

One Last Thing Before I Die:

This is the Bottom Line

A Study of 2 Peter 1:1-15

Characteristic of Completeness: Jesus Christ

Big Idea: God gives believers the capacity and responsibility to grow.

Related Scriptures: John 17:3; Acts 1:4-5; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 5:21; 12:9;

Galatians 2:20; 3:28; Ephesians 1:13; 4:20-24; Philippians 3:9;

2 Peter 3:3-13; 1 John 2:25; 5:20

Introduction:

A. Apparently, I need to get out more.

Early last week, I was standing in front of my house thinking about what to do about my landscaping, when my neighbor came out to empty his trash. We chatted a while. Then he mentioned his interest in a recent self-help book called *The Secret*.¹ He said, "I think there's something to this," and asked me if I was familiar with it. I wasn't. Which is why I think I need to get out more.

You see, after my neighbor revealed my ignorance, I did a little research. It seems that ► a woman by the name of Rhonda Byrne made a video by the same name, *The Secret*, back in March 2006. She says she was inspired to produce the video after reading a book, *The Science of Getting Rich*.²

The Secret soon went to DVD. After a few months, it was being featured on *Larry King Live* and Ellen Degeneres' daily TV show. The DVD spun off a book just before last Christmas.³ The book was featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in February 2007. Oprah endorsed the ideas in the book, saying, "For years on this show, this is what I've been trying to do."⁴ *The Secret* is now number one on the New York Times Best Seller list in the Hardcover Advice category.⁵

Thursday morning, I asked my wife, Cathy, if she had heard about *The Secret*, secretly hoping that there were others like me who were in the dark. She was no comfort. She said, "*The Secret*. Oh, yeah. There's a buzz about it at work."

¹ Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*, (New York: Atria Books, 2006).

² Available from http://www.oprah.com/spiritself/slide/20070208/ss_20070208_284_101.jhtml; internet; accessed 5 May 2007.

³ I got some of this background from a good article: Donald S. Whitney, "A Review of The Secret by Rhonda Byrne," available at <http://biblicalspirituality.org/secret.html>; internet; accessed 5 May 2007.

⁴ Available from video clip at http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/200702/tows_past_20070208.jhtml; internet; accessed 5 May 2007.

⁵ Available from <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/books/bestseller/>; accessed 5 May 2007.

Feeling left out, I got the book and read it. Turns out “the secret” in the book is something called the law of attraction. The idea is that, you create or attract the reality you experience by what you think and feel. Let me flesh this out a little by giving you a flurry of quick little one-liners from throughout the book:

1. ▶ “The Secret gives you anything you want: happiness, health, and wealth.”⁶
2. ▶ “The Great Secret of Life is the law of attraction.”⁷
3. ▶ “The law of attraction says, ‘like attracts like,’ so when you think a thought, you are also attracting like thoughts to you.”⁸
4. ▶ “As you think thoughts, they are sent into the Universe, and they magnetically attract all like things that are on the same frequency.”⁹
5. ▶ “Whatever is going on in your mind you are attracting to you.”¹⁰
6. ▶ “Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts.”¹¹
7. ▶ “Like Aladdin’s Genie, the law of attraction grants our every command.”¹²
8. ▶ “To attract money, focus on wealth.”¹³
9. ▶ “Disease is held in the body by thought, by observation of the illness, and by the attention given to the illness.”¹⁴

As ▶ far as I can tell, the author, Rhonda Byrne, has no particular credentials. But I must admit, if she visualized money, she certainly has attracted it. And it is remarkable that Byrne is joined by twenty-nine other co-authors who contribute heavily to the book, including some physicians and physicists and Ph.D.s and well-known authors and even a minister.

There are some things I like about the book. I think there is indeed a powerful connection between our thoughts and our actions. And the book encourages thankfulness. These are biblical ideas. But some things are decidedly unbiblical. This is not surprising. In the introduction to *The Science of Getting Rich*, the book that

⁶ Bob Proctor, quoted by Byrne.

⁷ Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*, (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 25.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bob Proctor, quoted by Byrne, 4.

¹¹ Byrne, 43.

¹² Byrne, 68.

¹³ Byrne, 111.

¹⁴ Byrne, 139

inspired Byrne, it says that the law of attraction is of Hindu origin.¹⁵ Listen to a few more quotes from *The Secret*. Keep in mind these quotes are addressed to you and me.

10. ▶ “You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You. ▶ You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of You on this planet.”¹⁶
11. ▶ “The earth turns on its orbit for You. The oceans ebb and flow for You. The birds sing for You. The sun rises and sets for You. The stars come out for You. ▶ Every beautiful thing you see, every wondrous thing you experience, is all there, for You. Take a look around. None of it can exist, without You. ▶ No matter who you thought you were, now you know the Truth of Who You Really Are. You are the master of the Universe.”¹⁷
12. ▶ “There is no blackboard in the sky on which God has written your purpose, your mission in life. . . . ▶ Your mission is the mission you give yourself. Your life will be what you create it as, and no one will stand in judgment of it, now or ever.”¹⁸

After ▶ reading the book, I can see why *The Secret* has become so popular. You get to be your own god and create whatever you want just by expecting it to happen. Such a deal.

What does this have to do with my sermon today? Well, I was thinking—visualizing, I guess. I was thinking that I needed a good introduction to my sermon. And, you know, this just came to me. Shazam.

- B. Actually, we’re beginning a new study today through the New Testament epistle of ▶ 2 Peter, the last letter written by the Apostle Peter as he faced imminent death. In the letter, Peter presents a worldview that is just a smidge different than the view presented in *The Secret*. In fact, Peter spends much of his letter warning about the coming of false teachers who are distinguished by a denial of the Lordship of Jesus Christ¹⁹ and a greedy, grasping arrogance²⁰ that refuses to submit to any authority but themselves.²¹ Hmmm.

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Attraction; internet; accessed 5 May 2007.

¹⁶ Byrne, 164.

¹⁷ Byrne, 183.

¹⁸ Neale Donald Walsch, quoted by Byrne, 177

¹⁹ 2 Peter 2:1.

²⁰ 2 Peter 2:3.

²¹ 2 Peter 2:10.

When Peter, one of the most important people in history, wants to say something just before he dies, I listen. Especially when he spent more time with Jesus in His earthly ministry than anyone else. Especially when he happens to be the first leader of the most revolutionary organization on earth bar none: the Church.

Peter wastes no time. In the first eleven verses of the first chapter of his letter, he gives us the bottom line. Then, in Verses 12-15, he looks back on the bottom line and reveals how strongly he feels about it and how much he wants to remind his readers of it. Notice how many times he says he wants to remind us. He ► says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:12 For this reason I will not be negligent ► to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. ► 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by ► reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I *must* put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. ► 15 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have ► a reminder of these things after my decease. [Emphasis mine]

- C. What ► *is* Peter's bottom line of which he wants so desperately to remind his readers? Here's what I think it is. I think Peter wants us to know and to never forget that God gives believers both the *capacity* and *responsibility* to grow more and more like Christ. In fact, that is the ► big idea of my message: Believers have the *capacity* and *responsibility* to grow in Christ. That is, God grants true Christians both the ability and duty to mature spiritually, to become more and more complete in Christ.

This may not sound all that sexy to you, but the implications are far-reaching. *The Secret* says, by my thoughts and feelings, I get whatever I want; Peter says, by God's grace and provision, I can and should do whatever *He* wants. *The Secret* is egocentric; Peter is theocentric. *The Secret* says our thinking creates reality; Peter says our thinking should be grounded reality. *The Secret* says I'm responsible to no one, I'm the creator; Peter says I'm answerable to God, He's the Creator. *The Secret* is about bloated narcissism; Peter is about self-emptying servanthood. *The Secret* is all about me and my agenda; Peter is about God and His agenda.

Both believe that we have power. But *The Secret* claims self-empowerment for self-fulfillment, while Peter claims God-empowerment for the fulfillment of His will in and through us.

So in effect, Peter is saying to his readers and to us: "One last thing before I die. This is the bottom line: Become more and more like Christ. You can. And you should. God has given us the capacity and responsibility to grow."

This idea relates to our motivation to become like Jesus Christ. In fact, ► Jesus Christ is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week. This Characteristic is represented by the statement: My foremost desire is to know and be like Jesus Christ—bringing

glory to God and enjoying His rewards. To this Peter would say, “Amen. That’s what I’m talking about. That’s the bottom line.”

- D. This morning, we’re going to focus primarily on ► our *capacity* to grow in Verses 1-4. Over the next two Sundays we’ll look at our *responsibility* to grow in Verses 5-11.
- E. Let me read ► Verses 1-4. Then we’ll go back and study our way through them.

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: ► 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ► 3 as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ► 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, ► that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

- F. From these verses, I glean ► five key ideas related to our capacity to grow as believers.
- I. Here’s ► the first idea: By His righteousness, we stand as equals before God. We’re not equal to God, but equal to one another in our worth and standing before God. I get this from ► Verse 1, where Peter writes:

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ

Peter does claim to have considerable authority. He’s ► an apostle, commissioned by Jesus Himself to be a messenger. But Peter certainly doesn’t claim to be God; instead he acknowledges ► Christ alone as “God and Savior.” Peter describes himself not as the “master of the Universe,” but as ► a bondservant, whose faith is not inherently better than yours or mine. He indicates that believers in Jesus have ► “like precious faith.” It’s the simple faith in Jesus Christ through which God graciously gives the free gift of eternal life to anyone.

Peter alludes to ► God’s righteousness as being involved in the process. Here’s ► how that works. When we believe in Jesus for eternal life, ► our sin is credited to Christ’s account. He paid for it on the cross. In return, ► His righteousness is credited to our account. We are declared righteous and in right standing before God because of what He has done. It’s explained this way in ► 2 Corinthians 5:21:

^{NKJ} 2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

As believers, our righteousness does not come from some trumped-up self-deification. We humbly acknowledge that we have no righteousness of our own. God, our Judge, has declared us to be righteous through our faith in what Christ has done.²² And that “like precious faith” puts all believers on equal footing before God. Galatians ► 3:28 proclaims:

^{NKJ} Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

II. Here’s ► the second idea: By His revelation, we can experience grace and peace. I get this from ► Verse 2, where Peter says:

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord

The Secret says we experience good things by simply expecting them, visualizing them, knowing them into existence. In effect, that makes us creators.

In Peter’s way of thinking, we experience good things—grace and peace—through knowing the One Creator, who has revealed Himself. God is the source of grace and peace. Through the general revelation of God’s creation and our conscience, God reveals Himself to us. Through the specific revelation of His Word and His Son, God reveals Himself to us. We don’t really create anything; we respond to what God has created. This is corroborated in ► 1 John 5:20:

^{NKJ} 1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Second ► Corinthians 4:6 says,

^{NKJ} 2 Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

John ► 17:3 says,

^{NKJ} John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

III. Here’s ► the third idea: By His power, we have everything we need to lead a godly life. I get this from ► Verse 3, where Peter says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:3 as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue

²² See also Philippians 3:8-9.

As believers, we have absolutely everything we need to live a godly life. But notice where it comes from: It's from ► *His* divine power. And notice what we do *not* have. We do not have whatever we want. We do not have whatever we expect. We don't even have whatever we ask, particularly if we ask with selfish motives.²³ We have whatever we need—whatever we need to take the next step pertaining to living a godly life.

I'm reminded of the TV show, *This Old House*, where old houses are made new. In the Christian life, it would be *This Old Self*. The old self is dilapidated and falling down, infested with sin and condemned. God provides all the brand-new materials and instructions and energy we need to build up the new self in the blueprint of Jesus Christ. But we've got to swing the hammer. And the process is not a pain-free picnic.

The Apostle Paul suffered a chronic illness. He asked the Lord repeatedly to heal him of it. The Lord said no. He said:

^{NKJ} 2 Corinthians 12:9 . . . “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” . . .

We don't have the unbridled power to create our own little narcissistic nirvana. But, by God's power, we do have everything we need to live a godly life.

IV. Here's ► the fourth idea: By His promises, our future is bright and secure. I get this from ► Verse 4, where Peter says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises . . .

The Secret says our hope for the future lies in our ability to make it up. The hope of the world is to expect better, to visualize our way out of our problems. “Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts.”²⁴

That may play well with the mucky-mucks down at the private country club, sipping a beer after 18 holes, lamenting missed putts. But it's an insult to those victimized by ethnic cleansing in Darfur or poverty in Somalia or rape in the Congo.

Peter says our hope lies not in our earthly circumstances, but in God's promises. What promises? Let me mention just three.

A. First, there is ► the promise of eternal life to all who believe Jesus for it. In ► 1 John 2:25, we are told:

^{NKJ} 1 John 2:25 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.

²³ James 4:3.

²⁴ Byrne, 43.

- B. Second, there is ► the promise of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, who takes up residence in all who believe in Jesus. Ephesians ► 1:13 explains:

^{NKJ} Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise²⁵

- C. Third, there is ► the promise of Christ's return to make things right.

The Secret is dismissive of this idea. It says, "Your life will be what you create it as, and no one will stand in judgment of it, now or ever."²⁶

Peter begs to differ. Later on, Peter says in ► 2 Peter 3:3 and following:

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 3:3 . . . scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

We usually associate the term, ► "lust" with sexuality, but the original Greek term is more general. It is simply the desire for something.²⁷ So, to walk according to your own lusts is to live according to your own selfish desires. Remember: "The Secret gives you anything you want: happiness, health, and wealth."²⁸

But God is waiting patiently. Waiting for people to come to repentance—to turn to Him, to change their minds about Jesus, from unbelief to belief. He's waiting for us to put aside our selfish desires and follow Him. Peter says in ► 2 Peter 3:9:

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

He has promised to return one day. And when He does, there will be judgment. Peter mentions a day of judgment four times in 2 Peter.²⁹ At the day of judgment, those who have not had the righteousness of Christ credited to their account through faith will have to pay. They ► will perish spiritually.

- V. Here's ► the fifth idea: By His partnership, we can become more like Him and less like the world. I get this from ► Verse 4, where Peter says,

²⁵ See also Acts 1:4-5.

²⁶ Neale Donald Walsch, quoted by Byrne, 177

²⁷ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "ἐπιθυμία," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

²⁸ Bob Proctor, quoted by Byrne.

²⁹ 2 Peter 2:3,4,9; 3:7.

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:4 . . . that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

The ► phrase, “partakers of the divine nature” almost sounds like it might come from *The Secret*, like we all share in some cosmic divinity or something. But that’s not what Peter is saying. The Greek word for nature, as it is used here, has to do with the character of something.³⁰ In this case, it means we are to exhibit the character of God. We are to be holy, set apart, extraordinarily godly. The opposite would be failing to escape or blending right in ► with “the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

The word, “partakers” implies more than just sharing a certain characteristic. There’s a partnership. In the first century, the word, commonly had commercial implications.³¹ It would be used to describe two fishermen buying a boat together and starting a fishing business. It was also used in a legal sense to describe a binding partnership between two parties, including marriage.³² When churches in Macedonia sent money to the poor believers in Jerusalem, they are described as partakers or partners.³³

So, through faith in Christ, we enter into a kind of partnership with Him whereby He works through us, directing us and empowering us to become more and more like Him, to represent Him well on earth. It’s not an equal partnership. God calls the shots. God gives believers the capacity and responsibility to grow. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians ► 4:22-24:

^{NKJ} Ephesians 4:22 . . . put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ► 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ► 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.³⁴

Again, I’m reminded of the *This Old Self* illustration. God provides all the brand-new materials and instructions and energy we need to build up the new self in the blueprint of Jesus Christ. But we’ve got to swing the hammer. God gives believers the capacity and responsibility to grow.

As I thought about the *This Old Self* illustration, I asked myself, “Bob, what ► kind of partner are you?” I encourage you to ask yourself the same question: What kind of partner are you?

A. Sometimes I can be ► the Stuck-at-Home-Depot partner. That’s when I go to church and study the Bible, aisle by aisle, and marvel at all the things God has provided. But I don’t swing the hammer. I don’t build. I become more knowledgeable, but not more Christlike. I don’t take what I’ve been supplied and apply it directly and specifically to my life.

³⁰ BDAG, s.v. “φύσις.”

³¹ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 16.

³² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 3, s.v. “κοινωνία,” by Hauck, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 798.

³³ Romans 15:26-27.

³⁴ See also Galatians 2:20.

- B. Other times I can be ► the Who-needs-instructions? partner. That's when I try to work hard for God, without seeking instructions on what and how to build. I have the Bible and the Holy Spirit as guides, but I don't take the time to patiently, prayerfully listen. And then I wonder why things aren't fitting. Why I'm exhausted. Why I don't seem to have the power that He promised.
- C. Other times I can be ► the I'm-not-a-professional partner. That's when I get to thinking I can't do this. I can't possibly do the hard work of becoming more Christlike. I can't change the world. I can't build the kingdom of God. That's best left to the professionals, the super spiritual folks, the people who've got it together.
- D. These aren't the kind of partners Peter has in mind. If God gives you and me the capacity and responsibility to grow in Christ, then all we have to be is ► the What's-the-next-step? partner. If God has supplied everything we need to grow, and the instructions are provided by the Bible and the Holy Spirit, then wouldn't our part be to proactively seek the next step in the building process? We don't yet have to figure out Steps 9, 10 and 11. We don't need to be overwhelmed by the total number of steps there may be. The one that really matters is simply the next one. We should take that step. And the good news is: We can.

Here's what I encourage you to do this week. First, prayerfully ask ► the question: What kind of partner am I? Then ► ask: What's the next step?

Maybe you'll discover that you're a Stuck-at-Home-Depot partner, and the next step is to take what you've got and apply it. Swing the hammer. Maybe that would involve inviting your neighbors for dinner to build a relationship in which they might see Christ at work in you. I don't know.

Maybe you'll discover that you're a Who-needs-instructions? partner, and the next step is to stop and listen quietly for instructions. Maybe that would involve more time in reflective, prayerful solitude. Or more time in Scripture. I don't know.

But I do know this: God gives believers the capacity and responsibility to grow.

What's your next step?