

There is a significant need in our world for direction, for clear truth based on God's Word and real knowledge. Peter's second letter has one clear theme and that is "the knowledge of God." It is written to provide direction to all who may read it. Peter was aware that the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ would be challenged by some and discarded by many throughout the ages. He was aware that the church would need some answers for some big questions. Some of those include Christ's return to earth and the final judgment. In light of those kinds of questions he knew that the future of the Christian faith could not rest merely on the strength of the stories told by eyewitnesses who had walked and talked with Jesus Christ.

This letter is intended to help the readers really "know God." In 2 Peter 1-2 he writes an introduction:

*"I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. May God give you more and more grace and peace **as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.**"*

He will return to this phrase time and again in this letter. He wants us to know God and to increase our knowledge about Him so that we might live godly lives on this earth. For some that is not what they want to hear. For some there is comfortableness with sin and trying to live a dual life but the Bible truly never teaches that. God has given us the power to live a godly life on this earth.

Here are some questions to think about in light of the watered down approach to Christianity today. Can someone come to know God without knowledge of Jesus as God's Son? Can one know God and yet abandon the rigorous life that the apostles required of those who professed Christ? Can you know God and reject the notion that Jesus will return some day?

Even the apostle's creed says that He will return to "judge the living and the dead." He is coming back and 2 Peter will give us insights for living like Christ desires us to live.

Here is today's scripture:

By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of His glory and excellence, He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share His divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

⁸ *The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁹ *But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.*

¹⁰ *So, dear brothers and sisters work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away.* ¹¹ *Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* 2 Peter 1:3-11 NLT

Guilt and shame are very unwelcome and unwanted companions. Peter knew the pain of them both. After denying that he knew Jesus three times in a row the Bible says that he “went out and wept bitterly.” In those moments he never could have imagined reconnecting with Jesus in any kind of redemptive way. He felt regret and then remorse but more importantly he also was willing to repent.

Peter was redeemed from failure and because of the pain he felt he calls the church to avoid sin and pursue holiness and full surrender to God. He longs for us to finish well. It may sound a little grouchy but Peter as an old man near the end of his own life is encouraging us with the notion that God has given us every tool we need to finish well in our relationship with Him.

Let’s look at an outline of his opening words. I find them to be moving and motivating. They are encouraging and enlightening.

1. Affirmation/Assertion: God has given us precious promises

*By His divine power, God has given us **everything** we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence.* ⁴ *And because of His glory and excellence, He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that **enable** you to share His divine nature and **escape** the world’s corruption caused by human desires.* 2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT

The bottom line is simply this: God has given us everything we need! We have everything to live a godly life; we have been enabled to share His divine nature and to escape the corruption of the world! Two incredible truths need to be seen here. We do this by coming to know Him (v.3) and through His precious promises. (v.4)

From a Bible study perspective I want you to circle three words in this text.

Everything: God has given us everything we need to live a godly life.

Enabled: We have been enabled to share in God’s divine nature.

Escape: We have been empowered to escape the world’s corruption.

The heart of these promises are based on our ability to cultivate our experiential knowledge of God and a willingness to grasp His promises in a world that tempts us to grasp other things. J. I. Packer in his book, *Knowing God* writes:

“What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set for ourselves in life? To know God. What is ‘eternal life’ that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. *‘This is eternal life; that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent’* (John 17:3)”

Packer continues, “What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, more delight and contentment than anything else?” His answer to this question is provided by the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote, *“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me’”* Jer. 9:23-24, NIV. (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* [InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1973]).

It’s not about knowing about God it’s about knowing God. Is knowing God a priority in your life? Are you really in a relationship with God? Are you being conformed into the likeness of his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit?

The more we know Him the more we will willingly release the rule of our lives into the gracious hands and rule of Christ.

We have been given promises that enable us to be conformed to His image. True knowledge of God is always accompanied by a firm belief in God’s promises. You and I cannot claim a relationship with God while at the same time abandoning the words of the Bible. You and I will thrive in this life and finish well if we can hold onto these great and precious promises.

2. Application: God has given us a plan for our lives

It’s always good to have a plan. Having spent quite a few days in the hospital the last couple of weeks I can tell you that there is great effort and collaboration to meet patient’s needs. If you are building a house there are plans that are prepared and provided so that builders know what to do. If you are flying a plane or preparing a court case or fixing a car or planting a garden, you have to have a plan.

How much more importance should we place on the plan God has for our lives? I would say quite a bit as important as those other thing may be. Peter lays it all out for us. . .

⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

⁸ *The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁹ *But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.* 2 Peter 1:5-9 NLT

The first three verses from this section are commonly known as a list of virtues. The fact is, they are much more than that. On a list items are generally standalone but in this list each characteristic is connected to the one that follows. They are linked like a chain and the sequence matters.

Growth matters! Your faith must be living. True faith sweats and grows.

“In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith . . .”
Make every effort simply means keep it moving and growing. Let’s look at each one briefly:

Moral Excellence/Virtue: This simply means living a life worthy of praise. It is living an honorable life; one that will be applauded by God. It means doing the right thing regardless of outcome.

To our faith let us add virtue.

Knowledge: Here again is the word that is a key theme in this letter. The thought is that if you know the right thing you will do the right thing. Knowledge doesn’t always bring virtue, which is why Peter has them in this order. Peter wants us to know God.

“At an evening religious gathering a famous actor was invited to come forward and share something. He was seated by an elderly minister and he turned to him and asked him what he should do. The old man shoved his Bible over to him and said, “Read Psalm 23.” With expression, diction, beauty and all the accomplishments of his profession he eloquently and dramatically recited this famous Psalm. The guests vigorously clapped their hands and gave him a lengthy applause. He had done well. It was the masterly work of an actor and artist.”

When he was done he asked the pastor to come forward to say a few words on Psalm 23. He was a man of God, a spiritual giant, a man filled with the Spirit of God. Strange as it may seem he stood and recited the 23rd Psalm. When he had finished there was hardly a dry eye in the audience. All present had been melted to tears. There was no clapping of hands. There was no applauding. There was a death-like silence over the entire audience. The audience had been strangely and deeply moved. God had spoken through His Word by His servant. After a few moments the actor broke the silence with this comment: “I am familiar with the 23rd Psalm. The Pastor obviously knows the Shepherd.”

We should do everything we can to know God. Not know about Him but to truly know Him.

To our virtue let us add knowledge.

Self-control: If you have children you may have said something like this. “Listen to me. If you don’t learn to control yourself, who will?”

Peter is saying to those learning to follow Christ, “Control yourselves. Say no to ungodly passions. Grow up and get on your feet. Pick up your faith; do what is right; increase your knowledge of God; begin to control yourself.” Remember this God has already given us the ability and power and tools to get this done.

Patient endurance: As you grow in your faith be patient. Be steadfast. It’s a long journey and a long haul. Be loyal to God. Don’t try to live in two worlds. If you fall and sin and make a mistake fall with your face toward God and fall on His mercy. The idea is that you gain strength and learn not to fall with His power and grace on your side. Peter learned it early on in his life. He fell early on but managed to grow up and steadfastly follow Christ with patient endurance.

Godliness: Can you feel the tension rising? Most people don’t feel worthy or qualified to say they are godly but that has always been the normal standard of the Bible and of God. Remember what Peter said in his first letter. He wrote, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.” He went on to equate godliness to submission to authority; (1 Peter 2:13, 18), a willingness to embrace suffering and service. Godliness is simply living a submissive life to God and reflecting His nature as we go through the ebb and flow of life.

Brotherly affection: This is about loving others and being willing to restore those that drift or fall away into sin. Peter knew what that felt like and he felt the brotherly love of Jesus one day on the seashore when Christ restored his faith and his salvation. Sometimes people can hurt us when they walk away but Christians will love like brothers and sisters. Blood will be thicker than water.

Love: It should come as no surprise that the “chain” we have been building would come to end with the link of love. What did Jesus say the greatest commandment was? You can find it in Matthew 22:37-40:

“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Our faith must be a growing faith if we are ever to be useful to God on this earth. When all is said and done we must have people whose lives we have touched. (father)

⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins. 2 Peter 1:5-9 NLT

In the last days of the Civil War, the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, fell to the Union army. Abraham Lincoln insisted on visiting the city. Even though no one knew he was coming, slaves recognized him immediately and thronged around him. He had liberated them by the Emancipation Proclamation, and now Lincoln’s army had set them free. According to Admiral David Porter, an eyewitness, Lincoln spoke to the throng around him: "My poor friends, you are free—free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it ... Liberty is your birthright."

But Lincoln also warned them not to abuse their freedom. "Let the world see that you merit [your freedom]," Lincoln said, "Don't let your joy carry you into excesses. Learn the laws and obey them."

That is very much like the message Jesus gives to those whom He has liberated by His death and resurrection. Jesus gives us our true birthright—spiritual freedom. But that freedom isn't an excuse for disobedience; it forms the basis for learning and obeying God's laws. It gives us direction in action.

3. Appeal: Grasp the practice of being a Christian

¹⁰ So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. ¹¹ Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:10-11 NLT

What an incredible invitation! Can you see that the authentic Christian will do everything they can to be like Jesus? There will be no more of this fence sitting or having one foot in the world and the other in the church kind of living. You will let go of some things, you will be offended by some things in this world and you will cut them out of your life but it will be worth it. Do you see the promise of this scripture? "Do these things and you will never fall away." And on top of everything else someday God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Eugene Peterson in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* writes, "It is not difficult in our world to get a person interested in the message of the Gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier Christians called holiness."

I know you may find this surprising but I have been known to talk to the TV. I watch it a lot less than I ever have and I have little interest in so much of what is on it but I have been known to talk to it. (the news and sports)

Too many times people want glory just for themselves.

Sometimes football players score a touchdown and do a dance wanting everyone to applaud them and their greatness. Basketball players run around the court beating their chests and encouraging people to applaud them.

Sometimes baseball players hit a homerun and prance around the bases. They want the crowds to worship and adore them.

If we want to stay on the right road, we need to seek to glorify God with our lives.

I was looking at the full moon a while back. So full, so bright. Then I realized it is only bright because of the sun. In our lives, we need to reflect the light and glory of God in our lives.

10% of church members cannot be found.

20% of church members never attend church.

25% admit that they never pray.

35% admit that they do not read their Bibles.

40% admit that they never contribute to the church tithe or offering.

60% never give to missions.

70% never assume responsibility within the church.

85% never invite anyone to church.

95 % have never led anyone to Christ.

BUT! 100% expect to go to heaven.

Joe Orner