

Spiritual Growth – God’s Gracious Initiative, Our Earnest Response
Part 2 – Sharing His Nature, Secured by His Promises
2 Peter 1:4

Review

- 2 Peter 1:3 – “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”
- God shares himself generously so we may know him intimately and fully, which is the purpose of our spiritual formation.
- This work is initiated, sustained, and assured by God himself (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4; Ephesians 2:8-10)

Contrasting Self-Dependence vs. God-Dependence

Self-Dependence	God-Dependence
Relies on discipline and effort as ultimate means	Relies on God's grace working through spiritual practices
Focuses on mastering techniques	Focuses on abiding in Christ
Measures success by self-improvement	Measures formation by increasing dependence on God
Fueled by fear of failure or self-justification	Rooted in rest, trust, and worship
Can lead to discouragement when progress stalls	Allows for grace in weakness and sustained formation
Treats spiritual growth like a project or goal	Treats growth as fruit of a relational life with God

J. I. Packer: “There is unspeakable comfort in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love, and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on his prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery can now disillusion him about me, in the way that I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me. There is, certainly, great cause for humility in the thought that He sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow human beings do not see (and I am glad!), and that He sees more corruption in me than that which I see in myself (which, in all good conscience, is enough). There is, however, equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that, for some unfathomable reason, He wants me as his friend, and desires to be my friend, and has given his Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose.”¹

Today’s lesson text:

2 Peter 1:4: “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Three Key Concepts

- God’s promises
- Divine nature
- Escape corruption

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (IVP Books, 1993), 37.

Our special affinity with false promises

Social psychologists have long noted that Western culture, more so than non-Western, has a special affinity with anxiety, even calling it “the most typical Western emotion.”² It is rooted in the tension between presumed entitlements of individualism, freedom, autonomy, scientific confidence, and the capacity to shape one’s future and control risks vs. the unpredictable realities that call these into question. On the one hand there is an uncertain future and the randomness of human existence, but on the other is the Western belief in attainable self-realization, self-gratification, and the capacity to make sense of one’s experience. We are caught in “the acrobatic exercise of coping with the unpredictability of the future, and the inconsistency of a pervasive attitude that we can plan our whole lives.”³

Tim Keller: In the 1830s, when Alexis de Tocqueville recorded his famous observations on America, he noted a “strange melancholy that haunts the inhabitants . . . in the midst of abundance.”² Americans believed that prosperity could quench their yearning for happiness, but such a hope was illusory, because, de Tocqueville added, “the incomplete joys of this world will never satisfy [the human] heart.” This strange melancholy manifests itself in many ways, but always leads to the same despair of not finding what is sought.⁴

The danger of false promises

- *False promises form us into spiritually misshapen lives* – Every false promise we believe forms our desires, habits, and character. False promises do this by offering counterfeit hope, misdirecting our loves, and gradually conforming us to the world. False promises pressure us into the world’s mold (Romans 12:2). Instead of spiritual transformation, we experience deformation, a warped version of who God made us to be.
- *False promises distort our desires* – False promises appeal to our deep longings for security, identity, and purpose, but deceive us into basing our pursuit of these things on means that cannot ultimately deliver (e.g., wealth, status, pleasure, control). These promises train our hearts to chase the wrong treasure (Matthew 6:21). Our desires are reshaped around idols rather than God, forming a life of striving, comparison, and discontent.
- *False promises shape our habits in misleading ways* - Whatever promises we believe will fulfill us become the basis for our habits. These habits form us over time. If the false promise is, “Social approval will make me whole,” then we may cultivate habits of performance, image control, or fear of rejection. If the lie is, “Comfort is what life is about,” then we may avoid risk, service, or discipline. We become shaped by repetition of false rhythms rather than the holy habits that shape us in Christlikeness.

² Paoli Rebughini, “A Sociology of anxiety: Western modern legacy and the Covid-19 outbreak. *International Sociology*, 36 (4), 556. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0268580921993325> (accessed 2024-02-06).

³ Paoli Rebughini, 558.

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* (Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition), location 110.

- *False promises numb us to the truth* - As we believe and live into false promises, they gradually dull our hunger for what is true and real. Lies, when internalized, make the truth seem distant, boring, or even offensive. We become darkened in our understanding and our hearts harden. We lose sensitivity to God's voice, and this leads us into indulgence. (Ephesians 4:18-20)
- *False promises create fragile Identities* - False promises form identities rooted in things that can fail such as performance, possessions, appearance, or status. When these false sources of identity collapse (a failed relationship, job loss, rejection), we are left unmoored. We become insecure, anxious, or defensive because we are built on what cannot last. God's promises give us an unshakable identity. False promises offer fragile identities.

God's promises

Essential point: God's promises allow us to *participate in the divine nature* and *escape the corruption in the world that is caused by evil desire*.

Three key concepts:

1. The purpose of spiritual growth (formation) is being transformed into the image of Christ
 - 2 Peter 1:4 – the divine nature
 - Galatians 4:19 – “I am again in the pangs of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in you.”
 - Galatians 2:20
2. God's promises assure us that nothing can separate us from His intent to do this.
 - Romans 8:28-39
 - Philippians 1:6
 - Romans 5:3-4
 - 1 John 1:9-2:2
3. Embedding these promises into our hearts guards us against believing the lies that corrupt God's intent.
 - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
 - Galatians 6:7-8
 - John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*
Deceptive ideas → that play to disordered desires → that are normalized in a sinful society

Spiritual Formation: God's Promises vs. False Promises⁵

Formation Area	Shaped by God's Promises	Shaped by False Promises
Core Desires	Oriented toward Christ, shaped by love, joy, peace, and holiness	Distorted by idols like success, pleasure, approval, and control
Habits and Practices	Grounded in grace-driven disciplines that deepen dependence on God	Driven by performance, avoidance, image-management, or indulgence
Response to Truth	Enlightened, receptive, increasingly attuned to God's Word and Spirit	Desensitized, hardened, confused by lies and cultural narratives
Sense of Identity	Rooted in being God's beloved, secure in Christ's finished work	Built on fragile things like appearance, success, or others' opinions
Vision of the Good Life	Focused on eternal joy and participation in the divine nature	Defined by temporal pleasures and self-realization
Response to Weakness	Grace-filled and hopeful, trusting in God's sustaining power	Fearful, discouraged, or prideful depending on outcomes
End Goal of Formation	Christlikeness and participation in God's nature (2 Peter 1:4)	Deformation into a distorted version of who God intended us to be

Series – Spiritual Growth, God's Gracious Initiative, Our Earnest Response

- Lesson 1, Carlus Gupton, June 15 – God's Initiative to Know Him Fully, 2 Peter 1:3-4
- Lesson 2, Carlus Gupton, June 22 – God's Initiative: Sharing His Nature, Secured by His Promises, 2 Peter 1:3-4
- Lesson 3, Carlus Gupton, June 29 – Our Earnest Response: The Relationship Between Character and Diligence, 2 Peter 1:5-7
- Lesson 4, Carlus Gupton, July 13 – Our Earnest Response: The Relationship Between Persistence and Holy Memory, 2 Peter 1:8-11
- Lesson 5 – John Mark Hicks, July 20 – Our Earnest Response: Confirming our Call, 2 Peter 1:10-11
- Lesson 6 – Wilson McCoy, July 27 – Our Earnest Response: The Dynamic of Maturing, 2 Peter 1:5-7
- Lesson 7 – Carlus Gupton, August 3 – Our Earnest Response: The Grounding of Sound Theology, 2 Peter 1:12-21.

⁵ Refined by author from ChatGPT, response to "Using the lesson outline, create a chart that describes the difference in our spiritual formation when we embrace God's promises vs. believing in false promises," *OpenAI*, June 20, 2025.