
Pursuit and Promise

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Spiritual growth is slow, steady work. There are seasons of intimacy and there are seasons of distance. At times it can feel sporadic, disorienting, and even disheartening. But if we could, for a moment, have God's point of view—if we could zoom way out on our spiritual journey—we would see that we are surely making progress toward the summit of spiritual maturity.

This is what the book of 2 Peter is about.

- **Chapter 1:** Spiritual growth and maturity and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus our Lord.
- **Chapter 2:** Being cautious and cunning when it comes to false teachers and false doctrine.
- **Chapter 3:** The assurance of Christ's return and our entrance into the eternal Kingdom.

For the next couple of months, we're going to lean more deeply into these ideas through a study of 2 Peter as we press onward and upward into spiritual maturity in Christ.

Peter's Introduction

2 Peter 1:1–11

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, 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 through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, 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. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful 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. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things 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.

In the introduction to his letter, Peter puts forth three profound ideas for the life of every follower of Jesus:

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE
CHANGE IS GRADUAL
CHANGE IS PROMISED

Change Is Possible

Questions—Would you like to change some aspect of your character or some quality about yourself? Have you ever said, believed, or heard, *People don't change?*

What these questions demonstrate is that we simultaneously carry a desire to change and a belief that it's not possible. This contradiction is one of the first things Peter addresses in his letter.

2 Peter 1:3–4

... as His **divine power** has given to us all things that **pertain** to life and godliness, 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 through these you may be **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

- The word “pertain” means “lead to.” In other words, through the divine power that we’ve already received in Christ, we’ve been given everything we need to grow in godliness and live a changed life.
- Consider the illustration of DNA. At conception, your genetic code is knit together, and your life becomes an outworking of that DNA. The same is true when you’ve trusted in Christ for salvation and received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: the very DNA of God is implanted in you and the rest of your life becomes an outworking of that DNA. That’s why Peter says that we’ve become partakers of the divine nature. The very nature of God has been implanted in us through the Holy Spirit.
- Peter both encourages and convicts us. To paraphrase him: *There is no wound or pain so deep in your life that it can’t be healed. There is no brokenness that is beyond repair. So, don’t tell me you don’t have what you need in order to live as you should. Don’t tell me you don’t have the power to change. You are a partaker of the divine nature of God. The very power of God lives in you.*

Romans 8:11

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

- Paul says it like this: *If the Spirit living in you raised Christ from the dead, what does the Spirit not have the power to do in your life?*

**Change is possible.
There’s no pain He can’t heal,
and there’s no person He can’t empower.
Change is possible.**

Change Is Gradual

Question—When you hear, “You already have everything you need to live a godly life,” do you feel some level of guilt that you’re not further along the path to spiritual maturity?

2 Peter 1:5–8

But also for this very reason, giving all **diligence**, 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. For if these things are yours and **abound**, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- The word “abound” means “increase in measure.”
- Peter tells us that spiritual growth doesn’t happen in an instant. It happens over the span of a lifetime of following Jesus. We have to be diligent about growing in virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Spiritual growth takes time. Change is gradual.

We live in a culture of instant gratification, but whenever the Bible talks about our spiritual journey, every metaphor represents really slow growth over a long period of time. Consider the following:

- **Jeremiah 17:7–8**

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green,

and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

- **Psalm 1: 1–3**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

- In Jeremiah and Psalms, the man who trusts in the Lord is compared to a tree. How do trees grow? SLOWLY.

- **Galatians 5: 22–23**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

- The outpourings of the Spirit are called fruit. How does fruit grow? SLOWLY.

- **1 Peter 2:2**

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

- Peter compares those new to the faith to infants, and he tells them to drink spiritual milk so that over time they have the nutrients they need to grow strong and healthy. How do people grow? SLOWLY.

Warning—Just because spiritual growth takes a long time does not mean we can lose patience, get lazy, or give up. Nor can we lower our expectations for ourselves. Peter exhorts us by saying: *You’ve escaped the corruption that is in the world, now make every effort to grow in godliness and be diligent about your spiritual growth!*

Eugene Peterson calls this “a long obedience in the same direction.”¹

Application—We fill our schedules with activities, and we tell everyone how busy we are because it makes us feel important, but we’re not focused on the long-term objective. In contrast, consider Jesus’ ministry. If you look at what Jesus did from day to day it can appear that not much was being accomplished. Yet, in just three years, Jesus

flipped the First Century world on its head,
brought the Roman Empire to its knees,
and changed the entire course of human history.

We have to focus on our purpose and our calling and become disciplined about our spiritual growth. With the help of the Holy Spirit we must develop “a long obedience in the same direction.”

Spiritual growth is gradual.

Impact is gradual.

Change is gradual.

Change Is Promised

2 Peter 1:10–11

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to **make your call and election sure**, for **if you do these things** 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.

- **Make your call and election sure:** Peter is *not* saying is that our works, deeds, or even spiritual growth and maturity earn us entrance into heaven.

- **James 2:18–20**

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and

¹ Peterson, Eugene H. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 1980.

I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

- James says, “You have faith? So what! The demons believe too. There’s nothing special about that. But you know what the demons don’t have? Outward evidence of belief.”
- In other words, your works prove that your faith is genuine.
- Peter takes that concept even deeper and says that character change and spiritual growth are proof of your calling and election. They’re proof of your salvation.
- Peter and James are both saying that a saved life is evidenced by a changed life.
- **If you do these things:** Peter is talking the things he listed in verses 5–8: 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.
- **An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom:** Peter tells us that when we finally reach our eternal reward, we will receive an extravagant “welcome home.”

**The ultimate reward for a growing, Christ-honoring life
is the personal welcome we will receive
from the King into His Kingdom:
“Well done, good and faithful servant!”**

1 John 3:2

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Conclusion

Our entrance into the Kingdom has been made possible not by our works or efforts. Our entrance is made possible solely by Christ’s work on our behalf. He laid everything down for us and invites us to lay everything down for Him.

Change is possible. Change is gradual. Change is promised.

Reflection—Is there an area of your heart into which you’ve been unwilling to allow God for fear of what He might ask you to change or what it might cost you? Is there something in your life that you don’t want to surrender to God? Is there something on Peter’s list (2 Peter 1:5–8) in the pursuit of which you believe God is asking you to cooperate with Him?

C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.²

Church, let’s celebrate the God who has given us everything we need to grow in maturity and is with us and for us every step of the way.

² Lewis, C S. *Mere Christianity*. N.p.: Geoffrey Bales Ltd., 1952.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is spiritual growth sometimes a disheartening journey? Reflect on God's faithfulness to you even in seasons of distance.
2. Why is change possible for followers of Jesus?
3. Describe what being "a partaker of the divine nature" means and how it changes your perspective on spiritual growth and your role in it.
4. Why is it so challenging to cultivate a "long obedience in the same direction"? How can you do this well?
5. Discuss: A saved life is evidenced by a changed life.
6. Reflect: Is there an area of your heart into which you've been unwilling to allow God for fear of what He might ask you to change or what it might cost you? Is there something in your life that you don't want to surrender to God? Is there something on Peter's list in the pursuit of which you believe God is asking you to cooperate with Him?

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