
“How to Be an Effective and Productive Christian”

2 Peter 1:5-11

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(2 Peter 1:5-11)

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸For 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. ⁹But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

When I was in junior high school, we all had to participate in physical education class, gym class. During the winter months, since we couldn't go outside, the activity was weight training or weightlifting. Here I was, this scrawny Asian kid, thinking he was all tough, because I hung around the tough crowd, but when I got into that weight room for the very first time, I had a rude awakening. The first exercise was the bench press. I don't remember the amount of weight that was on the bar, but I was so confident that I could lift it. I pushed the bar off the bench, lowered it to my chest, and there it lay. As hard as I tried, I was unable to lift that weight off my chest and back onto the bar. I was so embarrassed at how weak I was, that as soon as I got home, I asked my parents to buy me a weight set, so I could train in our basement and remove the terrible shame of being a weakling. Thankfully, my parents obliged and bought me those weights, which I still have in my basement today.

As soon as my parents bought me those weights, I was in my basement every day, trying to improve my strength. And boy did it go up. My strength just shot up. Every week I was putting more and more weight on the bar and I was getting stronger and stronger. But then I started to plateau. I kept doing the exercises, but I wasn't seeing as much improvement as I had seen before. My progress was beginning to taper. I was improving, but it required more effort and the gains were in smaller increments, until...I hit the juice. Just kidding.

Our spiritual growth often times mirrors that pattern. When we first become Christians, we see growth in practically every area of our lives. We're reading the Bible like crazy and praying constantly. We're keenly aware of our sins. Our relationship with Jesus is taking off like a rocket, but a year later, five years later, ten-twenty years later, the growth tapers. The changes in growth are less obvious, but they are occurring. More effort is required, but we are still pressing on.

This is what today's passage is addressing. It's speaking to us about spiritual growth, about being a Christian that's effective and productive, which is what we all want to be. So, let's take a closer look at what this passage has to say.

Verse 5 begins with the words, “for this very reason.” What reason is he talking about? For the answer we have to look back to what was said in verses 3-4, which we spoke about last week. It says,

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. ⁴ Through these he has given us his 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. **(2 Peter 1:3, 4)**

Jesus Christ has given us everything we need to live a godly life. And the result of this is that we participate in the divine nature and we escape the corruption in the world. For these reasons, or because this is the case, Peter says, “make every effort” to add to your faith the following list of virtues.

Now, we look at this list of virtues, let me briefly go through the meaning of the words and then we’ll say a few things that this list teaches us.

The word ‘faith’ means faithfulness or fidelity, which means loyalty to God. We speak of a faithful friend or a faithful spouse or a loyal employee. That’s what’s meant here:

‘Goodness’ means moral excellence. It’s a life that is praiseworthy because it’s a good life, a moral life.

Next is ‘knowledge’ which must refer to knowledge of Jesus Christ. It’s this knowledge that’s necessary to be saved. But we know that knowledge in the Bible is not merely knowing of facts, but it’s personal and relational.

‘Self-control’ is the opposite word to ‘desire’ or ‘indulgence.’ We all know what it’s like when we give into our desires or overly indulge in some pleasure, whether it’s food or sex. What we need is self-control. We cannot grow without self-control. We cannot be godly without it.

Next is ‘perseverance’ which means endurance. This also is an indispensable quality that’s found in every Christian. It’s the quality that allows us to endure trials and suffering and persecution, and come out of it, with our faith intact.

‘Godliness’ can also be translated as piety. It’s a word that describes a proper relationship to God. It’s a life that respects and honors and reveres God.

Then we have mutual affection, which is also translated as brotherly love. This is the love that members of a family would show. Love between siblings. Love between parents and children, but in the Christian context it becomes love amongst Christian brothers and sisters, as the church becomes our present and eternal family.

Then finally, from brotherly love, it concludes with agape love. This is the love that comes from God, and it encompasses everything we do. You remember Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, the well-known love chapter, where he says, that we can do the most incredible feats, but if we don’t do them with love, they are worthless and meaningless.

So, that’s the list. Now, what can we learn from them?

First, the order of the items in this list is not important, meaning that he's not building a tower, where you need the first layer to build the second layer and you need the second layer to build the third layer. It's more like making a cake. These are the essential ingredients you need to add to make a delicious cake.

Second, we can observe that there are qualities that have to do with morals and ethics like godliness and goodness. There are qualities that have to do with our character like faithfulness and self-control. And there are qualities that have to do with our Christian relationships like love. This observation helps us to see that our spiritual growth is multi-faceted. If I were to use the weightlifting illustration again, it's like doing exercises for every major muscle group in your body. Chest, abs, core, arms, back, shoulders, glutes, legs. In similar fashion, we need to be working on all of them.

Third, the Apostle Peter exhorts us to make every effort to grow in these virtues. Most of us know this, but it's important enough to be reminded over and over again. Peter is not teaching the way to become a Christian, that is you can become a Christian if you have all the ingredients on this list. Rather, he's telling us how we grow once we become Christians; how we grow throughout our lives as Christians. We grow only by putting in great effort. This is the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification is the process of a Christian growing in spiritual maturity, growing in Christ-likeness and sanctification, unlike justification, is a joint effort between the Christian and God. Justification is something that God does alone, by himself, in declaring us "not guilty" in his court room, but sanctification includes 100% our effort and 100% the work of God in our lives.

Let's look at a specific example like mutual affection, brotherly love. How do I make every effort to grow in brother love? First, I need to know what that means. Okay, it's love of the brethren, it's love for the family of Christ, it's love for people in my church. Next, like with everything else, I would then pray. That prayer may begin with a prayer of confession. I might say, "Lord, I have not been loving the people in my church that much. I have been too self-centered. Please forgive me. Now Lord, help me to love others. You yourself said we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Lord, that's radical and incredibly difficult. As natural and normal it is for me to love myself by feeding myself and caring for myself, help my love for others to be just as natural and normal and Lord, it says in your word that we are to do good to all people, but especially to those in the family of believers. Lord, what a great opportunity for me to grow in love, as our church's focus this year is that we love one another. So, help me Lord. Show me in real practical terms, how I can love."

And then the Friday email comes out, and after forgetting to read the past five emails, for some reason you happened to read this one, and it said. "Would you like to help a family in our church by cooking meals?" And then it clicks. I say to myself, "I can do that. I'm no Danny Moon, but I can cook a wicked spaghetti and meatballs." Then I sign up, cook the meal with all the love and skill I have, and deliver it to the family. Then I pray to God, "Thank you for giving me this opportunity to love this family in my church. Thank you for moving my heart to love them. Lord, I want to put in even more effort to grow in this area. Please provide me with even more opportunities." That's how we begin exerting ourselves to grow in these virtues.

Here's the **fourth** thing this list tells us. It tells us that salvation isn't just about getting to heaven. Yes, of course, when we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are promised a place in Christ's paradise. We are assured that when we die, we will be in heaven and not in hell, but that isn't the only thing we should be concerned about. Our being saved has implications for the here and now. We all know that upon becoming Christians, we don't immediately die and get beamed up to heaven. We know we have work to do here. We have work to do in us and we have work to do through us. Let me say that again. After we become Christians, we have work to do within us, in our minds, our character, our sin, our holiness and we have work to do through us, mission, evangelism, service, taking care of the poor and destitute. Or, as Andrew Davis says in his book, *The Infinite Journey*, we grow in our character (that's the inward part) and we grow in our action (that's the outward part). Is that how you're living your life? Is that the pattern you see in your life? Are you growing in character, in your heart and mind? Are you becoming more like Jesus? And at the same time are you growing in your service to Christ, carrying out the mission of Jesus, more and more? Pastor John MacArthur said something like this. Between becoming a Christian and dying, we do only one thing: sanctification. From the day we become Christians until the day we die, everything we do is sanctification. So, let's not incorrectly think that becoming a Christian is only about getting to heaven.

So, let me ask you. What kind of effort are you putting in? When I was playing competitive football in highschool, every summer we'd have to go through doubles and triples to get ready for the season. Doubles and triples mean double or triple practices every day. There would be a practice in the morning and then you'd go home and then you'd have to come back later in the day for another practice and then you'd have to hit the weight room, or do more drills out on the practice field. So, one of the things we had to do were sprints. We'd all line up and the coach would blow his whistle and we'd all sprint across the field, and I think we did that like 10 or 20 sprints in a row in like 30-degree heat. And every time we did these sprints, we'd hear the coach yelling, "Come on boys, stop dogging it." We weren't sure who he was talking about, but we all knew what he meant. He was saying, "Some of you are not trying. Some of you are coasting." Then sometimes, he'd call out your name. "Come on, Miller, stop dogging it! Come on, Yi, stop dogging it!"

So, are you dogging it? Are you coasting? Are you putting in the effort that the Lord requires? And what's the reason we should labor and strive in our sanctification? Because we are partakers in the divine nature. We are going to be like God, so let's start acting like God. Let's take on the character of God. And since our escape from worldly corruption is guaranteed, it makes no sense that we continue in that corruption, in that sin. Let's live like people who've been rescued and set free from sin, and not like we used to when we were enslaved to it. Friends, much sanctification does not occur in our lives because we are not putting in the effort. As God powerfully works within us, let us join him in that work.

What's the result of this growth in all these virtues? Look with me to verses 8-11:

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **(2 Peter 1:10)**

What is Peter getting at here, especially in verses 8-9? What does he mean when he says, “being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Remember that he’s speaking to Christians. “Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” in this case is saving knowledge. It’s knowledge of the gospel. Knowledge of Christ is effective and productive when it results in our salvation. Wouldn’t you agree? So, Peter is telling us that for those who are truly saved, for those to whom the knowledge of Christ is effective and productive, they are the people who increase in the possession of these virtues, in the growth of these virtues. Peter is defining the Christian as the one who makes the great effort to grow in faithfulness and godliness and perseverance and love and the rest. Or, another way to say it is like this: those God has justified, he also sanctifies. If justification is what happens in heaven, then sanctification is what occurs on earth.

In the same breath he says, if you are not growing in these virtues; if you are not maturing in Christ, then you have a severe case of spiritual blindness and spiritual memory loss. You have spiritual myopia and spiritual amnesia. You’ve lost perspective. And you’ve forgotten that you’ve been cleansed from your sins. Of all the things we should never forget, it’s this: that we’ve been cleansed from our sins. What was it that stood in the way of becoming a child of God, of entering heaven, of having peace? It was our sins. What was it that made us guilty and condemned in God’s courtroom? It was our sins. And what was it that washed our sins away? What was it that cleansed us from our sins? It was the blood of Christ. The Bible tells us that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. And what did Christ have to endure to cleanse our sins? He suffered, he was tortured, he was crucified on a roman cross. As awful and horrible as that physical pain was, he also endured divine judgment and wrath. At the cross, God the Father, turned away. He couldn’t even look upon his Son and all the guilt of sin that he carried upon himself. That separation was infinitely more horrible than even the physical pain.

Who was Jesus? Was he just another human? Was he a fellow sinner like you and me? No. He was the spotless lamb. He never spoke a bad word. He never thought a sinful thought. He never acted apart from the will of God. He was the only person to have ever lived a perfect life before God, in not doing the things he shouldn’t do and doing the things he was commanded to do. He was also God’s one and only Son, the most precious and most cherished of God. He was truly God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. And at the same time, he was fully and truly a human man. This perfect being, the God-man, the only person to have ever lived who didn’t deserve judgment, was judged and punished for us, so that our sins could be cleansed, so that a holy God would look at sinners like you and me, and accept us, and invite us to be his children. That’s what we’re forgetting, that’s what we’re not seeing, when we decide to stop growing. We’re forgetting the gospel and what it accomplished for us.

Finally, the Apostle Peter concludes with this. “Therefore, make every effort.” There’s that word again that he used in verse 5. Make every effort to add to your faith the following virtues. And now here, he concludes this section by returning back to the effort that we need to exert. Make every effort to confirm your calling and election. Paul would say it like this. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12b).”

James, the brother of Jesus would say it like this. “But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and *I will show you my faith by my works* (James 2:18).”

Friends, it is every Christian’s responsibility and duty to confirm our calling and election, that is, to make sure we are saved. How? By living the Christian life. We know a bird is a bird because it acts like a bird. It flies. And we know a fish is a fish because it acts like a fish. It swims. And we know a person is a Christian, because he or she acts like a Christian. They act like Christ. Is this true with each of you? Are you more like Jesus today than you were a year ago, five years ago?

Now, the result of this is unbelievable. Peter says that we will never stumble. What does that mean? It can’t mean, we will never sin. So, what then does it mean? When we read that statement along with what comes next, “and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom,” then it must mean that we will not fail to get to heaven. It means, that you won’t trip up right before the finish line and fail to finish. You won’t stumble. You’ll make it. God will ensure it, but look, also, at how Peter describes our outcome. “We will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Look at the language that he uses. I suppose he could have just said in much simpler terms, “you’ll enter heaven.” but instead he says, “a rich welcome”. The NASB says, an entrance that will be abundantly supplied to you.” It’ll be an extravagant, a wealthy, a generous entrance and to where will you go? Where will we end up? The eternal kingdom, not a temporal one, like on this earth, but an eternal kingdom and whose kingdom is it? It’s the kingdom of our Lord, the Lord of lords. It’s the kingdom of our Saviour, who shed his blood, the lamb who was slain, namely, Jesus Christ. That’s what’s in store for us who are saved, for those who prove their salvation by growing in Christian virtues.

Church, let’s kick COVID in the teeth. Let’s say ‘enough’ to spiritual lethargy. Let’s get back on track to growing in Christ, loving each other, and reaching our world.

Let’s pray.