

Grow by Grace

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, and we pray now that you would help us to understand it, to be encouraged and challenged by it, that we might continue to live for the Lord Jesus who died for us and was raised again.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Well, two years ago, our then six-year-old daughter came home from school.

I remember this very vividly, and she announced, I am going to marry Dylan. Now, I'm not sure who Dylan is, and I'm not even sure if Dylan knew about this, actually, but apparently that's what was going to happen.

I remember she was adamant about it. She was going to marry Dylan. Of course, the next day, Dylan didn't speak to her, and so she was no longer going to marry Dylan that day. Two years later, Dylan is never mentioned again, and now it's just going to be someone who will do what he's told.

Poor guy. But actually, she's more interested in becoming a teacher, presumably so she can tell kids what to do. But the point is, our daughter, number two one in particular, like a lot of children, is desperate to grow up.

[1 : 14] Well, Peter is also desperate for his readers to grow up, not in worldly maturity, but in spiritual maturity. Why? Well, so that they won't be carried away by error.

And at this point, I want us to turn to the last two verses of the letter. So if you've got your Bibles there, it'll be very helpful. Just turn over the page, the last two verses, the last paragraph there, chapter 3, verse 17 and 18.

I think these two verses summarize the whole letter. So he says, Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. You see, Peter is keen that his readers won't be carried away and fall from being Christian.

And the way to ensure that you're not carried away is by growing as a Christian. You see, the more you grow at something, the less likely you are to fall or fail at it.

[2 : 25] And so the more you grow at playing a sport or playing an instrument, the more you practice, well, the more you grow at it, the better you become and the less likely you are to fall or fail.

And so Peter is concerned that his readers grow. And we'll see this especially in chapter 1. And then in chapters 2 and 3, we'll see him warn them about these lawless men, these false teachers, so that they won't be carried away.

But notice the way he wants them to grow in chapter 3, those last two letters. The way he wants them to grow is in or by grace and in knowledge of Jesus.

Now, these ideas of grace and knowledge are also at the start of the letter. Grace and knowledge start the letter and they end the letter. It's kind of two bookends of 2 Peter. So let's turn back to the beginning and let's see it there.

So we're at point 1, verse 1. Just an aside, by the way.

[3 : 39] In verse 1, it contains one of the clearest references in the Bible to Jesus being God. Did you notice that? Our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Whereas in verse 2, Peter distinguishes between them.

That's just an aside. But it's verse 2 which uses those two key words of grace and knowledge, did you notice? And here Peter says that grace, that is God's generosity, God's gift which we don't deserve, God's undeserved generosity and peace come through our knowledge of God and of Jesus.

And now this word knowledge is more than just knowing about God and about Jesus. I mean, even the devil knows about God, doesn't he? Rather, it's also knowing them relationally and knowing God as our heavenly Father and knowing Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

In other words, knowledge of God refers to being a Christian. And it's through knowing God as a Christian that we are given grace and peace, he says.

That's the connection. I'm sure you're all familiar with the phrase, it's not what you know but who you know. Yeah. Well, it's the same here. It's through knowing God as our Father, Jesus as our Lord, that we receive grace and peace.

[4 : 57] But the interesting thing here is that Peter prays that this grace and peace might be yours in abundance or literally might be multiplied to you, the readers. Now, why does Peter pray that?

Well, presumably because he thinks they will continue to need God's grace and peace. Why? Well, to help them grow as Christians so they won't fall, you see.

That's what we saw at the end of the letter. Don't be carried away but grow in grace and knowledge. See, Peter knows that they will need God's gracious help to keep growing as Christians.

And in the very next verse, he reminds them of what God has already graciously given them. So we're at point 2, verse 3. He says, His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

And what has God graciously given us in verse 3? It's not rhetorical. Just call it out. Everything. Everything. Everything we need for life and godliness.

[6 : 07] Not everything we want, so boys, Ferraris are off the list. Everything we need for life and godliness. Eternal life and godliness. And everything includes access to God so that we can receive more grace to help us in our time of need, as Hebrews 4 puts it.

Peter says here that God has called us by his own glory and goodness, which is another way of saying his gracious character. He has called us to know him and through knowing him, he has given us everything we need for life and godliness.

I used to play soccer back when I was able to run without puffing. And I remember joining up one particular competition and when I paid my money, I was given everything I needed to play.

Shirt, shorts, socks, soccer ball. I even had access to shin pads and boots if I needed them. Everything I needed. When we sign up to become Christians, God gives us everything we need, not to play soccer, of course, but for life and godliness, including access to more grace when we need it.

Of course, to sign up for Christianity didn't cost us money, did it? Rather, the cost was the blood of Jesus, which he paid at the cross for us. And in doing so, Jesus paid for our sin so that we could be forgiven and given everything we need for new life and godliness.

[7 : 30] But what does everything include exactly? Well, I've already mentioned that he's given us continued access to God by prayer so that, as I said before, the way the writer to the Hebrews puts it, that we may find grace to help us in our time of need.

So that's part of everything. But it also includes our daily needs so that we won't be forced to be ungodly by stealing. It includes giving us one another so that we can care for and encourage one another to live godly lives.

It includes the Bible itself so that we can know God better, know how to live a godly life. And it includes the Holy Spirit who convicts us of the right thing and reminds us of God's truth from the Bible.

In fact, just the other night, last week, I was pretty tired and so was my wife, Michelle. So when I heard her starting to do the dishes, for a moment I thought, if I just keep quiet and let her do it.

But then these Bible verses started popping into my head. I was preparing for Philippians this morning and in Philippians it says, consider others better than yourselves. And then there's Ephesians 5, which says, husbands, lay down your lives for your wives.

[8 : 38] So I got up and asked if I could do it instead. You see, have you ever had those times when you've been convicted that you should do something for God or should not do something?

That's God's Spirit who is at work in you. And that's part of what God has graciously given us for life and godliness so that we can grow in our knowledge, in our relationship with Jesus.

But then Peter signals out something in particular that God has given us. And it's there in verse 4. He says, through these, that is his glory and goodness, his character, 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 its evil desires.

See, by God's character, he has given us promises, hasn't he? What are these promises? Well, in chapter 3, Peter gives us some examples.

For there he talks about the promise of Jesus' return and with that the promise of our new heavenly home. But God has given us other promises too, hasn't he?

[9 : 57] Do you remember this verse? See if you can finish it off. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that... That was beautiful.

That was beautiful. Yeah. And that's the promise, isn't it? So that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. That's one of God's promises.

And Peter says it's through these sorts of promises that we have escaped the corruption of the world. So through the promise, for example, about believing in Jesus, we have escaped the judgment for sin.

And now we can participate in the divine nature. Not that we become God and have the power over, I don't know, the weather and things like that. You know, we can zap our enemies and so on.

No, that's not what he's talking about. But rather to participate in the divine nature is to become like God in his character. To be faithful as God is faithful.

[10 : 57] To love as God loves and so on. In other words, these promises help us to grow in godliness. I can't remember if I've told you this story before or not.

I've mentioned it in the morning before and so I'm sorry if it's familiar to you. But it illustrates the point, I think, about promises helping us to be godly. And it's about a family from one of my old churches, a few churches ago.

So this was some years. And their son, in fact, they had twins and both of them suffered from severe autism. And this boy, he was in my Bible study group and he was hard work.

He was also very tall and very big. And sometimes during the Bible study, he'd have enough. Hopefully that was no reflection of my Bible study leading skills. But he'd want to leave and go to the door.

And I'm thinking, is he going to belt me if I don't let him out? And, you know, I didn't know how to handle him and how to love him. And it really felt for the parents who were trying to care for these two children of theirs.

[12 : 00] And I remember a conversation with his mum and a couple of others from the church. And someone asked her, how do you keep going? How do you keep being patient and loving? And she said, knowing God's promise that one day I'll see my son in heaven with a perfect autistic free body.

You see, the promise, this promise of heaven in particular, helped her to keep going. You see, helped her to keep loving and being patient, helped her to be godly.

And it's the same for us. The promise of Jesus' return in heaven helps us to keep going, to persevere. Other promises of God will help us in different areas of life to be godly. By grace, God has given us very great and precious promises to help us share in the divine nature, that is, to live godly lives instead of worldly ones, says Peter.

And since God has given us these promises, indeed, because he's given us everything we need for life and godliness, then, says Peter, grow in godliness. Point three, verse five.

For this very reason, he says, 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 brotherly kindness or mutual affection and to mutual affection love, he says.

[13 : 24] See, Peter says, verse five, make every effort to add to your faith, to grow. Not because our faith is somehow inadequate or deficient for eternal life.

No, no. If we believe in Jesus, if we have faith in Jesus, then we are Christians. As simple as that. So if you're here tonight and you're wondering how to become a Christian, how to receive eternal life, you believe in Jesus.

That's what you do. But once you do, says Peter, now that you are a Christian, then add these other qualities as well. In other words, grow as a Christian. Now, these qualities are not in chronological order as though we must first get goodness before we can end up with love.

Rather, it's at least like the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5. We are to grow in all of these qualities. But I do think Peter has deliberately chosen some of them because they are the very things that the false teachers lack.

Just turn to chapter 2 for a moment and you'll see what I mean. Chapter 2, verse 1. You don't have to turn anywhere. It's just the bottom of the page. Chapter 2, verse 1, he says, But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

[14 : 37] They'll introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful or uncontrolled ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping. You see, the false teachers, they lack knowledge and instead teach heresy.

Where to grow in knowledge, says Peter. Where to grow in self-control. But these false teachers, instead of having self-control, they live shameful or literally unrestrained ways. Peter says we're to grow in love, but these false teachers lack love because they are greedy and they exploit people.

You see, it's as though Peter is saying to his readers, You, my dear friends, make every effort to have these qualities that those false teachers lack. And not just have them a little bit, but even grow in them as well.

You see verse 8? Chapter 1, verse 8. He says, For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge, in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16 : 00] Peter says, Not only have these qualities, but grow in these qualities as well. And this makes sense, doesn't it?

I mean, when we become a Christian, we don't suddenly become completely self-controlled, do we? It's not an overnight thing. Suddenly, you know, we're non-Christian Thursday. Friday, we become a Christian.

That's it. We love perfectly. It's a process. You've got to work at it. You've got to make every effort to practice and to grow in these things. But if we don't grow, says Peter in verse 8, then we'll become ineffective and unproductive or literally unfruitful.

You see, for Peter, being a Christian isn't meant to be a static thing where we just kind of sit and plateau for the whole of our Christian life. No, no.

With God's help, Christians are meant to be growing and bearing fruit in our lives. We're meant to grow in our godliness. Of course, it does require effort, doesn't it?

[17 : 02] Effort to read our Bibles during the week. Effort to get to church at the end of a busy week and weekend so that we might encourage others to live godly lives. Effort to come to Bible study or the training nights that are coming up so that we might grow in our understanding of God.

It requires effort. I remember visiting a lady in hospital. It was a few years ago now. It was a Friday and she just had major surgery. But she said to me, I'm trying to recover quickly so I can get to church on Sunday.

She was 90 years old, had surgery on Friday. And then she added, I might not make it though, but I'll keep reading my Bible as best I can. And it just really struck me.

Here's this 90-year-old lady, just had surgery. She's in pain and yet she's making every effort still to keep growing as a Christian. Or take a family from morning church.

The mother has just given birth to their fourth child. Four days later, again they come to church because they want to keep growing as Christians. Was it easy for them? No.

[18 : 08] Not with four little kids and having just given birth. But they made the effort. But he says we're to make every effort to grow. Otherwise we'll be ineffective, unfruitful.

Christians who claim to know Jesus but who bear no evidence of it in our lives. And what's more, if we're not growing as Christians in godliness, then we've also forgotten what Jesus has done for us.

See verse 9? But if anyone does not have these qualities, they are nearsighted and blind and have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

You see, the person who isn't making every effort to grow is short-sighted, says Peter. I do suffer a bit from physical short-sightedness.

In fact, if I cover this eye, you're all blurry. And it means, you know, you can see what's close up, can't you? But you just can't see what's in the distance.

[19 : 11] Again, I can't remember what stories I've told or I haven't told, but I was, you know, I waved at my wife Michelle one day from a distance only to realise it was another girl. The worst part was Michelle saw me do it.

So I had to explain that it was just an innocent mistake. But for the person who claims to know Jesus with their mouths, yet shows no evidence of it in their lives, then they are spiritually short-sighted.

They don't look back far enough and see clearly enough what it cost Christ to forgive them. So they take his death for granted. And can I say, if you've hit a wall in your own Christian walk, then look back.

Consider again the cross of Christ, the depths of his love for you. See afresh the willingness of God the Son to come to earth to die for you.

That you might make every effort to grow. Not out of duty, but out of joyful thanks to him who gave his life for you. So Peter sums up the first part of his letter in verse 10 with the word therefore.

[20 : 28] Verse 10 he says, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, he's just been talking about, you will never fall and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Here, Peter wants them to demonstrate that they are genuine Christians. He wants them to confirm their calling by growing in godliness. If they grow, it will show they are genuine Christians.

And it will ensure that they won't fall, but instead receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ. Do you get a sense of how desperate Peter is for his readers to grow?

For us to grow? But remember, we're not alone in this journey. God's grace has given them and us everything we need to grow.

So, grow, he says. I'm going to finish up, but before I do, why not look at this list here in chapter 1 from verse 5 to 7.

[21 : 47] It's not a complete list. As I said, it's probably deliberately chosen to reflect what the false teachers lacked. But is there something in that list that God has already helped you to grow in? If so, then I want you to give thanks in a moment.

But perhaps there is something else that you could grow more in, then in a moment I want you to pray that God would graciously help you to grow in it. That we might together be effective and fruitful servants of Christ.

People who don't forget what Christ has done for us. So take a moment to look at that list. I'm going to pray for us, and during that prayer I'm going to pause and leave a time of silence. And in that time of silence, just pray to God quietly in your own mind, thanking Him for growth and praying that you might continue to grow in a particular quality.

So just take a moment and then I'll pray. Alright, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus.

We thank you that you have given us everything for eternal life and godliness, including and even your Son. Father, we thank you that you continue to help us to grow in godliness that we might be effective and fruitful servants for you.

[23 : 16] Father, we pray now for ourselves. Father, help us always to remember the death of Christ that brought us forgiveness.

forgiveness. And so in joyful thanks, make every effort to keep growing as your children. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.