

Your Number One Priority in 2008...and Beyond.

Read 2 Peter 1:1-11

¹ *Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:* ² *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.* ³ *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.* ⁴ *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.* 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, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, 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 if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.* ¹⁰ *Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,* ¹¹ *and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Introduction

Did you catch the way Peter greets his audience? “To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ ***have received a faith as precious as ours.***” If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have so much to be thankful for. Implied in that phrase are two great realities: One is the reality of your ***past forgiveness*** because of the cross work of Jesus Christ. When you placed your faith in the One who lived a sinless life and then died and rose again as your Substitute, your sins were forgiven—fully and finally. The *other* great reality is that of the ***future hope*** you have when Jesus Christ comes again and finishes His saving work in you by transforming you into His likeness. Those two great realities are the bookends of the Gospel or the Good News of what Christ did to rescue you from your sin. But as precious as these two realities are, you and I face a tremendous challenge. [Slide 1]

It is the challenge of the Gospel Gap—a huge gap that exists in the ***here-and-now*** between your *past forgiveness* and our *future hope*. This gap occurs when you fail to make the connection between your *past forgiveness* and *future hope* and the *everyday* problems you face. Let me illustrate by raising some questions:

1. What does the Gospel have to say to a wife or husband who is facing significant difficulties in their marriage?
2. What does the Gospel have to say to parents of a rebellious teenager—especially when they are at a point where they seem to have run out of options?
3. How does the Gospel apply to someone who has just gotten a pink slip from their employer and there are few if any prospects of being hired in the same field of experience or expertise?

How you decide to fill these and other “here-and-now” gaps will make all the difference in 2008—and beyond. Peter talks about this in verse 9. He is concerned that there are many professing followers of Christ who are not producing what God expects—namely a harvest of righteousness that grows out of this *precious* faith they have in Jesus Christ.

So what keeps this from happening? ***There is a lack of consistent growth—a lack of applying the Gospel to everyday life*** (which Peter describes in verses 5-7: “*add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control...*”). Peter is saying: Here is what the normal Christian life is supposed to look like—a life of continual growing and changing—or what we sometimes call the doctrine of *progressive sanctification*. Peter is saying that we ***all*** need this. We ***all*** need to be growing. There no exceptions.

And what keeps us from growing like this? Notice verse 9: “*But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*” Brothers and sisters, the problem is that there is a serious case of ***identity amnesia*** in the body of Christ. We so easily forget who we are, and therefore we fail to see the ***goal*** to which God is committed in our lives. So we manufacture our own short-sighted goals—and we interpret our experiences through the false lenses of these short-sighted goals. And we seek our identity in our jobs; in our grades; in our athletic achievements; through acceptance from others; in having or a boyfriend or girlfriend; in our marriages; or in having a model family. These things are not necessarily wrong. But they do not ultimately define who we are.

The bottom line is this: if you forget who you are, you will always be seeking to replace your identity with something else. You will continually be seeking to fill the Gospel gap with all the wrong stuff. And in so doing, you will tragically miss the “here-and-nowness” of the Gospel. So for the next few minutes, let’s listen carefully to five powerful truths that are critical for your growth in 2008...and beyond. [PRAY]

I. Understand Who You Are (vs. 1-2).

If you have trusted Christ to be your Savior and King...

A. You are part of a community of faith. (1b) Look at verse 1: “...*To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.*” You aren’t just a lone ranger. You are part of something much bigger. There are many ways of describing this in the Bible. A key description implied in verse 2 is...

B. You are Christ’s bride (2)

The term, bride, is not mentioned specifically here. But it is certainly implied. Notice the terminology. *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

The word, knowledge, is not *informational* knowledge (like the false teachers that Peter would later confront in this book). It is a *relational* kind of knowledge. A *true* knowing. An *intimate* knowledge. The kind of knowledge that a husband and wife experience in the marriage relationship. For example, in Genesis 4:1 in the KJV (which gives a more literal translation) it states: “*And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain...*”). The “knowingness” that Adam and Eve here is not a factual knowledge—but the most intimate knowledge that a married couple can experience.

So let’s think about that for a moment. One of the key ways of understanding your identity is that you are Christ’s bride. And as Christ’s bride, you are the object of His love, a love deeper than you can even comprehend. A love that is so deep that Christ gave up His life for you so that he could not only forgive you, but give you an *extreme makeover*. Just look at Eph. 5:25-27:

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

That is what is going on in the *here-and-nowness* of your life. The Gospel says that *not only* are you forgiven, *not only* do you have a future hope, but your Savior, your Bridegroom is lovingly preparing you for *the* Wedding Day. The Wedding Feast of the Lamb!! (In light of that, consider Romans 8:28-30).

I have to be honest with you. I don’t naturally think of myself as Christ’s Bride. And when I do, I don’t often *feel* like a very pretty one. So even though this truth is there, it is tempting to just sort of ignore it because on too many days, it can seem *so out of reach*. That is why Peter goes on to say that you need to....

- II. Understand all that God has provided for you (vs. 3-4).
 - A. *Everything* you need for a **godly** life (not just *eternal* life, but life *here-and-now*—in the midst of the harsh realities of a fallen world).
 - B. Specifically, His power and **promises**.

I don’t think anyone here would doubt that God is powerful. Infinitely powerful. Yet how many times do we really see His power displayed in our lives? We may even pray for it. But are we praying for His power to do what He ultimately *promised* it would do? To change us from proud, self-centered, self-serving, self-exalting people pursuing our own dreams into people who will settle for nothing less than *His dream*—to become a pure bride who is becoming more and more like Her *Bridegroom!*

So how does that happen? God's *promises* are the delivery system for His power! His promises *remind* you of your identity and His purposes in your life and therefore empower you to experience a change in the very nature of *how you respond to a difficult situation*.

It is God's power mediated through His promises...

C. That enable you to change. Peter states that change in two ways:

1. Positively: "...*you may participate in the divine nature...*" In other words, *put on the character of Christ* (You see this illustrated in the Fruit of Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24) and also in verses 5-7 as we will see in just a few minutes).
2. Negatively: *Escape the worldly corruption that comes through your fallen desires*.

I want to unpack this in more detail because this is where I think the text gets really practical. Peter describes the Christian life as an *escape from worldly corruption*. What does Peter mean by the word, corruption? Corruption is simply the "default" mode of life in a sin-cursed world. In the physical world, it is evident in the so-called 2nd Law of Thermodynamics—which is an observation that things left to themselves run down or degenerate. That includes cars and toys and computers and furnaces just to name a few things. It is why living organisms eventually die. In the spiritual world, people left to themselves also degenerate. God's *common grace* mercifully slows down the process. But in the end, corruption would win if not for the *special grace* of the Gospel.

But notice something. While Peter is saying that we can escape the corrupting effects of sin, it is by no means automatic. In fact, because of Adam's sin, you were born already *corrupt* and in a process of *ongoing corrupting*. And even after you are saved and become a new person, the residual effects of this corruption (a.k.a. the flesh) are present and at work in you. How? Through your fallen desires. Paul echoes the same truth in Eph. 4:22. Listen carefully to what he says:

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is **being corrupted by its deceitful desires**.*

Notice the tense Paul uses. "Which is *being* corrupted..." Paul is saying that *even after you come to faith in Christ*, your flesh or the "hangover" of your old self can actually lead you into further corrupt activity or thinking. How? Through your *desires* that *deceive* you!! Through desires that make promises that if you can obtain them, you

think you will be happy. Through desires that can even appear to be decent and respectable. But they are desires that are corrupting you because they are taking your eyes off of your identity and off of God's ultimate purposes for you!

Illustration 1: What does it look like when you are having difficulty in your marriage—and your fallen desires are running the show? For example, your frustrated desire for respect or love (neither of which is intrinsically evil) may cause you to try to change your spouse through subtle manipulation or outright revenge. Your desires may cause you to raise your voice—*or* they may just direct you to give your spouse the silent treatment. But one thing for sure, you will *miss* God's agenda and the opportunity to *escape* the corrupting effects of sin that come through your fallen desires.

On the other hand, what would it look like if you meditated on God's promises and caught a glimpse of the gracious work He is up to in your life in the midst of even your *deepest* disappointments? The marriage problems wouldn't necessarily disappear. But your determination to prove Christ's promises would unleash His power in you and enable you to respond in a *very* different way. A way that points to God's power and grace *at work in you!*

Illustration 2: What does it look like when your kids are rebelling against you—and your fallen desires are in charge of damage control? I am not saying that you as a parent don't need to respond. What I am saying is that whatever your identity is, whatever goal you have tucked away in the inner recesses of your heart will govern *how* you respond. If your identity is found in your self-image as a model parent, you will be embarrassed, you will be full of self-pity, and you will find any number of convenient ways to manipulate the situation. You may scream, yell, threaten—or something even worse. Or you may just weave a sad story that recites all the wonderful things you have ever done for your child that finally concludes with: "After all I have done for you—and *this* is what I get!?"

But what would it look like if you were firm in your identity in Christ and His unfailing purposes—even at a time like this? If you believe that He is on site 24/7 and that nothing voids His promises—not even the heart-break of a self-destructing, rebellious teen—you can begin to identify the areas of your life in which He wants to show His strength in your weakness as He develops *His* character in your life.

Which brings us to the next truth...

- III. Understand what God is up to in your life right now (vs. 5-7)
A. A process of *radical* change (vs. 5b-7).

This is a very interesting section. I do not have time to go in much depth. But I don't want you to miss what Peter is explaining here. He is giving you a glimpse of how God's process of sanctification works in the life of the believer. Just as the process of corruption leads us into further and further spiritual decline—God's sanctifying grace does just the opposite. What is especially unique about Peter's list of virtues here is that not only do they give us a list of the Spirit's fruit in our lives. They show us how one step of change leads to the next.

Faith (as James points out) must express itself in action (or *goodness*). The outworking of our faith in good works leads to a deeper *knowledge* of God. And knowing him more and more in turn deepens our knowledge of ourselves and thus shows us where we need to exercise *self-control*. This in turn points us to our need for *perseverance*, which is developed by keeping in view the goal of verse 4—*godliness*. This attitude to God produces a new openness to our fellow-Christians (namely, *brotherly kindness*), which in turn blossoms into a greater pursuit and practice of biblical *love*—which is the ultimate characteristic of our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The ultimate outcome of genuine faith is the cultivation of our Bridegroom's love in us

Can you see what the Lord is up to? Are you getting excited about His agenda—even in the midst of our fallen circumstances? But while He is doing all this, He does not do so *apart* from you, but *through* you and *in* you and *with* your involvement. In other words, this is...

- B. A process that requires your intense *effort* (v. 5a)

Two expressions worth noting here:

1. *Make every effort...*Speaks of diligent effort; “do your very best.”
2. “*Add to your faith...*” This word, “add” is a very interesting word. It has the idea of lavish provision, and is a verb used in classical times to describe *rich citizens financing a theatrical performance*.

Read Revelation 19:7-8:

⁷ *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.* ⁸ *Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)* Notice how the Bride is involved in the preparation for her Wedding day with Christ.

The same Scriptures that tell us that salvation comes by faith in Christ *alone* also tell us that such a faith will not **remain** alone. The kind of faith that saves us is not a passive faith. It is intensely active and inevitably results in the lifelong pursuit of *growing and changing* as we prepare ourselves for our Wedding day!!

Are you getting the implications of what Peter is saying? It takes **effort** to get in the Word, to latch on to Christ's promises and make them your own; to think long-term and find joy in what Christ is doing in my life. Your flesh is so powerful and your desires are so persuasive that it is amazing how quickly you and I can suffer from **identity amnesia**. About as quick as a blow to the head and off you go wondering after some short-term desire—the desire for the approval of others; the desire for a problem-free life; the desire to be free from traffic jams.

That is why the *scariest thing* you will could ever hear coming out of your mouth is: **"I don't have time to pray or get in the Word."** If you really believe that, then you have **no idea** how powerful the corruption is that you have to face each day. When you are thinking that way, you are **clueless** about how desperately you need to be focused on what God is doing in your life. Which is why Peter brings up the next point in this passage....

IV. Understand what is at stake (vs. 8-9)

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 if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*

In essence, Peter is saying...

A. Pursue spiritual growth and enjoy a **productive** life.

If you put your hope in Christ's promises and give yourself to His agenda, you will have a productive life, *whatever* your circumstances may be. Because ultimately what counts is seeing *God change you*. It's not that it's wrong to desire a romantic marriage. And obviously God is glorified when a Christian husband and wife pursue a God-honoring, loving relationship with each other.

But your productiveness is not ultimately determined by the success or failure of your spouse. I have seen more than one spouse try to ride the spiritual coattails of their godly spouse—and they may have even reaped the benefits of being married to such a spouse—but sadly their own life was marked by little or no spiritual growth. They had what they wanted—but they never recognized and pursued **what God wanted**. That, brothers and sisters, is a **tragedy!**

On the other hand, if you find your greater identity in your *marriage to Christ*, and His determination to change you into His image, you will bear fruit that may not only impact your marriage—but to marriages well beyond your own. And the worst thing that could possibly happen to you is that you will *become like Jesus!!* On the other hand, you can...

B. Ignore God’s resources and live an *unproductive* life.

Focus on your own short-sighted goals—and they will blind you to God’s greater goal. Be obsessed with success at work or having athletic kids who will get a sports scholarships or play professional sports—and even if all that would happen—you will wind up with little to show for all your effort.

Peter concludes with an invitation in verses 11-12.

V. Get involved with God in filling the gap (vs. 10-11)

[Slide 2] “**Mind the gap.**” (Explain the problem in subways and the sign in the London subway).

There are three take home truths here to help you mind the gap:

A. Your growth is the ultimate *proof* of your Christian profession.

“Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure...”

In alluding to Luke 6:44, "Every tree is known by his own fruit" Thomas Watson makes this observation in his treatise entitled: The Beatitudes:

*Christ nowhere says, Y[ou] shall know the tree by its leaves or flowers, or y[ou] shall know men by their talk, or y[ou] shall know them by the good story they tell of their experiences, or y[ou] shall know them by the manner and[tone] of their speaking, and emphasis and feeling of expression, or by their tears or emotions— but **by their fruits shall y[ou] know them.** (Watson, T. BEAUTITUDES. p.155)*

B. Your growth in Christ will keep you from *falling*. *“For if you do these things, you will never fall...”*

If you have placed your faith in Christ alone, but you struggle at times with assurance, keep on pursuing Christ’s goal—and you will *never* fall!

C. Your growth in Christ will bring you to a *rich* reward. *“...you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

Can you imagine what that day will be like? Just look for yourself in the crowd at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. You have endured the trials of living in a sin-cursed world. And here you are standing in the Presence of your Bridegroom. Faith has given way to ultimate reality. As you look back to your life on earth, what are thinking about? And what are you celebrating now? Your good job? Your nice house? Your model family? Your financial ease? None of those things will ultimately matter. Because you are in the palace of your Bridegroom, standing before His throne, crowned and reigning with Him. There is no thirst. No hunger. No suffering. No tears. There is no guilt. No need to confess or make restitution. No relationships that need to be reconciled. No more thoughts to correct. No more justice to be sought. No more desires gone astray. Your restoration is complete. You have been completely transformed. You are now like your Savior. Totally righteous and holy. This is where your Bridegroom is taking you. And you will forever be celebrating the one thing worth living for—the Lamb and His salvation.

What is your priority in 2008? To begin to close the Gospel gap in your life by claiming God's promises and by getting with other brothers and sisters where you can continually remind each other of God's promises no matter what your circumstances are. That is why our Small Groups are becoming such a vital part of ministry here at Cornerstone. If you want to learn more about them, see Pastor Bob or myself afterwards out in the Gathering Space.

If you want to learn more about the Good News of how people can have a personal relationship with this wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ, we have counselors here at the front who would be happy to talk to you.