

## **THE RECOVERY OF LOST JOY - Part seven**

**Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.**

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### **A PLEA FOR DISCIPLINED LIVING**

**2 Peter 1:5-8 - "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. [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."**

The subject before us is still the recovery of lost joy - the loss of enthusiasm - joy - and power in your walk with Jesus. And I suppose after six messages we ought to be becoming aware of the variety of causes of this problem. The devil works with great skill and variety. He knows how to best trip us up.

Peter writes to people who are in the throws of great persecution. They have been feeling the heat of the battle. They are saved, but perhaps growing tired - perhaps having doubts or hesitation - perhaps just beginning to second guess their initial commitment of faith in Jesus.

Look at the middle of **verse 7**. Peter says something is needed to keep these people from becoming **"ineffective"** and **"unfruitful"** in their faith (or "barren" and "unfruitful" in the KJV).

That picture of fruitful vs. unfruitful is really insightful. Fruitfulness implies that the resources increase with the passing of time. The life you possess in Jesus is one that you hold and find **"increasing"**(8). It isn't depleted with the passing of time or the heaviness of the task.

That's the picture Peter paints of New Testament Christianity. Just as the harvest of wheat or oats or barley is always greater than the amount of seed put into the ground, the life and power of the gospel multiplies with use and increases with its influence in our hearts.

1) So what causes this **"unfruitfulness"** - this **depletion** of spiritual strength? Peter deals with two causes in these verses:

a) ***A misunderstanding of the nature of Christian faith***

Notice verse 5 - **"For this very reason, *make every effort to supplement your faith* with virtue, and virtue with knowledge...."**

Faith must be supplemented. It must be added to. It is not something that can stand long all by itself. While nothing can ever be added to **"the faith"** - the body of revealed Christian truth, we must constantly add to **our** faith in that revealed truth.

Even here confusion must be cleared away. When Peter says we must **"*supplement*"** our faith he doesn't mean we are ever justified by anything **other** than faith alone. He doesn't mean adding **works** to our faith in order to be saved.

What he **does** mean is this world in which we all live as Christians aggressively wars against our trust in Christ Jesus alone as our ultimate treasure and joy and security. It takes constant **effort** to put faith in Christ alone. There is nothing easy about this faith in this world.

Is it **easy** or is it **hard** to believe in Jesus? Well, in a sense, there's nothing easier in all the world. We're justified by **faith alone** without any addition of human work. All one has to do is come in trust to the Savior. But there are things that are **easy** in themselves that are very **difficult** due to our own inward spiritual condition.

Do you remember the story of Naaman, the captain of the king's army of the Syrians, in the Old Testament (**2 Kings 5**). He was a leper. And the prophet told him God would heal him if he would go and dip in the Jordan river seven times he would be healed. And he almost couldn't do it. His pride made such a simple solution seem beneath him.

There is something in the fallen heart that makes simple repentance and humility and trust in Jesus Christ alone a very difficult thing indeed. **That's** the battle of faith in this world. That's why we must always exercise and grow in it.

True, there are tremendous provisions - **2 Peter 1:3-4** - "**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, [4] 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.**"

Everything needed is provided. I don't achieve my standing by my works. ***But that doesn't mean I don't work!*** My trust ***is*** in Jesus. I do ***rest*** in His love and finished work on the cross.

But there's a view of faith that the whole New Testament argues against. And it has become a very common view of faith in much of the church today. It's what might be called the ***automatic view of faith***. It's the idea that faith is a ***one-time placing of trust***. It's the idea that from that point on the power of Jesus works ***automatically*** in my life. But it doesn't!

There may be dozens of people listening to me right now who are operating under a false understanding of the very basics of the Christian life. Many have come to believe that all I have to do is accept certain things to be true of myself and Jesus, say that I believe those things, and the rest of the Christian life will just sort of happen inside me.

Listen, the Christian life doesn't just ***happen to you***. You can't just decide for Jesus and have the rest of the Christian life just creep over you like a ***virus***. It doesn't just overtake your natural system.

In other words, many people suffer from spiritual weariness and depression because they expect faith to accomplish in their hearts what it was never designed to do in the first place. ***Faith is not self-sustaining***. It is not ***self-propagating***. Peter (and a host of other New Testament writers) says it needs to be ***"supplemented."***

But there's another related cause of spiritual weariness analyzed in these verses:

b) ***A lack of diligence and discipline***

The idea gets repeated in these verses a couple of times:

**2 Peter 1:5** - "For this very reason, *make every effort* to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge...."

**2 Peter 1:10** - "Therefore, brothers, *be all the more diligent* to make your calling and election sure, for *if you practice* these qualities you will never fall."

**Hebrews 11:6** - "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that *he rewards those who seek him*."

Every once in a while somebody will fall badly in the body of Christ. They'll become engaged in actions that leave everyone else gasping for breath - "How could they do something so hard-hearted? How does a person become that blind?"

And then they'll say something like this: "Look at the way they were raised! Look how long they've been in the church! How could this happen to them?"

But how they were **raised** - just their **bare environment** - has very little to do with how they will **maintain** their Christian walk. It may **influence** their coming to Christ. But how they **continue** in the faith is a product of **ongoing diligence**, not just **upbringing**.

In fact, people can fall **badly** when, because of their upbringing or history in church they **rely** on these things and become less **diligent** in their adding to their faith day by day.

Paul warned Timothy that in the last times "**perilous times**" would come upon the church. Somehow there has come a real shift in my understanding as I read those verses. I used to think of them as somehow meant in the future tense. But more and more, I think those times are here right now.

I think the context of Paul's words indicates the peril has nothing to do with **antichrist**, **Armageddon**, or the **mark of the beast**. The times are perilous because people, in mass, will love what pleases them ("pleasure") more than they love what's right and what's true and what God really says. The church will become **selective** in what it takes from the hand of God. Spiritual discipline will be replaced by the **buffet approach** to spiritual nourishment. People will pick and choose what they like. And if this church, or this TV program doesn't serve it just my way, I'll go somewhere else where I can get it just the way I like it.

It takes more diligence to live the Christian life now than ever before! It takes more discipline.

## 2) **WE ARE TO ADD CERTAIN DISCIPLINES TO OUR FAITH**

**2 Peter 1:5-7 - "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."**

- a) ***Virtue*** - Virtue defines an inward purity of heart. Peter takes great pains to underscore a truth that needs constant refreshing in our lives. To ***believe*** right and to ***do*** right are not the same thing. There is no ***moral power*** in mere orthodoxy. The true power of the Spirit and the Word are ***on the inside***. Without this, you will soon be barren and unfruitful.

Think this through. Peter is talking about the ongoing need to test and shake ourselves. He is pressing the truth into our souls the way chefs rub seasoning into a piece of meat before they roast it.

I spoke with a lady not long ago. You could see the hardness on her face as she spoke: "I know what I'm doing is wrong. But I just feel dead inside. I don't care. I just don't feel anything anymore."

Now, there is still hope for a person like that - **2 Peter 1:3** - **"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...."**

Notice that last phrase. Jesus has **"....called us to his own glory and excellence."** So He's uttered this marvelous call. And He's graced us with precious resources - **"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...."** So yes, there is hope for all indeed!

But divine help doesn't come the way the tooth fairy put a quarter under your pillow at night. No. Divine help comes to those who **"supplement their faith."** True, you can't **attain** standing with God based on your own works. You can't **rely** on your own virtue for salvation. But you still must **aim** for virtue or grace remains inactive on your behalf.

- b) **Knowledge** - The mind must **yield** to divine revelation. Discipline yourself to **expose your mind** regularly and frequently to God's Word. To have **knowledge** you must **know**.

Here is a precious promise - **Psalms 119:130** - **"The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."** Note that verb **"unfolding."** This is the careful process of handling the Word with care and precision. It's the opposite of throwing divine truth around. It's placing God's ideas in their proper place.



**Yield** to what God says in His Word. Embrace what God says. Cling to it above all else. This is what a renewed mind **does** and it's also how a renewed mind **happens**. I'm talking about being humble enough to acknowledge and repent when God says you're wrong.

- c) **Self-control** - Earlier in this chapter Peter tells us, very simply, why this world is in such a mess. But watch in this American election campaign - none of the politicians will even bring it up:

**2 Peter 1:4 - "....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."**

Our lusts - our sinful desires - cause every thing to go bad. They cause life to sour and turn stale. They're the fungus on our churches and homes and marriages and children.

What Peter is teaching is so basic to fruitfulness and joy in following Jesus. If you think you will find spiritual life just because you signed a decision card - or were raised in a Christian home - or are a member in a church - it will escape you. Peter says there's another part to the story.

In another era this could be left unsaid. It was assumed as basic understanding in the Christian life. There was a big subject in the Godly life called ***mortification***. It was a course in ***killing and denying sinful desires***. It was commonly understood that craving ***self-fulfillment*** was a sure path for spiritual ruin. But this doesn't play well in our era of inner light and self-esteem.

- d) ***Steadfastness*** - Any commitment you make in faith is going to be tried and tested. This isn't a game. The opposition to spiritual progress in your life isn't a big fluke or accident. And don't assume ***you're*** being assaulted more than everyone else. Satan loves to get us playing ***that*** game.

**1 Corinthians 15:57-58** - “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. [58]

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

I am struck with the way Paul calls these Christians to be “***steadfast***” and “***immovable***” (which seems to be the very same thing just repeated for emphasis). Yet he calls them to this right on the heels of assuring them of an absolute victory that is freely ***given*** to them - “But thanks be to God, **who gives us the victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ”(57).

And the only conceivable reason is Paul knows that there will be times - whole seasons - where it won't **look** like they've been given the victory, and it won't **feel** like they've received the victory. So he says they must be ready to push into this victory in Christ. It's **free** but much **resisted** in this fallen world. We are called to **lean into it**.

- e) **Godliness** - A big part of supplementing your faith is learning to see all of life related to God himself. Life is **visible** and God is **invisible**. So this is not as natural to us as it should be. But without care in this area I will tend to just see what I'm doing as either **good** or **bad**, but only in the sense of **morality** rather than pleasing or displeasing a **Heavenly Father** who has redeemed me in Jesus Christ.

This is the whole concept behind Paul's famous words, "**So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God**"(1 Corinthians 10:31). This is not about saying grace before meals or not be too gluttonous. Paul is calling us to paint the motive behind all the things we aspire to and commit to doing. **God** is behind it in a conscious way.

And, just like Paul, Peter calls us to keep God at the center of every pursuit - every thought - every deed. My actions are always considered **relationally to Him**. He's the one first grieved in every failure. He's the one to whom ultimate accountability must one day be given. He's the one who urges me on in faithfulness.

The very essence of spirituality is being aware of how everything else tends to squeeze itself into the center of our hearts. It's refusing to allow the world to make you merely moral or religious instead of Godly. This quality of Godliness is what Paul was calling to mind when he said, ***"In Him we live and move and have our being."***

- f) ***Brotherly affection and love*** - One of the greatest enemies to the life of faith is relationships with others that go sour. Bad theology doesn't wound as many Christians as bitterness, ill-will, resentment, anger etc.

You will go a long way to supplementing your faith if you ***regulate your attitudes and actions toward others.***

**Ephesians 4:30-32** - "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [32] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

I've often thought about exactly what we are to be remembering as we come to the Lord's Table. It's not just a matter of reliving the cross experience - how much physical pain was involved, how much blood was shed, etc. Other people have experienced that kind of execution.

I think, rather, that my memory banks are to be used this way:  
The Lord begins to speak to my heart - "You really need to forgive, so and so - in fact, you should go and apologize."

"Apologize! But it was mostly his fault!"

"Your sin was **all** your fault, and I forgave you." That's what Paul meant when he wrote about having the kind of heart toward others that Christ had toward us.

3) **WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS WHOLE PROCESS OF DILIGENCE MAKE?**

**2 Peter 1:8-9 - "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."**

When people get lazy in supplementing their faith they are like an almost blind person without his glasses. They can't function with the realities of their world because they can't see anything important as it really is. They have no way of correctly relating all the pieces of their world to a cohesive, accurate whole image.

Remember, you will not ***automatically*** give due consideration to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the reality of eternal destinies, the wonderful delight of present grace and mercy, or even the emptiness of present desires and temptations - you won't ***interact*** meaningfully with these realities coasting on some conversion experience in your distant past. You'll grow weary without the constant, Spirit-enabled exercising of diligence in your walk of faith.