

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Work of Building Faith

by Dan Trygg

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, ⁶ knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, ⁷ godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted, and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble. ¹¹ For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you.”

2 Peter 1:5-11

2 Peter is one of the “general epistles”, so-called because these were letters that were not written to a particular church or individual, but were composed and distributed with a general audience in mind. **Peter had three main areas of concern: (1.) to encourage growth among the believers** (ch. 1); **(2.) to warn of false prophets** (ch. 2); and **(3.) to remind believers to be remain steadfast in light of the Lord's return** (ch. 3). As one of the “inner three” of Jesus' disciples (e.g., Mk. 5:37; 9:2; 14:32,33), Peter was in a unique position to be an eyewitness of the teachings, miracles and training methods of the Lord. In addition, his succeeding experiences as an apostle established his credibility as a wise and authoritative mentor and counselor of spiritual development. His advice to all believers, “ones who have received a faith of the same kind” as his own, is priceless. The Holy Spirit has seen fit to inspire and preserve this letter, so that we might also benefit from the deposit of experience and understanding of this “bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1).

Peter wastes no time. From his greeting on, he is challenging and encouraging us to go deeper. Vs. 2, “Grace to y'all and peace be multiplied in the true-knowledge/recognition of God”, does not stand as a separate statement, but **Peter uses it to draw us right into the incredible wealth of provision which God has made for us**, described in vss. 3,4, “...as/on-the-grounds-that **all things of His divine power, the things toward life and godliness, are-having-been-given to us by-means-of the true-knowledge/recognition of the One calling-us to/by His own glory and virtue**, by means of which things He has granted to us the promises, ...precious and magnificent to us..., **in order that by means of these** [the *all things* and the *promises*] **y'all might come-to-be/become sharers/partners of the divine nature**, escaping the corruption in the world by lust.” Now, *that* is a mouthful! There is obviously a great deal of depth that underlies what Peter says in this one sentence (yes, it is one sentence in the Greek). He never really delineates this in more detail, however. That is not really his purpose. In fact, a longer, in-depth exposition of what Peter understands of this would probably not be of much more value than to satisfy our theological curiosities. **The spiritual resources concerning which the apostle alludes must be discovered and applied in life-experiences in order to be of value.** Consequently, the most effective thing which Peter can do for us is to direct us along the path that will *lead to the discovery and application* of spiritual truth. In taking this approach, he leaves no “pearls” for opponents to trample upon or to use in mockery against him (Matt. 7:6). **He directs us to the pathway which leads to life** (cf., Matt. 7:13,14). Just as Jesus, his Master, had used parables to sift out the insincere and curious from those who were true seekers (Matt. 13:10-17), **Peter delineates a methodology for spiritual growth that only those who seriously want to grow will apply themselves to follow.**

Let us examine this methodology which Peter offers to us. In vss. 3,4, **he refers to two general ways in which we can get in touch with the resources which God has already designated for us. The first avenue described is “through the true-knowledge/recognition of the One having called us”.** What is meant by this? The word translated as “true-knowledge” is an intensive form of experiential knowing which comes as a flash of insight or revelation. The apostle Paul uses this word in a significant manner (e.g., Eph 1:17; 4:13; Col. 1:6,9,10; 2:2; 3:10). It is not just intellectual knowledge, but a kind of personal discovery, an “Aha!” kind of experience. **The provision of God comes through this kind of personal recognition of God in our day-to-day lives.** The provision *does not equal* the insight described by this word, but **this new recognition is an opportunity to engage with God as a “partner”** (vs. 4). **The second avenue alluded to by Peter has to do with the promises which God has given.** These promises, including both general ones, which would be found in the Scriptures, ...and any specific ones, promises which God may personally reveal to us..., **are also designed to direct us into areas where we can engage with God as a partner in His work.** If we translate verse 4 as “in order that you might become partakers *of* the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world by lust”, then we will see the focus as being on our personal holiness. But, if we translate it as “in order that we might become partners *with* the divine nature”, an entirely different possibility begins to emerge. **God has a much larger plan in which He desires to include us as His partners and co-workers** (1 Cor. 3:9). In John 5:19,20 we see Jesus modeling for

us a methodology whereby He purposefully would become a partner with the Father in whatever Jesus saw Him doing. Could it be that *this* is what Peter has in mind for *us*? **Is the focus of the passage on our sitting around becoming holy, or is it on doing the works of God? I think it leads us to embrace both aspects.** Unfortunately, traditionally, we have tended to focus only on personal holiness, and have not seen that *we are to "partner with God" as His loyal subjects in the Kingdom business of liberating people from the dominion and oppression of the devil* (cf. Lk. 4:16-44).

So, how do we acquire these spiritual insights, these personal "Aha!" experiences? Do we just passively wait for God to drop them on us, like rain out from heaven? No. **The methodology Peter describes is very active and clearly requires effort on our part**, "applying all diligence", or "bringing in alongside every effort" (vs. 5). **What are we to be working hard at? We are to "add to" or "supply" something to our faith.**

We have a basic, rudimentary faith, when we come to Jesus. The apostle Paul likened it to a foundation, which must then be built upon (I Cor. 3:10,11). Here, Peter exhorts us to **add "virtue" to our faith. What is "virtue"?** There are two basic possibilities. **"Virtue" either refers to an attitude**, i.e., a positive, eager desire to grow, ...or **"virtue" could also refer to a visible expression of the inworking presence and power of God.**

How would we then "add" this to our faith? The word translated as "add" also means to "supply, provide, or support". Let's try some of these: Supply to your faith, God's power. How about, "support in your faith God's power, or inworking"? **How might we do that? We align ourselves with what God wants to do in our lives.** We choose to be in agreement with God. We trust what God is doing and choose to act on His working.

The first observation is to see that our faith by itself is not enough. We must choose to build upon it. **Secondly, there are things we can do to shut down the working of God in our lives.** For example, if we have an area of unresolved sin that we are resistant to change, we are shutting down the virtue of God in our lives. If, on the other hand, we are even willing to be made willing, if we ask others for prayer, or we confess it as sin, we are opening our hearts up to God. That attitude of humility and desire to change is the result of God's Spirit working in us. **When we are open and responsive to Him, we are supporting His power, His inworking, within us.**

To this, we are to add experiential knowledge. Peter is not speaking only about information. **He is talking about applying to your faith the insights which God is revealing to you in your personal life.** The opposite would be to *be resistant* to that. A lesser level of resistance would be a simple *disregard for, or unawareness of*, the times when God reveals something to you. **How do you "add" that to your virtuous heart? By choosing to acknowledge and accept those insights when they come.**

Next, is self-control. The Greek word here is interesting. It refers to inner-strength. God is not asking us to simply white-knuckle this on our own. No. **There will be an inworking of God available to us to apply to the insights which God has given. We have the choice to partner with God on this, however, by being willing to step out in obedience.** With this step, we have moved from the inner desire and thought life to the *choices* which affect *action* in our lives.

Next, we have the step of supporting the self-control with "remaining-under", or perseverance. The word means to **remain consistent under the pressure of trial.** In other words, *we have another level of choice*, of "making every effort", which will affect the outcome. Now that we have moved beyond a general willingness, to a specific insight, to an actual choice to change, we are faced with the need to support that inner working of God in our lives that we have partnered with thus far *by not giving up and giving in.* Change is hard. Our old patterns are deeply embedded. One-time decisions are usually not enough to produce lasting change. We must *support* the change God has revealed by continuing to persevere in it.

To this perseverance, we add "godliness". This seems kind of strange. If we think of "godliness" as good behavior, then it would seem strange to say that we add good behavior to the good-behavior-choice in which we are persevering. The word in Greek, however, is not primarily about behavior. It is about devotion. **Literally the word means a "healthy devotion".** The root of the word refers both to the reverence and respect toward God, and also to the practices associated with devotion to Him. Why is this concept here? Because every area of our lives where we have been liberated from sin needs to be offered to God in order to truly be sound and whole. The end goal of our existence is to be fully dedicated to and consistent with the Spirit of God. We need to consciously offer ourselves to God, and utilize every area of strength or freedom in honoring and serving Him. **We support the persevering change in our lives by drawing near to God more completely.**

To this we add "brotherly-affection". This means that **our devotion to God can never mature in isolation from people. God wants our faith to work out in the practical fruit of enjoying people.** Psalm 16:2,3 strikes a healthy balance in this regard. This, again, is a *choice*. Are you willing to go all the way with God by choosing to "like" others? It may mean you have to look for what to like in them, but if Christ is in them, they certainly will be likable.

Finally, we are to add agapē-love. This means that we will choose to serve others for their good, whether we get anything in return or not. It is only when we have come this far that we will find the inner strength to give of ourselves as Jesus gave of Himself, ...**truly a work of God, ...but one we must also choose to partner in.**