

How To Be A Growing Christian

2 Peter 1:5-11

Pastor John Miller

I'm going to begin at the end of my text, so look at 2 Peter 1:10-11. Then we'll even go back to verse 3 to get a running start.

Peter says, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure..."—why?—"...for if you do these things..."—and we'll find out what "these things" are—"...you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Peter is going to tell us what to do if we're not going to stumble. I don't want to stumble. And if anyone knew about stumbling, Peter knew about it. Jesus had turned to Peter and said, "Peter, Satan desires to sift you as wheat." Can you imagine hangin' out with Jesus, and He turns to you and says, "Hey, the Devil called me last night, and he asked for you by name." Can you imagine that Jesus says, "Satan desires to have you. He wants to sift you as wheat"?

"What did you tell him, Lord?"

"He said he wants you."

"You didn't tell him 'Yes'; did You?"

Then Jesus turned to Peter and said to him, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren." Now Peter would go on to deny Jesus three times. Three times he would say, "I don't know the man," and he would even curse and swear to that. Then cutting like a knife deep into Peter's heart was the sound of the rooster's crow. Peter remembered the words of Jesus, and he went out and "wept bitterly." Then when Jesus rose from the dead, He called for Peter and restored him back into fellowship and commissioned him back into service. He said, "Peter, feed My sheep." That's exactly what Peter is doing in this passage; he is feeding the sheep.

If you haven't ever read and studied the epistles of Peter, you need to do that. They're called "general epistles." 1 Peter is about suffering. If you go through a hard time or are walking through a furnace of affliction, you need to read 1 Peter. 2 Peter is about false teachers and the danger they posed. Peter wanted to strengthen the believers, so they could stand against the opposition of false teaching that would come.

So in chapter 1 of 2 Peter, he talks about our salvation, and then he talks about our sanctification. Salvation is that initial forgiveness of sins, and then sanctification is our growth and maturity in our walk with the Lord. One is positional—I've been justified, and the other is practical—I'm being sanctified or how we grow in the grace and in the knowledge and in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

In order to be sanctified, God has given us some divine resources. They are in verses 3-4. These are the resources God has given you in order for you to grow as a believer. They are given to you “to make your call and election sure” and so you won’t “stumble” or fall. Verse 3 says, “...as His divine power...”—that’s resource number one—“...has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...”—everything you need to live a godly life is in His power—“...through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises...”—that’s resource number two—“...that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature...”—that’s resource number three—“...having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

So there are three divine resources: God’s “divine power,” God’s “promises” and God’s “divine nature.” You become a “partaker of the divine nature.” I believe that all three of these resources are available to every Christian, to every child of God. You may be already shutting me off by saying, “Well, Pastor Miller, you don’t know me. I’m not a good Christian; I can’t grow. I don’t really live the victorious Christian life. I don’t have the ability.” You’re wrong. God has given to you all that you need “for life and godliness.”

The word “power” here is the Greek word “dunamis.” We get our words “dynamite” or “dynamic” from it. It means that God’s Spirit give us dunamis or dynamic power to live the Christian life.

I remember when I first got saved, I realized that I couldn’t live the Christian life in my own strength. The sooner you come to that realization, the better off you’ll be. You cannot live the Christian life in your own strength and in your own ability. We don’t have what it takes to live the Christian life.

But thank God we’re not alone! God has given us His power, His dunamis. How much power does God have? He has all power. He is omnipotent, all powerful. God created the entire universe with words from His mouth. God can give you power to get victory in your marriage. He can give you power to get victory over temptation and victory over the trials that you are facing today. God will give you help and strength to live the Christian life. He never calls us to do something without giving us the ability to do it.

Then secondly, in verse 4, we have God’s promises. They are “exceedingly great and precious promises.” No one for sure knows how many promises there are in the Bible. Sometimes Christians will claim promises that really aren’t theirs. But some guess that there are about 3,500 promises, at least, for the believer in the New Testament. You can get a whole book of the written promises of God. John Bunyan said, “The pathway of life is strewn with the promises of God.”

Sometimes I’ll ask Christians, “What are you doing with the promises of God?”

They’ll say, “I’m underlining them in red in my Bible.” That’s good, but what is better is that you’re claiming them. The promises of God are like a blank check. A check is only good if the money is in the bank to back it up. I remember when my kids were young, I might say, “We

can't afford that."

They would say, "Well, just write one of those checks." They didn't realize that you had to have money in the bank to back it up. So I could write you a million dollar check from John Miller, but when you go to the bank to cash it, you'd be very disappointed; there are no funds to back that up in the bank.

But God's promises are like a blank check. And they are "exceedingly great and precious promises." He signed the check. You need strength? He fills out in the check for strength. You need wisdom? God fills out the check for wisdom. Cash it in. You need peace? He's Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace. You need righteousness? He's Jehovah Tsidkenu. If you need a shepherd, He's Jehovah Rohi. Whatever you need, fill out the check for your need, God signs His name, you take it to the bank and there always are sufficient funds—power—to cover the check and to keep His promises. God's promises are sure, because He has the power to fulfill them.

Thirdly, in verse 4, we become "partakers of the divine nature." So we have His power, His promises and His divine nature. That means that the moment you are born again, you have the life of God in your soul. That's what a Christian is. God imparts to you His very life. That doesn't mean that you are god—we'll never become God; the finite can never become the infinite, and the human can never become divine. There is only one God who became a man, and that is Jesus; He left heaven, came through the womb of a virgin and took on humanity. We can't ever become divine. But we can have divine power, divine promises and partake of the divine nature. Christ imparts His nature to us, so we have a new capacity.

When you read the word "nature," it actually conveys that we have a new "ability" or capacity to live a life that pleases God. So He says that we have everything we need "for life and godliness."

But the question now is, "Are you growing? Or are you wasting your resources?" Philippians 2:12 is a great parallel to what we are going to cover in our text. In Philippians 2:12, Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." We read that and sometimes get a little confused. "Well, I thought we are saved by grace. How are we working out our salvation?"

Notice that Paul didn't say, "work for your salvation." You're not working for your salvation; you're working it out. So in your conversion, God works your salvation in. You work it out in your sanctification and your service. That's a lifelong process. What it means is to live out what God has implanted in your heart.

So Peter tells us how to have a growing faith. First of all, we have the divine resources, verses 3-4; and secondly, we have the recipe, verses 5-7. Peter says, "But also for this very reason..."—so beside the fact you have God's power, God's promises and God's divine nature—"...giving all diligence..."—or "work at it very hard"—"...add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,

to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.”

Notice verse 5 says, “But also.” In other words, in verse 3, you have God’s power or dunamis, you have God’s promises to draw on—checks that just need to be made out and cashed in the bank of heaven—and you have God’s new nature implanted in you. So you have this faith, but your faith needs to grow. And now Peter gives us the recipe or the ingredients for a growing faith.

I believe with all my heart that if you are a Christian, you can grow. There’s no need for you to stagnate, there is no need for you to backslide, there is no need for you to stumble or fall. You can have a growing faith. But you need to put these ingredients into operation for your faith to grow.

“Giving all diligence” means working very hard. Again, Philippians 3:13 says, “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” He agonizes and presses toward the prize of the call of God. So bring every effort to task. This speaks of haste, earnestness and determination. If I were to paraphrase verse 5, I would render it, “Now that you have real faith, make every effort to lavishly add to your faith.”

What do we add to our faith? Number one, “virtue.” Verse 5 says, “Add to your faith virtue.” The word “virtue” means “moral excellence” or “courage to do what is right.” It’s the courage and commitment to live a holy life in a hostile, unholy world.

Remember when Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were taken to Babylon? That was a very unholy place. It was a very wicked culture and society. They were in the king’s palace and were told what they were going to eat, but it violated God’s word to them. So the Bible says that Daniel “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.” So they got permission not to eat the food, and God blessed and prospered them.

Let me make a suggestion, as a believer. You should dare to be a Daniel. Dare to have a firm purpose. Dare to make it known. Don’t get sucked up in the ways of the world, in the philosophies of the world, in the currents of the world.

Do you know when the time is to get victory over sin? Before you’re tempted. If you’re young and not married, dating or courting or have a relationship, don’t wait until the heat of affections kick in in a temptation. Decide beforehand where you’re not going to go; this is the line we’re not going to cross. If you’re a married person, decide that you won’t look here, and you won’t look there. Decide you won’t go out to lunch with the secretary and you won’t flirt with this person. You are drawing a line and have decided to live holy. You’re not going to lie, or steal or cheat. You’re going to do what’s right; you’re going to live a holy life. So what you do is you make a commitment. You dare to have a purpose. You dare to commit, no matter where the world goes.

There’s a song that says,

"I have decided to follow Jesus...

Though none go with me, still I will follow."

So I'm taking up my cross, and I'm going to follow Him, even if it means that I'm going against the grain and against the tide of the culture around me. Don't be afraid to live a pure life in a polluted world.

Then secondly, verse 5, we need to add to our virtue "knowledge." So we start with faith, and we add virtue or moral courage and excellence. Then we add to our virtue knowledge. The word "knowledge" is the Greek word "epignosis." It's an interesting word. It has the idea of an overflowing, experiential knowledge. It is practical knowledge learned by observation and experience. You can't grow if you don't grow in your knowledge of God.

How do we get to know God? First, by being born again and having a relationship with God. By walking in the fear or respect of God. But primarily by the Word of God, the Scriptures. You need to remind yourself that God's Word is essential if you are going to grow as a Christian.

Whenever I meet a Christian who has plateaued, declining, backslidden, apathetic or complacent, I ask them if they are reading their Bible. "Well, I've been too busy." You can never be too busy to read God's Word. You need to take the time to open the book and to read about God in His Word. In the Bible, God reveals Himself. Do you know what the Bible is? It's many things, but one thing that excites me is that it is the self-disclosure of God. Theologians call it the "revelation" of God. God reveals Himself. God reveals Himself in nature, in our conscience, through prophets, through angels and through dreams, but the primary revelation of God is found in His Word, the Bible.

If there are any dreams, visions or revelations that contradict the Bible, they are unnecessary and wrong. If they agree with the Bible, then they are really unnecessary, because we already have the Bible to go by. So be a person devoted to the Bible. Get grounded in God's Word.

A.W. Tozer said, "An unknown God can neither be trusted nor served." So if you want to grow in your faith and serve the Lord, then you need to get to know God, in the Bible, as God has chosen there to reveal Himself. As you grow in wisdom and in discernment, we need to have a life founded in God's Word. You can't grow without it.

The third ingredient in this recipe for Christian growth is temperance or "self-control." Verse 6 says, "to knowledge self-control." It means self-restraint. It's to be demonstrated in every area of life. As Christians, we should not let anything have control over our mind, our emotions, our body or our will. Only the Lord and His Word should control us. It means that we get ahold of ourselves.

Now this does not convey that you pull yourself up by your bootstraps. It does not convey that you live the Christian life in your own energy and power. Remember verse 3: God has given you His power, His promises and His divine nature. But you do find, through the power of the

Spirit, where Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." "All things" here doesn't literally mean "all things." It means all things that God asks me to do in His Word. So it's actually talking about the commands that God gives me in His Word I am able to obey. Husbands are able to love their wives. Wives are able to submit to their husbands. Children are able to obey their parents. God gives you the strength to obey His Word. We can do what God tells us we should do. That's what basically Paul is saying here. You can have self-control.

Self-control is used by an athlete, who would change his diet and discipline his body to obtain a goal. I think of some athletes who watch their diets strictly, exercise their body and say "No" to the pleasures of this world in order to accomplish a purpose and a goal that they have. We do that through the power and energy of the Holy Spirit.

Chuck Swindoll said, "This temperance means saying 'No' to a second helping or saying 'No' to a second glance." I like that. It goes all the way from saying "No" to donuts to that second glance. Jesus said that if you look lustfully, you've committed adultery in your heart. All I have to do is see a sign that says "Donuts." I don't even have to smell them. It's like, "I bind you, Satan! Get behind me, Devil!"

Self-control means to get ahold of yourself. In 1 Corinthians 13, it is one of the fruits of true love.

If I am to grow in faith, the fourth ingredient, in verse 6, is patience or "perseverance." Just hearing that word makes me impatient. "To self-control perseverance." Self-control has to do with our pleasures of life while patience relates to the pressures and problems of life. So I learn to get ahold of myself and resist the sinful pleasures, and I also have patience. Another way to define patience here is "steadfast endurance." It's the ability to keep going when the going gets rough. It's the ability to keep putting one foot in front of the other, enduring.

That's a great point for a marriage relationship; you don't give up. It's always too soon to quit. You always keep putting one foot in front of another. Love is not a passing emotion; it's a continual devotion. It involves perseverance or a steadfast love. It's looking to God to keep you going in hard times.

That's the key: you look to God to keep you going through difficulties. You look to God, you trust in God, you hope in God, you rely upon God to be your strength to get through the hardships of life. That's how you grow as a Christian. Many Christians have made a shipwreck of their faith, because they haven't added these ingredients to their walk with God.

The number five ingredient is "godliness," verse 6. "To perseverance godliness." This speaks of true piety or devotion to God. It describes a person who loves God and brings God into every aspect and part of their life. What it means is that everything that happens to you—every thought you have, every experience, every pleasure you partake of—you bring God into it. You ask yourself, "What is God saying? What is God doing? What is God's will? What is God's purpose?"

Let me give you an example from the Old Testament. Joseph was rejected by his brothers, thrown into a pit, locked up in prison and forgotten, but he ends up sitting on the throne next to Pharaoh in the palace. When Joseph was taken to Egypt, he came under a great temptation. Her name was Mrs. Potiphar. She had eyes for Joseph and said, "Come lie with me." That's the subtle approach. Now Joseph could have said, "Where is God? Why is God letting all this happen to me?! I'm in a bad place; I'm in Egypt in a bad place, so I'm just going to reject God. I'm not going to obey God." Joseph didn't say that. He said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" That was the first thing that came to his mind. When she tempted Joseph, he said that was a sin against God. He had already resolved that he was going to live a holy life. That's the way to get victory over temptation.

Then a few months later Joseph's brothers were bowing before him. They had come to Egypt to get grain. As they kneeled before him, Joseph said to them, "You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good." Almost every time in the Bible when Joseph speaks, he mentions God. He is one of the most Christ-like people in the Bible. He brought God into everything—resisting temptation, resisting hatred and resisting unforgiveness.

Maybe there is someone who you refuse to forgive who has hurt you deeply. You'll never grow as a Christian until you release that and give it to God. So you bring godliness into your faith.

Here is the sixth ingredient to enable my faith to grow is "brotherly kindness." Verse 7, "to godliness brotherly kindness." In the Greek, this is the word "philadelphia." I was in Philadelphia just a few weeks ago; I spoke at a conference there and got to visit Independence Hall and see the sights. It's the City of Brotherly Love. Brotherly kindness means that as a Christian, if you're going to grow, you have to actually love the brethren.

I've met people who say, "I'm a Christian, but I don't like Christians. They're weird and creepy. I don't go to church, because I don't like Christians." Really? The Bible says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." If you don't like Christians, something's wrong with your Christianity.

I didn't say Christians are perfect. I didn't say you always want to hang out with them. But you love them. You have a "philadelphia" for them, a love of the believers one for another. In Romans 12:10, it says, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love." It's so important to love the family of God. Until you love other believers, you're never going to grow as a Christian.

Here's the seventh and last ingredient in the recipe. It's love. "To brotherly kindness love." The Greek word is "agapé" or "agape." It is God's love through you to everyone. It's the word used in John 3:16. "For God so loved..."—"agapéd"—"...the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

We only have one word for "love" in the English language. Have you ever noticed that? We use the same word for "I love donuts" as we do for "I love my wife." Obviously, I love my wife more

than I love donuts. I love my dog and I love my kids. Hopefully you love your kids more than you love your dog. I love my pickup truck. I love to go skateboarding. I love to be on the beach on a beautiful day. So we use the same word “love” for this broad spectrum.

But in the Greek, there are different words for “love.” There is love at different levels. There is the Greek word “storge,” which is family love. There is the Greek word “phileó,” which means a brotherly love. Then there is the Greek word “eros,” from which we get our word “erotic.” It means a sexual love. Sometimes someone will say, “I love you,” and what they are really saying is “I lust after you.” It’s not really love; it’s lust. And then there is the Greek word “agapé,” which is God’s love.

What sets agapé apart from all the other words for love is that it is giving, sacrificial, self-denying and has nothing but the object loved in view. This is the love you need to have in your heart for other people. When it goes from philadelphia, loving the brethren, to agapé, it means loving everyone, even your enemies. That’s hard.

You’re to love that neighbor who plays his music very loud at night, like the one by me last night. It always happens to me. I went to go to bed at 9:00. Saturday nights, preachers have to get to bed. Down below, the neighbor next to us is having a party in their back yard. I sang, “Love one another, for love is of God.” Bummer. It’s always Saturday night. Why do people party on Saturday nights? Preachers have to sleep! What’s the deal?! I felt like going over to them and saying, “Turn the music down! I have to preach on love tomorrow! Come hear my sermon at Revival tomorrow. God bless you.” I’m always tried in the area in which I’m preaching.

You know what the birthmark of a Christian is? Not a haircut. Not a bumper sticker. Not a cross around your neck. It’s love. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” And even for the unlovely. Jesus said, “Bless those who curse you....Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Don’t despise them. Love even your enemies. “He...sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” So we need to love God and “love your neighbor as yourself.”

This is a pretty heavy list of ingredients to make your faith grow. This recipe is pretty hard. But remember verses 3-4. You have God’s power. You have God’s promises. You have God’s divine nature. So there are no excuses. You need to add these things to your faith.

Now notice in verses 8-9 the reasons for growing our faith. Why should we grow? Peter said, “For if these things are yours and abound...”—these are the reasons and rationale for Christian growth in adding to your faith these things—“...you will be neither barren nor unfruitful...”—it’s a negative way of saying you’ll bear fruit—“...in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” So either you’re bearing fruit, or you’re blind. Either in your life you’re seeing clearly, or you cannot see far off.

So notice these three things. In verse 8, if you put these things actively in your life, you will be fruitful, you won't be barren. God wants you to be bringing forth fruit. In John 15:7, Jesus said, "If you abide in Me and My Word abides in you..."—as a branch abides in the vine—"...you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." Your life will bear fruit. It's the secret of abiding. So if you want your life to bear fruit, then you need to add these things to it.

Notice in verse 9, you won't be blind or "shortsighted." "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." There are a lot of Christians who don't see very clearly. They're blind to the reality that their sins have been forgiven.

That's the third point in verse 9: you forget God's forgiveness. As a Christian, we must stay at the Cross. That's our place of fellowship and power. We must understand that we've been forgiven, and we need to be forgiving of others.

So if you add these things to your life, you'll be fruitful, you won't be blind and shortsighted and you won't be forgetful that God has forgiven you. What Peter is basically saying is that you'll have blessed assurance. If you don't grow as a Christian, if you've just been saved—you have fire insurance, so you're not going to hell—and you aren't living for Christ, then you will lack assurance. The way to have assurance is to have a growing, vibrant, living Christian faith. It is a faith based on God's Word, it has to be growing and vibrant and alive. Without it, there is no assurance.

Now in verses 10-11, we see, fourthly, the results of a growing faith. So we have the resources to grow, we have the recipe in order to grow, we have the reasons we should grow and then we have the results of a growing faith. "Therefore..."—this is the wrap-up—"...brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things..."—the things we read about in verses 5-7—"...you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

I want you to see three things here. First of all, you have assurance, verse 10; "to make your call and election sure." Are you sure that you are a child of God? Are you sure that you're saved? You can be saved and know it. Secondly, if you have a growing faith, you'll have stability. "For if you do these things, you will never stumble." Peter fell, and he wants us not to stumble or fall. Thirdly, if you do these things, you'll have triumphant jubilation when you enter heaven, verse 11. "For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." I happen to believe that in verse 11, he is saying that you'll go to heaven triumphantly.

You ask, "Well, how else can you go to heaven?"

"Ashamed." Because you had a saved soul but a wasted life.

Have you ever stopped to think what it will be like to actually look at Jesus when you get to heaven? To actually see Him? Have you ever wondered what words you will hear from His

lips? Will they be, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? Or will they be, "I gave you a gift and opportunities. I gave you My Spirit. I gave you My Word. You wasted them"? The Bible indicates that there will be some Christians who will get to heaven, but they will just get there by the skin of their teeth; they will be saved but only by fire. All their works, all their rewards, will perish. All our service to God will be tested by fire, and if they are "wood, hay and stubble"—if they are selfish or they're not done in the Spirit, if they're not done to the glory of God, these works will be consumed.

We hear quite often the statement, "And only one life, and it will soon be past. And only what's done for Christ will last." When you come to the end of your life and ask, "What have I done? What have I accomplished? What have I done of any eternal value? How have I impacted others? How have I glorified God? Have I led anyone to Christ? Have I prayed for people? Do I share the Gospel? Do I serve the Lord? Do I give my time, talent and treasure to further His kingdom? Will I hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'? Or will I hang my head in shame?"

That sounds bizarre to some people to think that here's a preacher telling them that when you get to heaven, you might be ashamed. But it could happen. Because it's possible to never grow, never mature and never glorify God in your body, which belongs to Him.

God has given to you His power. God has given to you His promises. And God has given to you a new divine nature. What are you doing with all this?

Let's pray.