

Spiritual Growth – God’s Gracious Initiative, Our Earnest Response

Part 4 – Our Earnest Response: The Relationship Between Persistence and Holy Memory, 2 Pet. 1:8-9

Review

- 2 Peter 1:3-4 – “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. 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.”
- God shares himself generously so we may know him fully, the goal of spiritual formation.
- This work is initiated, sustained, and assured by God himself (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4; Ephesians 2:8-10)
- God’s promises allow us to *participate in the divine nature* and *escape the corruption in the world that is caused by evil desire*.
- Spiritual formation is cooperating with God’s work in me, with disciplined energy, to become increasingly more godlike. Peter presents a dynamic model of formation that is:
 - Motivated by grace (v. 5a)
 - Characterized by disciplined effort (v. 5a)
 - Designed for transformation (vv. 5b–7)

Lesson text, 2 Pet. 1:8-9, expressed as a contrast:

Positive Growth Outcome – v. 8	Negative Growth Outcome – v. 9
“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.”	“But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.”

Positive Growth Outcome

- Condition – “If you possess these qualities...”
- Expectation – “...in *increasing measure*...”
- Result – “...they will keep you from being *ineffective or unproductive in your knowledge*...”

Principles

- Remember, *knowledge*, in this case is “knowledge of *him*” (1:3). It is the deep relational knowledge of God (“participate in the divine nature”) that he “calls” or invites us into. But this promise of God is contingent on our “making every effort” (1:5) to enter this disciplined journey of development.
- God could not be known if he did not continually welcome us warmly into himself. But like any relationship between living beings, true relationship cannot occur without reciprocal response.
- Our sincere efforts at developing Christ-like character (“add to your faith, virtue,” etc.) are our *reciprocal* response that gives God clear indication that he can trust us with revealing deepening layers of himself. God wants our relationship with him to emerge out of mutual love, which disallows forcing himself upon us. It must be a recurring dynamic where God makes gracious initiative, which is met by our earnest response in *increasing measure*, which is met by more of his gracious initiative.
- Otherwise, our relationship with him becomes *ineffective* (Gk., *argos*, idle or lazy) and *unproductive* (“unfruitful,” failing to reflect the “crop” of God’s likeness in us).

Negative Growth Outcome

- Condition – “but whoever does not have them is *near-sighted and blind*”
- Contributing factor – “*forgetting* that they have been cleansed from their past sins.”

Principles

- Look at the connection between spiritual blindness, forgetting, and insensitivity to sin. *A key to spiritual growth is clear vision and holy memory, especially memory of one's story of overcoming sin.*
- Three ideas:
 - **Clear vision** – God wants our vision of unfolding glory to be constantly in front of us (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 1:18-19)
 - **One's story with sin** – Sin and unrighteousness can blur this vision (Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:18). This is why God makes the provision of continual cleansing of sin (1 John 1:5-7). There is a close relationship between our *recognition* and *confession* of sin and the *light* and *clarity* of our spiritual vision. God not only allows us to see but uses the clean lens to magnify our vision.
 - **Holy memory** – Peter indicates that *remembering our cleansing from past sin* is an important key to ongoing spiritual union with God. We go back to the memory of Christ's work that saved us, to the point in time that we were convicted and drawn to Jesus, washed in his blood, and united with him. This holy memory is a spiritual anchor. There are many classic songs that capture this theme – Amazing Grace, At Calvary, Alas and Did My Savior Bleed, O Happy Day, He Touched Me. It is also carried over in passages like 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

Six varied paths of conversion

1. Confirmation – *Faith embraced from an early age and confirmed by conscious choice*

Some grow up in households or churches where the story of Christ is woven into daily life. Their journey is less about a dramatic break from the past and more about owning what they've been taught—embracing it personally as they mature. This is the Timothy path (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15), where sincere faith is handed down through family or community, then confirmed by personal conviction.

Example: A young woman who participates in years of children's church and youth ministry, who later, as a college student, makes a baptismal commitment with adult resolve and clearer vision.

2. Clarification – *Faith refined or awakened by new light*

Some always sense a draw to God, even live with reverence and moral conviction, but at some point gain clarity about the gospel, the meaning of baptism, or what full surrender to Christ entails. This leads to a decision that feels less like a first-time belief and more like finally *understanding* what God has been saying all along.

Example: The person who grew up in a devout Catholic family, always reverent toward God, but comes to see adult baptism by immersion as a personal, informed act of surrender after studying Scripture more deeply.

3. Correction – *Faith redirected after sincere but misguided devotion*

Some are sincere but misinformed, following religious or moral paths that miss the fullness of the gospel. In these cases, God lovingly corrects their trajectory, not to invalidate their past, but to bring it into alignment with truth. Think of Apollos in Acts 18:24–28, who “knew only the baptism of John” but was gently taught “the way of God more accurately.”

Example: A Jehovah's Witness who deeply loves God but comes to see the beauty of the divinity of Christ and the gift of grace, and responds with baptism according to the biblical gospel.

4. **Convergence – A life of many threads drawn together in surrender**

This path often involves winding roads — starts and stops, belief and doubt, rebellion and curiosity — but over time, the person begins to recognize that all those moments were leading to an unavoidable crossroads. The pull of grace becomes too strong to resist. God’s providence in their story becomes clear in hindsight, revealing how even detours were preparing the way.

Example: Someone who wandered through secularism, flirted with various religions, experienced relational trauma, and then through a series of connections, readings, and inner awakenings, finally sees the hand of Christ behind it all and surrenders.

5. **Radical Conversion – A decisive and dramatic turning point**

Some are jolted into belief by a powerful spiritual experience or crisis — often sudden, intense, and disruptive to their old life. These are like Saul’s “Damascus Road” moment, often marked by tears, repentance, and complete reorientation. They may not fully understand the experience at first, but the heart change is undeniable.

Example: An addict who hits rock bottom and, through an encounter with a friend or an unexpected word of Scripture, is arrested by God’s Spirit and begins a new life almost overnight.

6. **Compassionate Awakening – God’s love is made real through others**

Some people are won not by argument or crisis, but by *compassion*, by seeing the gospel lived through the kindness, humility, or forgiveness of Christians. It isn’t a theological revelation that shifts them, but an encounter with Christ through his people. They are loved into faith.

Example: A man indifferent to religion becomes curious about Christianity after a Christian co-worker continues showing patience, forgiveness, and grace in stressful situations, and eventually asks about the source of her peace.

Growing through redemptive vision and holy memory

1. **Cultivate Clear Spiritual Vision (2 Peter 1:9; Ephesians 1:18; 4:18; Romans 1:21)**

- **Problem:** The spiritually stagnant are “nearsighted and blind,” lacking sight of eternal purpose. Romans 1:21 and Ephesians 4:18 show that *darkened understanding* begins when we become ungrateful or hard-hearted, leading to futility of thought and separation from God.
- **Practice:**
 - **Daily reflection on God’s promises and glory** (2 Cor. 3:18): Use journaling or prayer time to write what you “see” of God’s character and how you’re being invited to grow into it.
 - **Pray for vision:** Regularly pray Ephesians 1:18 – “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.”
 - **Guard against spiritual apathy** by recognizing how unconfessed sin or pride clouds our vision. When you lose sight of God’s larger purpose, stop and ask: *What sin or neglect has blurred my vision?*

2. Remember your story of sin and salvation (2 Peter 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 1 John 1:5-7)

- **Problem:** Forgetting our cleansing causes spiritual amnesia. Without remembering the mercy that saved us, we drift into performance or apathy.
- **Practice:**
 - **Write your redemption testimony:** Like Paul in 1 Timothy 1:12–17, trace the “before” and “after” of your walk with Christ. Reflect on how grace transformed you.
 - **Return often to the foot of the cross:** Read and sing songs that stir “holy memory” — *O Happy Day, At Calvary*, etc.
 - **Keep a visible reminder:** A photo, Bible verse, or object that brings to mind your cleansing moment—where God broke in with light (cf. 1 John 1:5-7).

3. Practice ongoing confession and cleansing (1 John 1:5-7)

- **Problem:** Fellowship with God requires *walking in the light*, including being honest about sin.
- **Practice:**
 - **Begin each week with confession:** Don’t just confess individual sins, but reflect on how your heart may have grown cold or proud. Then let the light of Christ renew you.
 - **Link confession to growth:** View confession not as guilt management but as vision-restoration. Every act of confession clarifies your lens to see God’s glory more brightly.

4. Renew growth through gratitude and response (Romans 1:21; 2 Peter 1:5-8)

- **Problem:** Romans 1:21 connects the paths of sin to a failure to *honor God* and *give thanks*.
- **Practice:**
 - **Cultivate daily gratitude:** As a practice of spiritual vision, list daily three evidences of God’s grace at work in you. This keeps your heart tender and your mind alert to God’s presence.
 - **Make every effort (2 Peter 1:5):** Growth isn’t passive. Form habits of “adding to your faith” (virtue, knowledge, self-control...) with intention and prayer, knowing that these open up deeper participation in the divine nature.

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

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- 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.