

One Last Thing Before I Die:
This You Must Do
A Study of 2 Peter 1:5-7

Characteristic of Completeness: Love

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

Related Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 6:9;

Colossians 3:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 5:14; James 2:14-17; 1 Peter 4:19

Introduction:

- A. Matt ► Casper seems like a nice guy. I can learn from him. He's a marketing copywriter, a freelance writer, a musician, and an atheist. I've started reading a recent book he co-authored documenting his experiences while visiting some evangelical mega-churches in America.

After attending one mega-church, Casper comments on the absence of any call to action. He ► says,

If I did believe in God, and that I was going to be granted eternal life in heaven, ► I would want to do something significant here on Earth, ► to live as much of my life as I could following the example set by Jesus when he was here on Earth . . . I don't know, maybe I don't know the real story of Jesus . . .

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Sounds like he knows the real story of Jesus pretty well.

Sometimes we can be abusers. Abusers of God's grace. Grace abuse happens when I focus on the privileges God has graciously given me, but ignore the responsibilities. Grace abuse involves receiving the free gift of eternal life by faith, but making little or no effort to gratefully follow the example of Jesus in serving others.

- B. Last ► week, we began a study through the New Testament letter of Second Peter. It's the last letter from the Apostle Peter as he faces death. Some scholars have argued that Peter is writing particularly to those who are abusing God's grace.² Which means I'm not sure I really want to hear this. But I know I need to. You see, I'm a recovering grace abuser.
- C. The big idea from my message last week is also the big idea for this week, only the emphasis is different. The ► big idea is this: Believers have the capacity and responsibility to grow.

¹ Matt Casper and Jim Henderson, *Jim and Casper Go To Church*, (n.p.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 7.

² Richard J. Bauckman, *Jude, 2 Peter, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 50, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 187-188.

1. Last week, we focused primarily on ► our *capacity* to grow, based on 2 Peter 1:1-4. We learned that, by Christ's righteousness, we stand as equals before God; by His revelation, we can experience grace and peace; by His power, we have everything we need to lead a godly life; by His promises, our future is secure; and by His partnership, we can become more like Him and less like the world.
2. Today, we're going to focus on ► our *responsibility* to grow, based on 2 Peter 1:5-7. In the first part of Verse 5, the Apostle Peter communicates our responsibility to grow in no uncertain terms. He ► says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith . . .

- a. The command ► is to *add* something to our faith in Jesus Christ. The Greek word for "add" means to provide or supply or furnish something at one's own expense.³ The term also connotes something supplied generously, lavishly, in abundance.⁴ So we are responsible to grow, and to do so at any cost, sparing no expense.
- b. The phrase, ► "for this very reason" points back to our capacity to grow, explained in Verses 1-4. We have a responsibility to grow because we have the capacity to grow. We *should* grow because we *can* grow. Indeed we are made to grow. "Because of what God has done, there is now something we should do."⁵ Chronic immaturity may be common, but it's not normative.
- c. And our effort to grow is to be characterized ► by "giving all diligence." This means to "bring every effort," to "do one's very best," to "try very hard."⁶ It's our responsibility to grow, and to give it everything we've got.

³ 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. "ἐπιχορηγέω," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

⁴ Kenneth O. Gangel, "2 Peter," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (USA: Victor Books, 1983), 865; Edwin A. Blum, "2 Peter," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 269; Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude, The Bible Speaks Today*, John R.W. Stott, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 57.

⁵ Fred Chay, "Making Your Calling and Election Sure: An Aspect of Assurance, 2 Peter 1:5-11," (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Seminary, 2006), 4.

⁶ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. "παρεισφέρω," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

- C. In the rest of our text, Peter lists seven areas of growth. Beginning in the middle of ► Verse 5, he says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:5 . . . add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

This ► list of seven traits constitutes the outline of my sermon this morning. These are some important characteristics of Christlikeness. We're going to consider what they mean and how to apply them one by one.

But some preliminary comments are in order.

1. First, the seven traits are overlapping ideas that are not presented in a precise, logical sequence.⁷ Nevertheless, it does appear to be significant that love comes last.⁸ In ancient lists of character qualities, often the last one comprises all of the others.⁹ Other Scriptures corroborate that love would be a fitting climax or summary. For example, ► Colossians 3:14 says,

^{NKJ} Colossians 3:14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.¹⁰

For this reason, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is love.

2. A ► second thing to keep in mind: The issue is not so much whether you do or don't have these virtues in your life. Most believers have some measure of each trait. The issue is whether we are *growing* in these areas. It's not where you are, it's where you're going. In ► 2 Peter 1:8, it says,

^{NIV} 2 Peter 1:8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive .

The idea is this: If I'm not growing in Christlikeness, then I'm ineffective and unproductive. Which is not the legacy I'd like to leave. I don't want my gravestone to read: In memory of Bob Kerrey, now in heaven, but ineffective and unproductive on earth.

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude, The NIV Application Commentary*, Terry Muck ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 45; Lucas and Green, 58.

⁸ Lucas and Green, 61.

⁹ Bauckman, 187.

¹⁰ See also 1 Corinthians 13.

3. Third, ► trying to work at all of these traits all at once can seem overwhelming. But growth is a continual, gradual process, and I find that God usually directs and empowers me in that process one step at a time.

So, before we work through this list of traits, let's ask God to help us identify just one thing along the way—one thing He wants us to do right now. Let's ask Him to bring to mind a situation, or a relationship, or a need, or a social ill, or a habit that He wants us to work on right now.

The exciting thing to me is that this list is so comprehensive that we can be confident that God has something for each of us. From this list, we can expect to hear what our Creator has in mind for you and me right now.

Let's pray.

Lord, you have given us the capacity and responsibility to grow more and more like Christ. Help us to see clearly the next step You want us to take in that process. Amen.

- I. The first item on the list ► is virtue.
- A. The Greek word is a general term describing uncommonly excellent character worthy of praise.¹¹ Other English translations render it “goodness” or “moral excellence.”
- This is such a general term that it can be hard to get a specific handle on it. But the use of the term usually has a social context and involves the enhancement of the common good through exceptional civic virtue.¹² Virtue, it seems, is something demonstrated in community.
- B. So perhaps we could ask ourselves some questions. Am I an increasingly valuable servant of my community? Is my community better off because of me? Would my neighbors or coworkers say something like, “I don't believe all the stuff Bob does, but I'd sure hate to see him leave”?
- C. Let's revisit Casper, the friendly atheist. After hearing a sermon in an American mega-church, he ► says,

The pastor kept talking about the problems the people in this church are probably facing in their lives . . . and yeah, we've all got problems. ► But we're sitting here in Mission Viejo, California. ► Half these people are probably worth a few million apiece, based on the cars and clothes I've seen today. I mean, how bad off can you really be here?

¹¹ BDAG, s.v. “ἀρετή.”

¹² Ibid.

► . . . *The sermon stuck with telling people that their main objective is dealing with their own struggles, which are what? ► Crises of faith? Cash flow? Relationships? I know it's not about having enough to eat or a place to sleep tonight.*

► *I don't mean to be overly critical, but what if. . . the pastor challenged everyone to go out and serve someone else here on Earth? ► Could you imagine if he told everyone here today to go out and make a difference today—► donate two hours of their time at a local shelter, buy a new set of clothes for a homeless person; can you imagine what a difference that would make in one day alone?*¹³

D. Jesus tells us in ► Matthew 5:16:

^{NKJ} Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

That's virtue.

II. The next item on the list ► is knowledge.

A. The Greek term for knowledge here is a little different.

Back in Verses 2 and 3, the term translated “knowledge” seems to be descriptive of our relationship with the Lord; it's a relational kind of knowing.

In contrast, the term here in Verse 5 describes a comprehension or intellectual grasp of something.¹⁴ Instead of describing the sphere of our relationship with Christ, this kind of knowledge seems to describe our understanding of God's will. And the suggestion is that this kind of knowing is progressively acquired.¹⁵

Some scholars believe Peter is referring to the practical wisdom “obtained by dedicating ourselves to learning God's truth in the Scriptures and putting that truth into action.”¹⁶ It is the knowledge of the will of God.¹⁷ It is the kind of knowledge that comes from reading and thinking and studying and discussing and applying the Bible to one's life.¹⁸

This isn't just knowledge accumulated for the sake of knowledge, because we are told in 1 Corinthians 8:1:

¹³ Casper, 8-9.

¹⁴ BDAG, s.v. “γνῶσις.”

¹⁵ Bauckman, 186.

¹⁶ *The Nelson Study Bible*, s.v. 2 Peter 1:5.

¹⁷ Blum, 269; Moo, 45.

¹⁸ Lucas and Green, 59.

^{NKJ} 1 Corinthians 8:1 . . . Knowledge puffs up . . .

This is knowledge applied. It's wisdom. It's discernment. It results in an increasingly biblical worldview that pervades more and more of our lives.

- B. So perhaps we could ask ourselves some questions. Am I growing in the knowledge and application of Scripture to my life? Am I just puffing myself up with knowledge, or am I, with all diligence, putting it to work? Am I increasingly living out what the Lord tells me to think and do and be in the Bible?

III. The next item on the list ► is self-control.

- A. The term describes the restraint of emotions, impulses, or desires.¹⁹ It is particularly associated with restraint of sexual impulses.²⁰ It is the opposite of compulsive excess.²¹ It is “disciplined moderation rather than self indulgence.”²²

Self-control includes the restraint of behaviors that are addictive or compulsive, such as drinking, eating, shopping, gaming, etc.

Self-control includes the avoidance of behaviors that are immoral such as abusive anger, lusting, doing porn, doing drugs, etc.

Self-control also includes not only restraint and avoidance, but also discipline—discipline to do what you need to do, when you need to do it, whether you like it or not.

- B. So perhaps we could ask ourselves some questions. Who or what is controlling me? What drives me? Is it anything other than the Lord who lives in me? Are there bad habits or strongholds that need to be broken in my life? Is my life balanced or characterized by compulsive extremes?

IV. The next item on the list ► is perseverance.

- A. In Greek, it is a compound of two words meaning “remain” and “under.” A good word picture is provided by ► a weightlifter who remains under the weight he has lifted. Perseverance is “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.”²³ Synonyms include patience, endurance, fortitude, and steadfastness.²⁴

¹⁹ BDAG, s.v. “ἐγκράτεια.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Blum, 269.

²² Chay, 5.

²³ BDAG, s.v. “ὑπομονή.”

²⁴ Ibid.

It is a willingness to put up with tough times today because of the promise of a better tomorrow.²⁵ For the Christian, it is more than mere bravery or stick-to-it-iveness; it is tied directly to our trust in God and our hope in His promises.²⁶

- B. It does raise an important question though: Persevere in doing what? In the metaphor of the weightlifter, what's the weight? I think Peter is talking about perseverance in doing the will of God, in doing good. You see, sometimes we're going to suffer for doing good; sometimes it's hard to do what God wants. It is not the path of least resistance. If it weren't hard, if it did not involve suffering, there would be no need for perseverance. Peter says in ► 1 Peter 4:19:

^{NKJ} 1 Peter 4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

- C. So perhaps we could ask ourselves some questions. Have I given up on doing something I know I should do? Is my effort to follow the Lord a matter of whatever it takes, or more a matter of whatever I feel like? Am I taking the path of least resistance defining by the world, or am I persevering on the path of righteousness.

- V. The next item on the list ► is godliness.

- A. I used to think that godliness was mostly a matter of being Godlike in character. But the word actually emphasizes living life with a Godward perspective. To be sure, living with a Godward perspective results in becoming Godlike, but the ideas are distinct. Having a Godward perspective comes before developing a Godlike character.

The Greek word for godliness describes a manner of life that is directed toward God.²⁷ It is being continually aware of God's presence.²⁸ One scholar says it ► is "a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life."²⁹ It is to be consciously connected with God throughout the day, mindful of His presence and prayerful.

- B. Something I experienced just yesterday provides an illustration. Cathy and I spend a few hours going to different places, getting some ideas about some home improvements we'd like to make. I was continually aware of her presence. There was an excitement about what we might discover or do together. Sometimes she talked and I listened. Sometimes I talked and she listened. Sometimes we held hands. Sometimes we didn't, but I always had a sense of where she was. Sometimes there was silence. But even in the silence, we walked together, and I could sense when she wanted me to slow down and look at something more closely.

²⁵ Lucas and Green, 59.

²⁶ Bauckman, 186.

²⁷ BDAG, s.v., "εὐσέβεια."

²⁸ *The Nelson Study Bible*, s.v. 2 Peter 1:7.

²⁹ E.M.B Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (London: Tyndale, 1968), 70, quoted by Blum, 270.

Just as I had a practical awareness of Cathy, so godliness is a practical awareness of God in every aspect of life.

- C. So perhaps we could ask ourselves some questions. Do I have a practical awareness of God in *every* aspect of my life? Am I growing in being prayerfully connected to God throughout my day? Am I increasingly attentive to places where He wants me to slow down and look at something more closely? Am I increasingly in dialogue with God?
- VI. The next item on the list ► is brotherly kindness.

- A. The Greek word for brotherly kindness, *philadelphia*, denotes family affection between physical brothers and sisters.³⁰ In fact, outside the New Testament, the word is always used in ancient literature to describe the love between siblings in the context of a home.³¹

But the early church adopted the word to describe the love to be expressed among fellow Christians.³² The idea is that, in the Church, our love for one another should be remarkably familial. Galatians ► 6:10 says,

^{NJ} Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The saying, “blood is thicker than water,” applies to Christians, only the blood we share is Christ’s shed for us. I looked up the saying, “blood is thicker than water,” in a dictionary of idioms. The meaning carries an application. It ► says, “People who are related have stronger obligations to each other than to people outside the family and are expected to endure family problems.”³³

- B. If it were up to me, I’d remove this brotherly kindness from the list. I don’t like it. It’s hard. Families have conflict and church families are no exception. Some of the most obnoxious people I know are Christians. Perhaps it’s simply because I know Christians more, and the people you know the most can, at times, be the most irritating.

But we’re not called to *like* all our fellow Christians; we’re called to extend them brotherly kindness.

This last week, I spent many hours trying to work through various interpersonal conflicts in the church. It’s gut-wrenching. It’s draining. It’s painful. And it’s

³⁰ BDAG, s.v. “φιλαδελφία;” Bauckman, 187.

³¹ Lucas and Green, 60.

³² Moo, 46-47.

³³ Richard A. Spears, *NTC’s American Idioms Dictionary*, 3ed., s.v. “blood runs thicker than water,” (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).

needful. It's what healthy families do. Healthy families are not characterized by the absence of conflict, but by the resolution of it, according to brotherly kindness.

- C. So perhaps we could ask ourselves some questions. Am I increasingly willing to resolve family conflicts, or is it mostly cut and run? Am I willing to work and suffer for the greater good of reconciliation and family unity? Am I even thinking about how I might serve the most difficult, hard-to-love person in my life group?

VII. The last item on the list ► is love. It's the capstone.

- A. This biblical love is a choice to value another.³⁴ It is not an emotion. It is not something you feel. It is a decision—a decision to make a personal sacrifice to serve the best interests of another. In ► John 15:12-13, Jesus says,

^{NKJ} John 15:12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

- B. The juxtaposition of brotherly kindness and love as the last two items on the list suggests that we are to look for that which distinguishes the two. That which distinguishes love from brotherly kindness is this: Love is to be shown to all people, not just Christians.³⁵ We are to love unbelievers. We are to love our neighbors, our community.
- C. When we love others, we not only help others, but we are changed. Our paradigm is shifted. We are knocked off our egocentric pedestal, and it encourages us to love others even more.

Let me illustrate. Last Tuesday, I was at Moon Mountain Elementary School, teaching some Latinos how to speak English. I was working with a small group of people who speak no English at all. I was teaching them the alphabet and numbers. And I was teaching them how to ask and answer simple questions: What is your name? What is your address?

As I was teaching them to say where they live in English, I discovered that a bunch of them have the same address, and they didn't appear to be related. One right after another told me in Spanish and then awkwardly sounded out in English the same numbers and the same street.

And then I remembered a conversation I had with the principal of the school. She said many poor households represented at her school have fifteen people living in one small house or apartment. Fifteen. And often there isn't a single book in the entire house.

³⁴ Friberg, s.v. “ἀγάπη.”

³⁵ Moo, 47; Lucas and Green, 61.

And then I thought about my own situation. I have a study at home with thousands of books. Everybody in my immediate family is pursuing an advanced degree. My son and his wife are living with us temporarily until he finishes up his Master's program. In my middle-America circle of friends, people have commented, "That must be hard, the *four* of you living together like that."

First of all, it hasn't been hard from any perspective you take. But when I think of the living situation of some of my Latino neighbors who live barely three miles away as the crow flies, the idea that I might be suffering some kind of housing hardship is laughable. And it encourages me grow in putting my privilege to work in serving people less privileged. I think that's what Jesus has in mind.

Conclusion:

I invite you to take a moment right now ► to review this list of areas in which every believer ought to be growing: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. What one thing does God want you to do right now? What situation, or relationship, or need, or habit does He want you to work on right now?

The exciting thing is you can be confident that God has something for you in this list. There's a project for you to discover and do together. What's the next step?

Lord, you have given us the capacity and responsibility to grow more and more like Christ. Help us to see clearly the next step You want us to take in that process. Amen