

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Let's imagine that your dream, your passion, is to be a farmer. Now you know I have great respect for farmers and ranchers—I think they are amazing people! And let's imagine that that is your passion. Only one problem...you have nothing you need to be a farmer. So, I show up and because I so respect that calling, I'm going to be your benefactor—I'm going to make it happen. I buy you land; I build you a house; I build you barns; I buy you machinery, fertilizer, seed, irrigation— everything you need to be a farmer, I'll take care of it. There's only one thing you need to do. What is that? Farm! I'm not going to do that for you. Peter says that God has given us everything that we need, to live out this life that our soul longs for in Christ. He has given you everything you need. Just one thing we need to do. What is that? To live like it! What does that mean? I'm so glad you asked because we're going to talk about that. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 1. We learned the Gospel Truth in verses 1-4 of Chapter 1, which reminded us that as a gift of His grace and mercy, He has given us everything that we need. We have become partakers of the divine nature. We're the recipients of these precious and magnificent promises. We have been set free from the bondage to sin and from the corruption and disappointments of this world. And that gives way to Verse 5:

Now for this very reason... (What reason? Because the Gospel truth is true) for this very reason also, applying all diligence, (which is a reminder this doesn't happen automatically. Just because you trust Christ as Savior doesn't mean you wake up one morning and everything is different. You have to apply all diligence. You have to work hard to do your part to bring this to pass.) ...applying all diligence in your faith supply moral excellence,

So, faith is what we were given, and then it goes on to list seven, what the NASB calls qualities or virtues that basically create a bit of a checklist in order to assess where I'm at in this journey. So, there is a lot of debate as to whether these are seven random things in a checklist, whether they're like links in a chain, or whether they're like stairsteps. I think the most likely is that they're like stairsteps. That's the way the text is written. I think that makes the most sense. What's important to understand about that is one leads into another. So essentially, we're all going to probably get stuck somewhere for some reason, and it's helpful to assess where am I stuck, why am I stuck there, and what is necessary to keep moving forward...to take the next step?

The other thing that is worth noting in Verse 5 is the word supply. First of all, that's an imperative; it's a command. There is no question that Peter has told us God has done everything

necessary, but we're commanded to take these necessary steps in order to live it out, in order to experience this life in Christ that our soul desires. So, it's critical that we understand there's no magic in this. You don't just wake up one morning and all of it is true in the sense of being lived out. You have to have this partnership where He's done His part, but now it's necessary for us to do our part. The word supply there is also a really interesting Greek word. It's the word from which we get our word chorus. Basically, the roots of this word were used to describe—for example—when a play would come to town in the first century Greek world, basically all they brought were the actors and the play. But in order to really bring this play to life, in order to make it special, a benefactor would have to step up, and that benefactor would provide the resources for the music, for the costumes, for the pageantry, for everything that would bring this play to life and make it special. That's this word supply; that's the root of it. So essentially God has given us everything necessary to live this life, but now we have to diligently do our part—to bring the music and the costumes and the color and the pageantry—to bring this to life, for it's something more than merely a ticket to Heaven, but actually it's that life that our soul longs for. So that's a good way to think of the list that follows.

So, the first one is moral excellence. Excellence is the same word that was used to describe Jesus in Verse 3. Essentially the Greek philosophers saw this word as a word that they would translate as virtue, and virtuous meant to live in a way that was consistent with your nature. So, it really applied to anything. For example, if you planted a corn seed in the ground and corn grows, they would define that as virtuous because the corn is consistent with the nature of that seed. You plant a flower seed. Then a flower grows, and that would be considered virtuous because a flower is consistent with the seed—the essence or the nature of the seed. So, the idea then is Jesus is righteous and that's because of His essence—that's who He is. Out of Him flows righteousness because His very essence is righteous. So, the beginning step is really an understanding of who we are as the people of God, who we are as the children of God—that we're God's own possession, we're partakers of the divine nature. We have been set free from the corruption of the world; we're recipients of these precious and magnificent promises. So, all of that is at our core and there should be a longing to pursue and understand what that means and to live that way.

Here's the reality: If that isn't a longing or a passion, you're stuck right there. Nothing of significance is going to happen in terms of living out this Christian life if there isn't something deep within you that wants that. I can buy you the land and the tractors and the barns and everything necessary for you to be a successful farmer. But if your passion is to be a middle-school math teacher, if you don't even like to be outdoors, it's not going to work. There has to be something within you—a fire within you that says, “That is my longing; that's my passion, and I'm going to do what's necessary to make this happen.” So that is like step one—a really good place to start the assessment. Is that really what's in you? Is that the fire that burns in you and is that really how you live your life? Or is this just kind of something on the side that, you know, you visit God every now and then and it's really not much more to you than that. So, step one has to be kind of this core virtue—this longing, this desire—because it's not an easy road. If you're going to travel this road, it has to matter to you.

...from moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; (Ch.1 Vs. 5b)

Knowledge is a critical term in 2 Peter. He uses it eleven times in three short chapters. Knowledge is information, but it's not merely information. It's not like you're accumulating information in order to take a quiz. It has much more to do with this information, this truth that then is assimilated into life in order to experience this life in Christ. It's the difference between being an Ag student at college and processing the information because there's a test coming, and actually being a farmer and trying to farm and trying to figure this out and accumulate the knowledge to go out and apply it and make it happen—to fulfill your dream!

Most of these terms have direct relevance to the false teachers that Peter is concerned about. They come in and they proclaim lies—they deceive. There are religious lies or secular worldly lies. Every day we are bombarded by hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of lies. In order to travel this path, we must know the truth. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” There's no way anyone is ever going to be able to keep up with the lies. The only hope you have is if you clearly understand the truth. The truth exposes the lies, and you live accordingly. A lot of Christians are disappointed and stuck in their Christian life because they have believed a long list of lies—religious lies, secular lies—lies that have basically stuck their Christian life there. Until you actually know the truth of who you are in Christ—what is true of you, what God has said—you're never really going to progress from there. So, first is this desire—this longing. Second is: you have to really understand what is true.

...and in your knowledge, self-control (Vs. 6a)

Self-control, discipline. So, you want to be a farmer. I give you everything you need to be a farmer. This is your passion. You learn what you need to learn, but now you have to discipline yourself to do the work. This isn't going to work if you sleep until 10:00 every morning. It isn't going to work if you spend everyday fishing. It isn't going to work if you don't apply that knowledge, and discipline yourself to operate accordingly. If we're going to live this life, there has to be self-discipline, self-control. As we will learn, the false teachers were encouraging people to indulge the flesh. They were making a distinction that there's a spiritual life and then there's your fleshly life and the two are irrelevant. So, you can have God and still live it up. But as the people listened and indulged the flesh, they got themselves more and more in the mud...more and more in despair and discouragement and bondage...and that's where their Christian life stuck. They're going nowhere. I think we understand everything in life that is meaningful requires self-discipline. Whether it's about my marriage working, about running my business, about friendships and relationships, about physical health, about managing my money—anything of significance requires self-control or you're simply not going to be successful. If you're indulging the flesh, if there are places where you're involved in things that you know are disappointing or offensive to God, you're not going anywhere. You're stuck and you're going to be stuck unless you deal with that. You must be indulging the flesh because you believed a lie. You believed a lie because you don't really know the truth. So that's kind of how the steps continue to work to move us forward.

...and in your self-control, perseverance (Vs. 6b)

Perseverance just means hard work. Some translations have the word patience. Patience is way too passive. This isn't talking about patience. Patience is like sitting on a rock and waiting it out. This is more like hiking to the top of the mountain. The level of commitment and perseverance that's necessary to work hard and to fight the battles and to do what is necessary to ultimately get there. We talked about this in 1 Peter—that we don't want to be those who sit in the bleachers and watch the battle. We don't want to be those that are content to just wear the uniform but never get on the field. We want to be those that are on the field, that are in the battle, in the struggle, that are bruised and bloody, but at the end of the story we'll know that we had a significant part of that which will matter forever. That's this idea of perseverance—that this matters to me so I learn the truth; I discipline myself. This is going to be hard. We're going against the current. We're going against the values of the culture. There are a lot of things I have to say, "No," to in order to say, "Yes," to the best things. If I'm not willing to do that, then I'm just stuck there. There are a lot of Christians that are very dissatisfied with their Christian lives, but the truth is there is no real sense of perseverance. They just think, "I want to go to bed some night, wake up in the morning, and everything should be wonderful." That's like the farmer thinking, "I really don't want to work very hard. You know I want to sleep in until 10:00; I want to fish every day. I don't really want to worry about weeds and all that stuff, but I want to get to the fall, and I want to have a bumper crop. I want to go to bed one night and in the morning all of the crop is there, and mission accomplished!" But the reality is, "It just doesn't work that way. It's a lot of hard work!" You have to ask yourself, "Is that true of me? Am I willing to persevere? Am I willing to fight the battle? Am I willing to get in there and challenge the culture and live this life that is contrary to the flow of the culture...but is what my soul longs for?"

...and in your perseverance, godliness; (Vs. 6c)

Godliness is one of those terms that often sounds really abstract like, "I don't even know what that means. Is it like a look on my face or what is it?" The best way to understand godliness is simply experiencing Jesus as a way of life—in every area of my life. There is no secular/sacred division. The Christian life is not that I visit God on Sunday and then do my own thing six days a week. It's not that I have a public life and a secret, private life. It's not that there is a secular part of me and a sacred part of me. It is a way of life! Jesus penetrates every area of my life. One of the unique things about being a farmer is it's not really a job. It's not a 9:00 to 5:00; you don't punch in and punch out. It is a way of life. If you don't want that, if you can't settle into that, you're never going to make it as a farmer. It's even unique in the sense that the farmhouse sits on the farm. Most of us, when we're done with work, we go home. Think how different that is for a farmer. It's right there; home is right in the middle of the farm because it's a way of life. That's godliness. It's something that's a part of every area of my life. If you have parts of your life that are disconnected from your Christian faith—little private secrets and things—and you kind of have your business way and you have your Jesus way, this is never going to work for you. You have to think about working your way backwards. Why isn't this making sense? Do I lack the perseverance? Do I lack the self-control? Do I lack an understanding of what's true? Do I just not even want this? So, you kind of process through the steps and figure out why that is.

Cara: All right. This message is amazing. You talked about working hard to do your part for the Kingdom. Now, just to be extra clear, for our listeners, this isn't about working hard for your salvation. This is about working to carry out the work God has planned for each one of us.

Bryan: Right. So, the language is do your part in the Kingdom. So that means you're already in the Kingdom. It's not the basis of salvation, but we're back to James that we studied before. And that is a faith that saves is a faith that works. So, we're now actively engaged in what God has called us to and really to be part of something that will still matter a thousand, hundred thousand years from now.

Arnie: And Bryan, our research that we've done here at Back to the Bible really shows that if people who call themselves Christians don't take their role seriously, that their lives look identical to someone who doesn't profess the name of Christ. So, it's like you're saying, there has to be a diligence in following Jesus.

Bryan: Absolutely. So, there's God's part and there's my part, so I don't contribute to the salvation. But if I want to experience the life, the abundant life that Jesus promised, then there is my part in understanding and believing, living that out. So just the idea of commands implies I have a choice to obey or disobey. It's not automatic, but to really experience the life my soul longs for, I have to understand this isn't just a ticket to Heaven. It's far more comprehensive, far more fulfilling than that.

Cara: You want a farm story? Go for it. I don't have one. I mean, I was just going to say when you're, oh, I totally relate. I mean, I think with farming there's no days off. So you know Well, I really related to this message because I grew up on a farm, and how it compares to the Christian life, because I'm sure Arnie, who has horses and he has a thing going on out at his place, can attest to this. It's not that at all. [It's a lifestyle.] It's a lifestyle.

Arnie: Yeah. You don't just do that from eight to five and then. It's seven days a week, 24/7.

Cara: Everything about the farm life is unpredictable and there's reward in that, great reward, but you're out there in hail storms and you're pulling calves out of the mud and calving season one day doesn't look like the next day. And you might have a couple of days where, you know, it's snowing, but the cows always have to be fed. You always have to be feeding yourself spiritually and you're depending on it to feed yourself and your children and still take enough to, you know, you're putting it out there for other people. I mean it's so much of the Christian life.

Bryan: It is and it's such a common metaphor in the New Testament for the Christian life. It's one we can identify with here in the Midwest. I mean I love farmers and cowboys. They're clear at the top of my list of people I admire, but it isn't eight to five. It's a way of life. I mentioned in the message, even your house is plopped right in the middle of it, which is kind of a metaphor for what life looks like. It penetrates every area of life. It's a long process from planting to harvesting, and it's a good illustration that Peter uses that the Christian life, Jesus should penetrate every area of life. It's a way of life. It's not Jesus on Sunday morning and then I'll see you next week. It's every moment of every day. That's how we have to think of it.

Cara: I've actually witnessed to people who think the Christian life is boring, and I think it's their impression of a farm is you get up, throw seeds in the ground, sun goes down, you're out on the porch whittling wood, you know. So, I would say that it's dead on, that actual working farm. It's new every day and exciting. It's, [Yeah.] Christian life is such an adventure. [Yeah.] You know, you just never know. It is not boring.

Bryan: No, It's not boring!

Cara: As you started going through the list in Second Peter Chapter One, it went from moral excellence to knowledge, self-control, to perseverance, and then to godliness. Can you talk again about how each of those qualities leads to the next?

Bryan: Yeah, so I'll start by saying I'm not really a formula guy, but this is how the text is written. So, I think it's really helpful. So, it starts with his idea of moral excellence, which is I have to want it, I have to desire, as kind of a desire for this virtuous life, or nothing's going to happen. From there it moves to the truth, which Peter refers to as knowledge. From there it moves to self-control, which based on the truth, I discipline myself, deliver accordingly, but it's hard. So, I persevere. And that leads to godliness, which practically speaking is just experiencing Jesus in everyday life, which then shows up in love. So, one builds on the other and it's helpful if I'm not experiencing the life as a Christian that I desire, where am I stuck? I think for a lot of Christians; it probably goes all the way back to the beginning. I just don't want it bad enough. So, I haven't really taken the steps that follow.

Arnie: So, it is refreshing that you do see just somewhat of a formula kind of way to success. So maybe someone who is stuck in their faith who's not going anywhere, maybe it would be good to do as you're suggesting, is maybe look at this list and see if you're stuck in one of these ways. Would you agree with that?

Bryan: Yeah, I think in this case it is one step leads to the other and it is possible to identify where I'm stuck, which again, I think there's a lot of tools available for people.

Arnie: It sure seems like false teachers have to camouflage themselves pretty well. So how again do we spot them?

Bryan: I think the only way to spot them is to know the truth. You're never going to be able to keep up with all the lies. So, when you know the truth, again, think about a subject you know really well. It's very hard to deceive you in your area of expertise. So, if we could become experts in the truth of the Scripture, it exposes the lie and we respond accordingly.

Arnie: But you know, really what you're saying is it's not about the pastor. It's about your relationship with Jesus Christ based on the Word. Is that what you're saying? You've got to be grounded yourself.

Bryan: Yeah. So, I think you have to find people you trust just like your doctor, your financial advisor, your lawyer or whatever, and then learn together and then learn to study the Bible yourself and together. You know, we have so many tools available to us to help us in this process in 21st century America. But the more you learn and understand the truth, the more the lies are going to be exposed. I think in most cases the lies are coming from multiple sources, probably not necessarily your local pastor, and you have to be aware of that.

Cara: I'm going to assume as a pastor then, you've had to deal with false teachers, and then how do you handle that situation?

Bryan: Yeah, so great question. When it's formal, like within the church, that's the easiest. You identify them and get them out, but most of it isn't that way. Most of it comes through a hundred different avenues into people's lives and you can't tell them what they can and can't listen to. You can't tell them what they can and can't read. You just can't manage people's lives like that. So, it has to be a real discerning effort to teach them the truth, so that they know the truth, so they can discern the lies. You know, as quickly as when they get in their car to drive home from church service on the weekend, they're going to get lies. And so, it's constant. So, we have to be very diligent to make sure that they understand the truth. And that exposes the lies.

Cara: I think what's hard is that there'll be a guy out there preaching and ten, nine out of 10 things might be biblical truth, but then there's that one thing. I think that's hard too.

Bryan: Yeah. And the difference between theology, where we have disagreement, isn't a false teacher, versus someone who's leading people astray, is teaching something that's clearly contrary to what the Bible teaches. And that may not even be a preacher. It may be a commercial, it may be somebody on the radio, maybe somebody on TV, maybe something on the Internet. I mean, false teachers come in a hundred different ways and packages. But I also think for those of us that are called to teach the Word, if we can teach it in such a way that it compels people, that this book has information that can really help my life. So, when they go home, they open it up, they read it, they learn from it, they grow. If we're making the Bible seem irrelevant to everyday life, then people are going to check out. And that's part of the problem.