

Grow by Grace

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[0 : 0 0] Exodus 33 verse 18. Then the Lord said, There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back, but my face must not be seen.

The Lord said to Moses, Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning and then come up on Mount Sinai.

Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain. Not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.

So Moses chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning as the Lord had commanded him. And he carried the two stone tablets in his hand.

[1 : 3 2] Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. 2 Peter 1, 1-11. And in this letter we read, Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Through these he has given us very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

[3 : 0 3] For this very reason make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge and to knowledge self-control and to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness and to godliness mutual affection and to mutual affection love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore my brothers and sisters make every effort to confirm your calling and election.

For if you do these things you will never stumble and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Please do keep your bowels open although the verses will also be on the screen. One of my daughters was six years old as she came home from school very excited and she said, I can't wait to grow up because when I do I'm going to marry Dylan.

[4 : 23] Now I don't think Dylan was aware of this at all and of course now that my daughter has grown up she can't even remember who Dylan is. Young love, so fickle.

The point is, like lots of children when they're younger they're desperate to grow up, aren't they? Well Peter is desperate for his readers to grow up. Not physically, but spiritually.

And so by way of overview of the letter Peter is writing from prison soon to be executed. As we'll see next week, he doesn't have long to live and so he's desperate to help his readers grow while he does live.

Why? Well because it seems there have been some false teachers who have come amongst his readers and they deny Christ will return in the future. They say in chapter 3 for example, where is this coming, this second coming or advent?

Which is why I thought we'd look at 2 Peter. The second advent features heavily as we head towards the first advent and Christmas. But the point is they denied that Jesus would return.

[5 : 30] And if Jesus won't return to judge in the future and put the world right, then they say, it doesn't matter how you live in the present. And so in chapter 2 we'll see that they live very badly in the present.

Of course we know Jesus will return in the future and we'll see some evidence for it next week. And so it does matter how we live in the present as we'll see this week. But for Peter, the way to combat these false teachers is to exhort his readers to grow in their knowledge or their relationship with Jesus.

Because the more you grow as a Christian, the less likely you'll fall for these false teachers and your secure position. And we see this at the end of the letter, which I think are the key summary verses for the whole letter, where Peter writes right at the end, You see, the antidote to falling is not just verse 17 to guard, be on guard against the false teachers, that's chapter 2.

It's also verse 18 to grow, which is chapter 1. Because the more you grow at something, the less likely you'll fall from it.

The more you grow at a sport or exercise a muscle, the less likely that you'll fall into injury. Or the more you grow at your job, then the less likely you'll fail at it or be fired from it.

[7 : 14] Or the more you grow at playing an instrument, the less likely you'll fall from the music you can hit the wrong notes. You get the idea, right? That's why Peter is so desperate to see his readers and us grow as Christians so we won't fall for any false teachers and away from Christ.

And the way we're to grow in our knowledge or our relationship with Jesus is by God's grace. Grace is undeserved generosity. What God gives us generously even when we don't deserve it.

And so we're to use what God has graciously given us to grow, which is what our passage in chapter 1 is about today. Starting with God's grace through Jesus. So point 1, verse 1, Peter writes, Here Peter is all about Jesus.

In fact, he mentions Jesus three times in the first two verses. He's a servant of Jesus, an apostle of Jesus. What's more, he calls Jesus both God and Savior.

In verse 1, For Jesus is God the Son who saves us from the judgment our sins deserve, right? For at the cross, Jesus took our judgment in our place.

[8 : 37] That's what we remember during communion, his death for us. And by doing so, he enables us to have a right relationship with God and to be righteous in God's sight, if you like.

That's what he means when he says in verse 1, the righteousness of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Christ, the righteousness he gives us by his death and resurrection. Of course, this is God's grace towards us, isn't it?

We did not deserve Jesus to die for us, but God graciously gave him for us, didn't he? And Jesus graciously went to the cross for us that we might be made righteous in God's sight.

Of course, this is only for those who believe or have faith in Jesus, but he even gives us faith too. Notice in verse 1 how it says, through the righteousness of Jesus, we have all received a faith.

It's passive. We've not earned it. We've been given it. It's a undeserved gift, which means it's by grace too. Of course, it also means we need to keep praying for those who don't yet have this faith that God might enable them or give that to them as well.

[9 : 50] So do keep praying for your non-Christian friends and family that God would enable them to have faith. And if you're here today and not yet a Christian and just checking it out, we're very glad to have you.

But why not pray for God to help you have that faith? I mean, what have you got to lose? Because you've actually got lots to gain. For it's by this faith we are given life eternal.

That's what you got to gain. It's why Peter calls at the end of verse 1 this faith precious. It's precious because it's by faith we're given life eternal. And for us who already have faith, I wonder if we remember that.

That is a precious gift from God. I wonder when the last time you thanked God for your faith was. So I was thinking about it myself and I can't remember the last time. I just kind of take it for granted.

But it's a precious gift, isn't it? And what's more, our faith in Christ is of equal worth to ours, says Peter. It's equal worth to Peter, the leader of the apostles.

[10 : 52] There are no second class Christians in God's kingdom, you see. Despite what some sects or religions say, so the JW's, for example, they say it's only 144,000 people who go to heaven and they're like the first class Christians and the rest go to earth, like the second class Christians, economy class.

But God gives us a precious faith of equal worth, all by grace. And he gives us even more. Verse 2. Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge or relationship of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.

You see, through knowing God and Jesus, grace and peace are ours in abundance. We have loads more to be received. By the way, by knowledge here, Peter means more than just knowing about God and Jesus.

He means knowing personally. And we use the word knowing in both ways, don't we? For example, I know the movie star John Travolta, by which I mean I know about him.

But when our friends say, I know the movie star John Travolta, they know him personally. And even received a \$2,000 gift from him one time. Well, Peter will talk about growing in knowledge about Jesus later in verse 5 and 6.

[12 : 08] But here, he's talking about knowing them personally in relationship as a Christian. And this means we receive more than a \$2,000 gift. As I said, we receive life eternal.

And with it, an abundance, verse 2, loads more grace and peace. Such that in times of distress or sorrow, we always have access to more peace from God to bring us comfort.

And in times of need or hardship, we always have access to more grace from God, his undeserved generosity to help us, like giving us strength to persevere through difficult times.

Plus, he's given us everything else we need to live a godly life too, point two. So he says, verse 3, his divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

At the end of the verse, Peter reminds us that we've been called by God's glory and goodness, which is just another way of saying by God's gracious character. And that's why I had that first reading, because in the first reading, there are all kind of synonyms.

[13 : 23] You know, Moses says, show me your glory. And then God says, I'll show you my goodness. So they're kind of equal there. And he'll do it by proclaiming his name or character.

You know, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God. In other words, God's glory and goodness refer to God's gracious character. And it's by that character he has called us into his family, given us that precious faith.

And it's by that same character, verse 3, that he's powerfully and graciously given us everything else we need to live a godly life.

When I was younger, before I had to have two ACL reconstructions on both my knees, I used to play soccer with a church team. And when I paid my money and signed up for the comp, I was given a soccer shirt, soccer shorts, socks and chin pads even.

Even a soccer ball. The only thing I wasn't given were boots. I was given almost everything I needed to play the game. Well, when we sign up as Christians, when we believe in Jesus, God actually gives us everything we need to play as Christians.

[14 : 37] That is to live a godly life. And this everything includes things like access to God in prayer to help us in times of need so we can be godly.

It includes giving us our daily bread as we say in the Lord's Prayer so we won't be tempted to steal and be ungodly. It includes one another so we can care for and encourage each other to be godly.

It includes the Bible itself so we can know God's character and what it means to reflect it, to be godly. And it includes God's Spirit who works through our conscience convicting us of God's Word that we might live out His Word and be godly.

It even includes promises in His Word that help us to be godly. Verse 4. Through these, that is His character, His glory and goodness, He has given us very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.

That is, be godly, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. Peter says, we've escaped the corruption of the world. That is, we've escaped from being caught up in living its way.

[15 : 54] We are still impacted by the corruption in the world. We only have to turn on the news to see that or look at our lives. But we've been freed from being caught up in living that way and so we live God's loving way instead.

But what's more, God's gracious character, His glory and goodness have also given us great and precious promises. What are these promises? Well, there's lots in the Bible like, you know, God will never leave us nor forsake us.

But perhaps the one Peter particularly has in mind are those he mentions in chapter 3. I like chapter 3, verse 13 where he says, in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heavens and a new earth, the world to come where it'll be perfect, where righteousness dwells.

And he says, promises like that help us or move us to reflect God's loving character, to be godly. I may have told you this before, but I still feel very to remember a guy who suffered a severe cognitive impairment.

His name is Adam. He was in my Bible study group at another church and he seemed to enjoy it but he was a lot of work. We'd have supper at the beginning of the night. M&Ms; were his favourite but sometimes he'd grab a handful, lick them and decide, no, I don't want them anymore and put them back in the bowl that we were all using.

[17 : 16] Other times, he thought he wanted to go home and check on his parents and so he wanted to leave the unit they were meeting in which wasn't safe for him to do and so I had to kind of literally stand between him and the door.

The only problem was he was six foot, I am not and he could sometimes get violent so it was occasionally scary. Now, I only tried to care for him one night a week.

His parents cared for him every single day of the week and I remember hearing his mum speak to a few of us after church one time and a person asked, how do you keep going? How do you keep being patient and loving?

And she responded, knowing God's promise that one day in the new creation I'll see him with a perfect impairment-free body. That's how.

You see, the promise of a new heavens and earth helped her to keep going, helped her to keep loving and being patient. In other words, to keep being godly. That's just one example of how God's promises encourage us to live a godly life.

[18 : 21] At the point, God's gracious character has not only called us into relationship with him such that we know him personally, but his power and gracious character have given us everything we need to live a godly life more and more.

And so, says Peter, live it more and more. Point three, verse five. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge and to knowledge self-control and to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness and to godliness mutual affection and to mutual affection love.

Notice how in verse five Peter says, for this very reason. Yet because God's grace and power has given us everything we need to live a godly life, then the rest of verse five, make every effort to live it, to grow in it more and more.

Now, I need to say that these things in verses five to seven are not in chronological order as though we must first get goodness before we get knowledge and so on.

Otherwise, I'm pretty sure I would never make it to love right at the end. I wouldn't make it past the first two. Rather, it's more like the fruit of the spirit where we're to grow in all of these qualities at the same time.

[19 : 36] But notice, Peter says, we're to make every effort to grow in them and not some effort, not when I feel like it effort, but every effort.

And it does take effort because the Christian life is often like a tug-of-war. You know what a tug-of-war is? Where you kind of pull backwards and forwards or side to side.

I love it. I don't know if you can see, but I love it how the mother is laughing and having fun, but the father has this look of determination. Oh, we will win. So typical of us dads. But for us as Christians, it's a bit more like this.

Our sinful nature and Satan, the world, if you like, they seek to pull us away from Christ while God's spirit and word pull us towards Christ and being more like him.

Now, God's spirit and word are stronger and will win, which is why they have a bigger arrow. And so he should be moving more often towards Christ. It should be a slow upward trajectory like that towards Jesus.

[20 : 41] But the way God's spirit works is through God's word to us, convicting us and helping us make every effort. But why?

Why are we to make every effort to grow in godliness anyway? Well, first, because it will keep us from being unfruitful for Jesus and forgetful of Jesus. Verse 8.

He says, For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, notice the growth language, increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, as we grow in these things, it will protect us from being unproductive or unfruitful for Jesus. You see, no matter how old we are, we can still be fruitful or productive for Christ.

Sometimes we think we've got nothing to offer Jesus because of our life situation, but we can all pray for others, can't we? We can all still encourage one another, can't we?

[21 : 49] We can still be a good witness to others, send a Christmas card with a tract inside to non-Christians, for example. And we can still all take opportunities to speak about Jesus.

We can do all those things, no matter our life situation. But if we're not growing in love and self-control, but being pulled backwards to be unloving and lacking self-control, then will we be a good witness for Jesus?

We won't be, will we? Mahatma Gandhi once said, if it weren't for Christians, I'd be a Christian. Isn't that scathing?

In other words, if it wasn't for seeing so many Christians who are ineffective and unproductive for Jesus, putting him off Christianity, then he would have been a Christian because he quite liked Jesus himself.

But by growing in these things with God's gracious help, it will keep us from being like that. It will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive, unfruitful for Jesus.

[22 : 55] And what's more, it will keep us from being forgetful of Jesus, verse 9. But whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Here, Peter uses the metaphor of sight, and he says, if we're not making every effort to grow, we have an eyesight problem, which I can relate to. My eyes are actually worse over distances to the point where I was up at Shopping Town one day and I thought I saw my wife Michelle in the distance so I waved at her, but she came up behind me and said, who's that girl you're waving to?

And that's what Peter is talking about here. You see, if we don't make every effort to grow in these things, he's saying we're spiritually short-sighted. That is, we're blind to the distance and in the distance in front of us is not a boy or girl, but in the distance it's the cross of Christ behind us that we're blind to.

In other words, we forget that Christ has shed his blood to cleanse us from sin. As Peter puts it plainly, we've forgotten what he's done for us, the pain he endured for us.

In other words, his death for us ought to move us to make every effort to grow as Christians, to joyfully live for him. And so here are two reasons why it already matters how we live now in the present.

[24 : 27] First, so we're productive or fruitful for Jesus and second, because it shows we're not forgetful of Jesus and his blood that cleanses us. But there's two final reasons why it matters how we live in verse 10 and 11.

Verse 10, In verse 10, by making every effort to grow in these things, it shows we belong to Jesus.

It confirms our calling and election as his people, you see. You see, if we keep living the world's way, then it really shows we belong to the world, right?

But if we keep living Christ's way and growing in it more and more each day, then it shows we really do belong to him, that we really are one of his people. It confirms our calling and election that they're real.

And on the flip side, it keeps us from stumbling from Jesus. For like we saw at the start, the more we grow at something, the less likely we are to fall or fail from it or at it.

[25 : 44] And so here are two more reasons why it matters how we live. By making every effort to grow more and more, it will confirm we belong to Jesus and help us not to stumble from Jesus but receive that rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus.

And so do you see why Peter is so desperate for his readers, for us to grow as Christians? And we can because God's grace has given us everything we need to do it.

And so why don't we have a look at that list that we saw in verses 5 to 7 and ask yourself, is there an area that you could make every effort to grow in more this week? Perhaps it's a growing in self-control, you know, with your temper or patience or what you watch or how you speak.

Or perhaps it's growing in mutual affection that is brotherly and sisterly love because there's someone, you know, a fellow Christian who you find hard to love. Or perhaps it's growing in knowledge by joining a growth group so you can study the Bible more which means you get to know God more.

That's how we get to know God is through his word. Or perhaps it's growing in perseverance because, you know, your job or your family or your health, your life situation is, well, at the moment, not everything you hoped it would be.

[27 : 04] And so you need to grow in perseverance, persevering in faith, trusting that God is still good and at work for your good. Whatever it is, we're going to take a moment and I actually want you to pick two things and pray.

First, pick something from the list that God has already helped you to grow in, something that you're doing okay at and give thanks that God has helped you to grow in that area. And then second, do what I said before, pick one of those things that you think you could grow in more this week and then we're going to have a moment of quiet, a chance for you to thank God for the one thing and ask for God's gracious help to grow in the other thing and then I'll close.

So over to you. Well, let me close in prayer.

Gracious God, we thank you for your grace which gave your Son to make us right with you and gave us a precious faith in him. Thank you that you have also graciously given us everything we need to live a godly life as your people.

And so, please help us to live a life that's dependent on your grace using what you've given us to make every effort to grow as your people. Help us in this, we pray, so that we won't be unfruitful or forgetful nor stumble from you but show that we truly belong to you.

[28 : 28] And so, receive that rich welcome that awaits us all. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.