

3 / Supplementing A Desire for Godliness

Adding the Pursuit of Virtue to Your Faith

Then said Evangelist, “Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.”

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run.

From *The Pilgrim’s Progress*¹

The beautiful passage in **2 Peter 1:3-4** sets up the context of the study we will embark on in this book. It is a journey that is so very important. These first verses describe his salvation provided for those who believe.

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. **2 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV)***

The gist of this passage is that God has granted, or bestowed, upon those who have believed in him “all things” that pertain to life and godliness. As a king bestows something upon a servant — Christ has, through his power, bestowed to us “all things.”

What are “all things”? He does not mean “all things” in the sense of everything in the world, but rather “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” He has given us everything we need for the journey of faith. This encompasses both salvation and the working of God in our lives. As the Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes on this verse;

Probably what is in view is the work of the Spirit of God in believers, providing them with gifts and enabling them to use these gifts.²

Specifically, what is listed here is a grouping of wonderful things,

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), 33.

² Edwin A. Blum, “[2 Peter](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 268.

- The knowledge of Jesus
- The call of Jesus to his own glory and excellence
- The granting of our participation in God's promises
- The privilege of becoming partakers of the divine nature / Holy Spirit
- The escape of the corruption of the world because of sinful desire / which is in us as well

All of these aspects Peter uses to describe God's salvation which is deep and wide and broad, beyond our understanding. In this listing of God's works on our behalf there are hints, however, that this is but the beginning of the journey God intends for his servants. Excellence doesn't happen overnight. Participation requires time and relationship; it is not accomplished overnight. The divine nature was provided for some point other than just being an heirloom that we show our friends. The escape of corruption spoken of is a lifelong pursuit, just as the "sinful desire" of man is not exercised overnight.

The Journey

Sadly, some Christians believe their faith journey is basically over after believing in Jesus Christ since they believe that they are righteous in God in his eyes. There *is* truth there, but that truth is incomplete.

The purpose of God's salvation is not **being declared righteous now** —looking forward to our **ultimate righteousness** later in heaven—and that only. The whole point of Jesus' salvation is this **plus** God's turning us little by little, day by day, from glory to glory into the image of His Son in the here and now.

Not: Justification + Glorification = **Salvation**

But: Justification + **Sanctification** + Glorification = Salvation

The journey of salvation—sanctification—represents the bulk of our time on earth as Christians, it should not be treated as an afterthought. It is our life purpose, or better yet, it is God's purpose in us.

There are many metaphors you could use to describe this, let's paint one.

*It is as if the Lord King of our country has **called** us to participate in a great journey, a fantastic sail across the ocean. To accomplish this he has given us a great sailing ship, a ship called **faith**, and a crew of **helpful hands** and sailing companions, and the **maps and charts** to guide us.*

The journey is not over at the installation service. It has not yet begun.

He has provided the major things we need for the journey, now he asks us to go to the storehouses and purchase the things that we personally need, at our own expense (God truly provides even the food we eat, but we work for funds to pay for it), to complete the journey.

The ship is sturdy enough, but we must also be prepared for such a journey and for each trial along the way. What is in question is not the sturdiness of the ship, but the sturdiness of the crew.

Supplementing our Faith

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue...
2 Peter 1:5a

Peter, after describing the salvation bestowed upon us through faith in the Son of God, **pushes us toward action.** And it is not half-hearted but rather nearly **desperate**, particularly considering the consequences of this pursuit (and the dire consequences of avoiding it) that are given just a few verses hence.³ The promises of success or declarations of potential failure in our faith ought to shake us a bit. Peter is not exaggerating.

*He implores **us** to make every effort to supplement our faith.*

The action is our own. It is something we must do. There remains plenty of verbiage in the New Testament instructing us in what God does in our justification and sanctification, but here, the action is ours. We must not avoid the action by shifting this responsibility to another.

We are to supplement! What does that mean?

The Greek word behind the English word supplement means “to provide at one’s own expense.” The idea here is that we have God’s salvation through faith freely given to us. On one level completed and done. And now, as saved ones, we are to add to it through our own pursuit (at our own expense) a number of qualities that supplement, or work with, our faith.

This listing gives us insights in how we are able grow in our faith, or how not to be stuck in the mud of inaction. This is significant. Do we just grow as Christians without action? Maybe. But what happens when we cooperate with that process?

³ See **2 Peter 1:8-9** / 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

We should take a minute to speak of this listing of qualities that is now described, let's look at in total;

...supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Notice that this is not just a list of qualities with no particular order; they are in succession, one allowing the other to spring into effect, a growing cascade. This is very important as we try to figure out the meanings and applications of this passage. The order of these things is intentional. One building on the next.

Notice as well, the ultimate goal of this cascade is **love**. Not simply affection, or friendship, but God's enduring and supernatural kind of love. A love that springs from God himself. A love best pictured in the work of Jesus for his people. We often think we understand love, but I'm not sure we do.

This push toward true love shows us that the goal of this whole enterprise is not for self-fulfillment or self-improvement, but we are to improve for our heavenly Father for very specific goals and reasons, all of which need to be self-less, humble, self-deprecating even — in favor of God's ways and not our own. Not out of selfish ambition, but for God, and through his ethic of humility and service.

Our first action of supplementing is supplementing **virtue** to our faith.

...With Virtue

This is the Greek word that is translated as “excellence” just a few verses before (see 2 Peter 1:3). It definitely has that idea.

Understanding its explicit meaning here is a bit difficult as how does “virtue” come before “knowledge.” Also, that concept of “moral excellence” is already expressed later on—and better and higher—in the passage by the term “**godliness**” which is more in line with what we think of as being excellent in behavior.

So this word **virtue** is to be understood to mean “uncommon character worthy of praise”⁴ and therefore not the presence of this, but the goal of this in our lives.

⁴ Arndt, William, et al. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed., University of Chicago Press, 2000. BDAG

We need to supplement our faith **first** with the **desire to be excellent and virtuous**, and as elsewhere, we learn that the praise we should desire is from God alone. When this pursuit becomes the pursuit of praise from men, it turns ugly and even evil; when God is the one we choose to please, it becomes fragrant.

This is the “ambition” for progress, not the selfish ambition of Philippians 2.

We need **to want to grow and become excellent** so our Heavenly Father might praise us. It is his “well done” we must desire, not the human and fleshly “atta boy.”

The direction of this desire for excellence and praise does matter.

The Pharisees desired praise and excellence and were devoted to the Word of God — and it turned into the pursuit of mere men worshipping their own understanding and devotion to the “word” but removing God himself from the mix.

Some Barriers

There are many barriers to these things that our present in the heart of men. First and foremost is the ugly demon **pride**. It is the greatest of vices, and it greatly gets in the way of God’s intended work. “I don’t need to grow and pursue more, I am sufficient as I am.” “I am already above my peers.” “If I admit I don’t know something, I will look less.”

Such attitudes will hinder our growth.

Be prepared to humble yourselves before each other. Be prepared to be wrong. Be prepared to apologize. Be prepared to consider others better than yourself.

There are many other types of barriers, possibly as many as there are people in the church; there is laziness, ignorance, apathy, distraction, and more.

You might want to ask yourself what your particular barriers are, barriers to desiring a better and stronger walk with God, and things that get in the way of a greater desire to pursue Him.

For the barrier of **pride** — dig deep in the well of Christ’s humility

For the barrier of **laziness** — come to Jesus because his burden is light

For the barrier of **apathy** — consider the Lord’s passion in the cross

For the barrier of **distraction** — seek first the kingdom, ask for his help

It’s hard for one person to change the heart of another. No, it’s not hard, it’s impossible. However, I believe we can encourage and implore each other, but

ultimately God has to do the work in our hearts, and we—on an individual level—need to respond.

If you are a believer and you have trusted Christ, the Holy Spirit who dwells in you can be the spark that start the engine of your heart and makes this sanctification process begin to hum. If there is no spark, perhaps there is no Spirit. Perhaps your heart is hard and needs to be softened.

Devotionally, please consider the following questions and ideas to engage virtue our lives. After this, consider doing the activity below as well.

May God bless our pursuit of him.

What might it Look Like?

The following are some of the word imagery that the New Testament writers use to describe their pursuit of the things of God, contextually after coming to faith in Christ, their journey is not over, thus they strive forward...

Seeking First / Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Hungering and Thirsting / Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Pressing On / Philippians 3:14, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Fighting / Struggling / 1 Timothy 6:12, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Run the Race / 1 Corinthians 9:24, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.”

Athletic Struggles / 1 Timothy 4:8, “for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

Straining Forward / Philippians 3:13, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...”

Holding On / Hebrews 6:18, “so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”

Thinking It Through, Devotionally...

Do you personally hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Or do you wrongly consider righteousness to be actually in your possession?

Matthew 5:6 / "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Matthew 6:33 / "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Psalms 107:9 / "For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things."

Do you recognize your shortcomings?

Or, do you wrongly consider that you have no sin? (1 John 1:9-10)

Romans 7:18 / For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Jeremiah 17:9 / The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Romans 8:8 / Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Do you have "divine discontent?"

A disappointment with your current condition, a longing for more?

Phil 2:13 / ...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Hebrews 11:16 / But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Is there a desire to "press on" and "pursue" God wholeheartedly?

Think of all the imagery with which God asks us to pursue Him... Pressing On / Seeking / Hungering and Thirsting / Fighting the good fight of the faith / Running the race / Spiritual training / Straining Forward / Holding On

Is this you? If not are you open to it? The flesh will not have any of this or make it about you and your pride / The Spirit will make it about knowing Christ and serving others.

A Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to desire what you desire, to seek your first and foremost, help us to die to ourselves, help us to surrender to your Spirit. Let our first and last thoughts be about you, help us to consider others better than ourselves and serve them too. Help us be excellent, not in the sight of men, but in your sight. Help us not be content with our status of growth but always striving forward for his sake, even at our own expense.

An Activity For You _____

You are not above this, you know!

Consider over a few days **one area of growth** that you need to pursue as a believer; perhaps it is an area in your life that you feel ignorant or uninformed in, or perhaps it is an area of sin that crops up over and over. Perhaps it is something that is getting in the way of you maturing as you ought.

Please consider doing this very hard thing! If you think you might struggle too much through it consider starting in an easier place.

One Area of Growth I Need Is...

State it plainly: _____

Admit the sin or ignorance to God: _____

Tell God of your desire to overcome it: _____

Put Your Goal in the form of a statement of excellence: _____

Be prepared for the next step, the step of adding **Knowledge** to Virtue!

In other words, adding **truth** to passion.

Here are some things you might be struggling with...

Taking the Seven Deadly Sins Into Account from Proverbs 6:16-19 as a starting point...

Pride (haughty eyes) / Anger
Lust / Envy / Gluttony / Sloth
Covetousness / Lying / Discord

An Example to Consider

I know a guy who struggles with sin, and I'll be in regular contact with him over the next few weeks, he will share with us some of his struggles and the process so you can see it in real-time.

We could pretend that this is not a problem, but what good would that do?

One Area of Growth I Need Is...

State it plainly: I struggle with forgiving people who have sinned against me

Admit the sin or ignorance to God: I know it's a sin to not forgive others as I have been forgiven, it requires of me confession and my deepest attention, not my sweeping of it under the rug.

Tell God of your desire to overcome it: I have no desire to hold on to grudges, as they hinder my relationship with God, my relationship with others, and, if I'm honest, my very relationship with myself.

Put Your Goal in the form of a statement of excellence: It is my desire to not be petty and vindictive in my relationships with others, even when they betray, lie, or mistreat me. There are proper steps to be taken in those times. But, I don't need to hold on to such things – I should be excellent and forgive others as Christ as forgiven me. Am I more important than Christ? Who do I think I am?

I am prepared for the next step, the step of **knowledge!**