must go against your impulses or feelings in order to attain a higher goal. An athlete must say no to junk food in order to keep in shape. He must work out when he doesn't feel like it. It applies to controlling all desires, including greed, sex, food, emotions, and the use of our time.

Action: We practice self-control each day not allowing your flesh to control us. EG saying no to the second Tim Tam; saying no to the clothing on the rack that says but me; saying no to allowing your emotions to control you like frustration and anger.

4. Perseverance

This refers to the ability to endure hardship and distress. Thayer (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament [Harper & Brothers, 1887], pp. 644) defines it as “the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.” It is often used with reference to suffering (Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Thess. 1:4; James 1:3). It means that we keep following Christ even when it results in persecution or hardship.

Action: To develop perseverance in life.

1. Firstly, you must establish what it is you truly desire. What goal do you really want to achieve.
2. Have a clear step-by-step plan of how you're going to achieve your goal. Your plan is your roadmap to your desired destination. Simply without one you'll get lost.
3. Before you start your pursuit of a goal, make a commitment to yourself that you will work toward it for a specific period of time and won't give up before that time arrives. Make this period as long or as short as you want but the important thing is not to quit before the allotted time.

When the deadline arrives, you can then decide whether to continue with the strategy you're currently following or make some changes to it.

Revising your strategies is fine but quitting is fatal. Quitting will only strengthen and accentuate your inability to persevere and see things through.

4. Identify potential obstacles you could face along the way. This will not only prepare you mentally for when you do come across them, but it will also help you in the process of devising

alternative strategies and contingency plans.

5. Seek out help and moral support from family, friends or mentors. They will help keep you focused and motivated on following through until you achieve your goal.

6. Self-control is a must when developing perseverance in daily life. Exercising self-control ensures you remain focused on the task or tasks in hand, and not get side-tracked and distracted.

7. Establish consistent daily habits. Take small steps of progress consistently everyday will mean that your efforts will compound and success will be inevitable.

5. Godliness

“Godliness” refers to “a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life” (Green, p. 70). It refers to awe in the presence of God and the obedience that befits that reverence (William Barclay, *New Testament Words* [Westminster Press], pp. 106-107). It is “the attitude which gives God the place he ought to occupy in life and in thought and in devotion” (ibid., p. 107).

Godliness refers to practical religion, or, perhaps we should say, practiced religion. Godliness is the religion we practice in our day-to-day walk. It is ...

“... the attitude of reverence which seeks to please God in all things. It desires a right relation with both God and men. Godliness brings the sanctifying presence of God into all the experiences of life.... This characteristic distinguishes the true believer from the ungodly false teachers (2:5-22; 3:7).”

Action: 1. Trust in Jesus and His precious promises

2. Maintain the right motivation to serve God and His purposes. (Take the focus off of YOU!)

6. Brotherly/Sisterly Kindness

“Brotherly kindness” is the love saints should have for one another as fellow-believers. It is a love based in part on what we share in common with the One we love. There is a certain element of reciprocity involved, for ideally we should be a blessing to our brother in Christ, and he should be a blessing to us.

This love, based on a shared relationship with Christ, can be sensed immediately even though two saints may never have met before. I well remember my first trip to India. Having arrived late after airport cancellations, Liz and I met our hosts. We were greeted with smiles and flowers. Very quickly, a deep sense of brotherly love was evident as we found a bond of love in Christ.

This does not mean that brotherly love is a snap, that it is automatic. If it were, Peter would not have found it necessary to command us to pursue it with diligence, not only in his second epistle but also in his first.

Action: Do acts of Kindness to your brothers and sisters: eg send a card; make a phone call; give a meal to one who is sick.

7. Love

Michael Green shows its uniqueness:

“In friendship (philia) the partners seek mutual solace; in sexual love (eros) mutual satisfaction. In both cases these feelings are aroused because of what the loved one is. With agape it is the reverse. God’s agape is evoked not by what we are, but by what he is. It has its origin in the agent, not in the object.

This agape might be defined as a deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person's good. That is what God did for us (Jn. 3:16). That is what he wants us to do (1 Jn. 3:16). That is what he is prepared to achieve in us (Rom. 5:5). Thus the Spirit of the God who is love is freely given to us, in order to reproduce in us that same quality."

While "Phileo love" is directed toward fellow-believers, "Agape love" is universal in scope. It is a love which applies both to believers and to unbelievers:

Action: Do sacrificial acts of love for another eg neighbour; serve in a community group; give to various causes that need help.

Peter closes this section:

With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus. Without these qualities you can't see what's right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books.

So, friends, confirm God's invitation to you, his choice of you. Don't put it off; do it now. Do this, and you'll have your life on a firm footing, the streets paved and the way wide open into the eternal kingdom of our Master and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Walking Free: We continue to see God breaking through into people's lives as he brings

revelation that unlocks their healing. Recently a lady was given a memory of a past event by God where she saw the wrist of a receptionist that had been used for self-harm. Though the client had not cut herself, her thinking and hatred of self was as if she was self-harming because of the deep rejection she felt from her parents. Prayers of confession followed and the client then saw her arm (signifying self-harm) being healed by God until there was no scarring. Praise the Lord.

During our team meetings as we pray for our clients, God gives us insight about the next area to pray for in a person's life. Lo and behold a week or so later when we pray for the client, it turns out the same area that God told us about. We are so grateful for Julie, Margaret, Dianne and Lesley who come each fortnight to pray with us.

We have prayed through a church since last newsletter. It stretched the people who joined us but they are seeing the results of the prayers both positively (people responding to Jesus) and negatively (Satan's stepped up opposition through some parishioners)

We are still praying for clients on Tuesdays, Thursdays and second Saturdays. We now have some young people coming to us for prayer.

Toowoomba Team: Hal, Debbie, Stephanie are still praying for a client each week. They have been using effectively the *Taking to the Courts* prayer to set people free.

Bible Studies: I have been taking 6-12 people through the I John unpacking the teaching that John the apostle gives us. It helps us to understand what to do when we are confronted by the false teaching and ideas peddled through the media. He also encourages to live obediently with Jesus as this gives us real life.

Finances: Finances remain a challenge as we have lost some sponsorship. We are looking for more sponsors to support the healing and teaching work of Jesus through Walking Free. No matter how small the donation, we welcome new donors. Remember that each donation to the gift fund is tax deductible.

If you would like to become a sponsor, it is a matter of a one off or regular donation to the following:

Walking Free Renewing Ministries Gift Fund

BSB 084-961 ACC 82-215-5845.

Use your name if you would like a tax receipt at the end of the financial year.

Praise God for His provision.

- Thank God for the healing and restoration He is bringing to our clients.
- Thank God for His financial provision for Walking Free.

- Pray for team in Adelaide who pray for the ministry: □ Margaret, Lesley, Dianne and Julie

- Please pray for team at Toowoomba: Hal and Debbie, Stephanie, Charmaine and Craig.

Family Life continues to be challenging. We have just returned from our niece's wedding in Canberra that went well via the Grampians where the waterfalls were overflowing spectacularly. We have new grandchildren on the way. It is early days but post Easter 2017 will be busy! Thus the next few weeks till Christmas will be spent helping them through babysitting etc.

Pray for Naomi, Jonathan and Jennifer; Jess; David and Maddy and Elijah.

India: Pray for Pastor Devadas, Pastor CH and Rev Sambabu and their ministry amongst Hindu people. Pastor Devadas celebrated the second anniversary of the church where his brother CH spoke. The work amongst Hindus is challenging as they share the gospel. Both have seen healings and people being baptized mainly amongst women.

Kenya: Pastor Newton is heading off to Garissa with his team to build a church that was blown away by a storm. Monies have been donated to help build this church in an area that is hostile to Christianity. Pray for their protection.

