

Sermon Brief

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Text: 2 Peter 1:5-11

Title: “Make Every Effort”

Subject: Believers are to cooperate with God in becoming like Christ.

Complement: Those who do so will be richly rewarded.

Textual Idea: Believers are to cooperate with God in becoming like Christ – those who do so will be richly rewarded.

Sermon Idea: Sow “Christ” seeds and reap eternal blessing.

Interrogative: Am I making progress in becoming like Jesus?

Key Points:

1. Believers are to sow Christ-like traits. (vv.5-7)
2. You will reap what you sow. (vv.8-9)
3. Believers who sow Christ-like traits will be richly rewarded. (vv.10-11)

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that in light of our participation in Christ, we are to go all out in living a Christ-like life. When we appropriate what God has given us, we lead productive, fruitful lives which will receive God’s ultimate commendation in His eternal kingdom.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) create a progress report on their spiritual growth, (2) keep a journal of any ‘small wins,’ (3) avoid ‘gospel amnesia.’

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need for godly living in a corrupt world.

“Make Every Effort”

2 Peter 1:5-11

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We were cleaning out our basement the other day when I came across a binder filled with all my report cards! It was so fun to read through them again and see my development over the years as a student. In my early report cards, there were several comments about lacking discipline in talking to my friends during class. Not surprising! But as I matured that changed. It was nice to see how I progressed through the years.

That’s essentially what Peter is doing in 2 Peter 1:5-11. Go ahead and turn there. Last week I began a new study in this short letter, and I mentioned that Peter has two great concerns, **(LCD) beware false teaching and pursue godly living**. The second concern, godly living, is his focus in our passage this morning. After having begun the letter by telling us that God has given us “everything we need” to live godly lives in this corrupt world, he now shifts to how we are to appropriate all that God has equipped us with. And as we study this section, I challenge you to think of this, **(LCD) what kind of Progress Report would God give me? Am I growing in grace? Becoming like Jesus?**

Let’s see, 2 Peter 1:5, *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

Peter starts off by saying, “for this very reason,” what reason? Recall that last week we saw that God has called us to participate in the divine nature, in the life of God, which enables us to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. This is our calling – to live out the Christ-life in this dark world to the glory of God. Peter is saying, “live in synch with your calling.” The whole reason you exist is to glorify God, so for this reason, live out the Christ-life – and that requires effort. He says, “make every effort.” The word for “effort” in the Greek is “spoude.” It’s where we get the word “speed” from. It means “haste, diligence.” We are to put every ounce of energy into growing in our faith.

Now last week, we saw that even our faith is a gift from God. Our growth itself comes from God as Paul says, **(LCD) “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”** So if it’s all from God, shouldn’t we just “let go and let God?” Why do I need to expend myself so much? Well, even look at this verse. Yes, God causes the growth, but we still need to plant and water! Right?! In other words, our spiritual growth is the result of our cooperation with God. As one

commentator said, **(LCD) “We do not automatically become more virtuous as if God infused virtue into us intravenously; we need to make plans and expend effort.”**

From the initial seed of faith that God gives us, we are to then cooperate with God by adding to our faith multiple virtues. The word for **(LCD) “add” is very instructive. Other translations have “supply” or “supplement.” The word is “epichoregeo”** and it is an aorist active imperative which means that this is not optional, and it is urgent. What we’re reading here about adding, supplying or supplementing to our faith is non-negotiable for Christ-followers. Also, notice this note, “This word was used of making a rich or lavish provision. Originally it referred to a person who paid the expenses of a chorus in staging a play.” In other words, it will cost us dearly to pursue a godly life...and we should be willing, even eager, to pay the cost.

What are we to supply? Well, Peter mentions seven virtues in what appears to be an ascending order, “*make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.*” One of the first sermons I ever preached was on this passage over 20 years ago. I compared this list to a multi-layered cake with each virtue building on the one before it – meaning that the virtues listed and the order they’re presented in are essential. I no longer think that’s true. Having done a much more thorough study this time around, I found that what we have here is a very common literary device of the time called a “sorite.” Sorites were chains of random virtues culminating in a chief virtue. This is what Peter is doing here. This list isn’t meant to be comprehensive or precisely ordered. We can consider each virtue briefly and separately. And keep in mind, our job is to supply these things lavishly, regardless of personal cost. As I review each one, keep in mind my earlier challenge, **(LCD) what kind of Progress Report would God give me?**

The first one we’re to work hard at adding to our faith is **(LCD) “goodness.”** It’s the same word used of Jesus in verse 3, “arete,” and it refers to “excellence of achievement or mastery in a field.” In particular, the field we’re talking about is moral character so we’re being challenged to pursue excellence in our character. This is someone whose life is above reproach. I think of someone like **(LCD) Tammy Carlson** here. Her character is so good...and it’s rubbed off on her daughter Alexa too! They’re not perfect, but man would I love to be like them – exhibiting the highest integrity and character!! How’s your progress in moral character?

Next is **(LCD) “knowledge,”** or “gnosis” in the Greek. It’s related to the word we saw multiple times last week, “epignosis.” Here it refers less to intimate, relational knowledge of God and more to practical wisdom for living a godly life. Think of the book of Proverbs and all its practical wisdom like avoid gossip, tell the truth, don’t be lazy. When I think of this trait, one of our elders, **(LCD) Kyle Van Etten**, comes to mind. Kyle is a voracious learner and I’ve found that I can go to him on pretty much anything and get the low down: finances, management, conflict resolution, etc... I’m old enough to be his father but I don’t hold a candle to his practical wisdom. How’s your progress in knowledge?

Next is **(LCD) “self-control.”** The Greek word literally means “to hold oneself in.” It’s the ability to reign in one’s natural impulses, emotions and desires. Now, I don’t know about you, but when I read through these seven virtues, this is the one that stood out to me. I’m pretty emotional and impulsive by nature and it’s taken me decades to be more disciplined. I’ve had to really work at this. But what’s cool is that according to Galatians 5, it’s a fruit of the Spirit; as I keep in step with the Spirit, God gives me the ability to be self-controlled. That’s so encouraging! One of exhibits self-control is **(LCD) my good friend Marichal Monts.** I’ve seen him encounter racism full on and watched him control his emotions so beautifully. I admire him greatly. How’s your progress in self-control?

Next is **(LCD) perseverance.** The Greek word literally means “to bear up under.” It’s the power to withstand hardship. One commentator mentioned that it’s the ability to view time and circumstances through God’s eyes...knowing and believing that God is the ultimate judge. I think of friends like **(LCD) Tom Schuck and Deb Anderson** who endure so much and yet continue to praise God, not in a denial kind of way, they lament too, but through tremendous hardship they hold on to God. I hope I can grow in this virtue to be like them. How’s your progress in perseverance?

Next is **(LCD) godliness.** The word here refers to showing proper respect to a superior whether to a boss, the king, or God. It’s about reverence and honoring. Michael Green said it’s a “very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life.” **(LCD) Daniel Lagan** comes to my mind here. Every time I talk to him, every time, he is focused on God and brings God into every aspect of life. Honestly, with some, this can be overbearing even feeling put-on, but not with Daniel. His reverence for God comes off genuinely. Love it. How’s your progress in godliness?

Next is **(LCD) brotherly kindness.** This refers to warmth of affections among believers which was usually reserved only for family in the Greco-Roman world. We’re talking people who make others feel like family. They strive to maintain unity over being right...boy to do we need more of these kinds of people! One who I think lives this out is **(LCD) Linda Plunske.** When you’re with her, she makes you feel valued, special. She just overflows with warmth and kindness. How’s your progress in brotherly kindness?

Finally, the chief of all virtues, **(LCD) love,** self-sacrificing action on behalf of others. This is the chief of all virtues because it most represents who God is. John says in his letter that God IS love. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the supreme example of love. It is given even when the feeling isn’t there. God loves us not because we are loveable but because He is love – He can’t help it! In another virtue list in Colossians, Paul says this, **(LCD) “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”** Love is the chief virtue. I see this selfless love in my friend **(LCD) Matt Miller.** He consistently seeks to serve others, often at his own cost, and is happy to do so. He exhibits a selflessness that really challenges me. How’s your progress in love?

So...how is your **(LCD) Progress Report in these virtues?** One application from today may be to create a progress report on yourself with these virtues as well as others.

Remember I said these aren't comprehensive. One virtue I'm trying to grow in is humility. It's not listed here but the Holy Spirit recently highlighted it to me in a prayer time. In response, I'm reading a book called, "The Power of Humility" and it has been so helpful. For example, one of the chapters was on repentance. The author said you can measure someone's humility by the time gap between sinning and repenting. The shorter the time, but humbler the person. Right after reading that chapter, I got into a tiff with someone. I knew I was wrong, but I didn't want to admit it. And then, as I was brushing my teeth, the Spirit whispered, "the time is ticking between sin and repentance!" Reluctantly, I went and apologized to the person for being a dweeb. Hopefully, I made a little progress in humility! What virtue do you need to "make every effort" at growing in?

There's a lot on the line with all this. Look at what Peter says, verse 8, "*For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Anyone concerned about living an effective, productive life? I sure am! Then according to Peter, I need to grow in these...but that feels like a burden! I thought Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light? This doesn't sound easy and light! Plus, I thought we aren't supposed to focus on performance in the Christian life! What gives?

To lighten your load a bit, notice what Peter says here, "*if you possess these qualities in increasing measure.*" Notice it doesn't say in perfect measure. None of the people I highlighted bear these qualities in perfect measure...that's a relief to me! The key is progress, not perfection. Someone recently told me about a popular book called **(LCD) The Progress Principle**. It was the result of a years long study of people's work motivations. The researchers asked 238 people to keep an electronic diary of how they felt about their work throughout the life of a project. Here's their conclusion, "*In an analysis of 12,000 daily diaries, the authors found that of all the events that occur on best days, one stood out well above the rest – simply making progress on meaningful work.*" Simple. Progress motivates. A blogger summarized it this way, **(LCD) Pick one small move forward, actually take action, reduces self-doubt and builds confidence, progress motivates you to take more action.** Applied to the spiritual life, just focus on one small move forward in one of these virtues.

For me with humility right now, I'm focusing on narrowing the time between sin and repentance, between doing something wrong and admitting it. Small wins. Don't get discouraged because you're not exactly like Jesus yet! Just focus on small wins – small steps of progress. That will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive. So going back to our challenge, **(LCD) which of these virtues is the Holy Spirit highlighting in your life? What "small win" can you focus on in order to progress in this area?**

This is important to take seriously in light of what Peter says in verse 9, "*But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.*" When we don't "make every effort" to pursue a godly life, we're showing that we've forgotten all that God has done for us in saving us from eternal damnation and wrath. One commentator called it "gospel amnesia;" we forget that we owe our very lives to God. This is one reason why it is wise to "preach the gospel to

ourselves” every day. We get so caught up in the present that we become near-sighted - focused on this earthly life, instead of our true, eternal life with God. It reminds me of what the Spirit said to the church of Laodicea, **(LCD) “So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”** O how we are susceptible to this lukewarmness in this “Vanity Fair” we call America! God, open our eyes to the reality of eternal judgment that we’ve been saved from!

We also need God to open our eyes to the reality of the eternal ticker tape parade to come too. Verse 10, *“Therefore, in light of the possibility of being spiritual blinded, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* Notice Peter repeats the word “effort,” make every effort, give it your all, to confirm your calling and election. The word “confirm” is a legal one that refers to validating a will. It’s also in the middle voice, which means it is something done to or for oneself. In other words, “make every effort to confirm for yourself.” It isn’t that we’re making God surer of our salvation, we’re making ourselves more sure! Peter is not saying that our salvation depends on our efforts, he’s saying that our assurance of salvation depends on our efforts.

I’m reminded of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians, **(LCD) “If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.”** You don’t want to barely enter into the kingdom of God! No! Instead, if we do these things, we won’t stumble, meaning we won’t have any serious interruptions on the path to glory, and we’ll receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of Jesus! In other words, spend your life exerting yourself for God’s eternal kingdom, not your earthly one, and you won’t be sorry.

This week has been hard for our British friends with the passing of their beloved **(LCD) Queen Elizabeth**. She was queen for 70 years, the longest ever, and she was a great lady. But one thing that caught my attention was a CNN video entitled, **(LCD) “70 Years of Service in 3 Minutes.”** To me, it highlighted just how fleeting this life is...even for a queen! Even the greatest earthly kingdom can’t last forever! Don’t waste your life pursuing earthly kingdoms and glory! The queen didn’t. Look at this tribute from an Anglican deacon, **(LCD) “She was a thorough Christian. The Queen wrote her own speeches every Christmas and she always managed to get in there that the person who inspired her was Jesus Christ. And that, I think, is why she led a life of service and duty and obligation—a servant-leader, if you will. She put Him at the heart of everything. And I think that’s important for someone who’s a global leader because they have to be accountable to someone. And for the Queen that was Christ.”** How about you? **(LCD) How’s your spiritual progress report?** What will be said of us when we pass away? May we follow the queen’s good example so that we can look forward to a heavenly ticker tape parade in the eternal kingdom of the one we’re accountable to, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!