

Are You Swimming or Drifting
II Peter 1:5-7

This true story appeared in “The Incredible Series” and is titled *Glenda’s Long Swim*. Glenda and Robert Lennon were alone four miles off the coast of Florida fishing from their yacht. Glenda decided to take a swim and soon found the current had carried her too far out from the boat. Hearing her cries for help, Robert, without thinking, dove in and swam to her, but then realized they were both being carried out to sea by the strong current. He was a champion swimmer, but she was not. They made a plan. He would swim against the tide to keep the boat in view until the tide ceased and he could reach the boat. She should save her strength and just float with the tide and he would come and get her. He fought the tide for six hours and just as the boat was about to disappear on the horizon the tide turned and his strokes carried him to the boat exhausted. The sun had set. His searching was futile – he could not find his wife. The next day on one last effort of searching, the search party found his wife – 20 miles out and still alive.

Turning to II Peter 1 this morning we will be considering verses 5-7, but for context I would like us to begin by reading verses 3-4 along with our passage for today.

II Peter 1:3-7

In the two messages dealing with verses 3 and 4 we discovered that God has given us everything we need for godly living through a knowledge of Him. There isn’t anything we lack from Him to help us mature in our faith. We saw from Philippians 1:6 that what He began at salvation, He will complete when Christ returns. He doesn’t mean for us to just drift through life helplessly, skating by on a fire insurance plan. His desire is for us to become more like Christ in character each day.

Along with the right tools to make us godly, tools that He supplies, He has also given us exceedingly great and precious promises that also help us

participate in the divine character. Not that we become little gods, but that these promises, which are beyond our comprehension, will help us mature in faith becoming more like Christ. The more we grow in Christ, the less we are attached to the world and its evil desires.

However, when we come to verses 5-7 it seems as though there is a paradox, a contradiction to verses 3-4. It seems like these verses are telling us that it’s our responsibility to develop godly character. It leaves us with a thoughtful hmmm.

So whose role is it for spiritual maturity?
God’s?
Ours?
A combination of both?

Here’s what I want us to see this morning.
Our motivation is clear
Our method is clear
Our manner is clear

I. OUR MOTIVATION IS CLEAR – v. 5a

I think the answer is in the opening statement of verse 5. “For this reason”, what reason? “For this reason” or because of these “very great and precious promises” and because we have received everything that relates to eternal life and godliness, the Christian has the responsibility to put forth great effort on his part in living for Christ.

I believe Peter is saying that it takes both what God has given and in what the believer does in order for spiritual growth to happen. God doesn’t just wave a magic wand and say a few abracadabras and poof we’re changed automatically into a fully mature Christian. We aren’t to sit around and expect it to just happen. He has given us the tools, but we have to use the tools He has given. They do no good sitting on the workbench in the box.

Let me illustrate from something that happened this past week. David had a report due for history class on an historical figure. He chose Colonel Sanders.

He had told us about the report a couple weeks ago and mentioned that they would have to do an oral report as well as the written report. Last week he mentioned that they could earn extra credit for bringing in something that represented their character. He wanted to take some KFC popcorn nuggets. After he was picked up Thursday morning the day of the report, Robyn received a frantic call because he had forgotten to get his KFC the night before. Now, we as his parents want him to succeed. We ask about deadlines and requirements and do what we can to help him succeed but we also want him to accept responsibility for how well he does.

Like our illustration at the beginning you can swim against the tide of the world in order to come to a likeness of Christ or you can drift along. One will reach his or her destination, the other will drift further and further away.

Just reading the Bible won't make you godly, but it will help you see areas you need to know more about and areas you need to change. It takes effort to study and sometimes you can study and study and still feel like you can't get it. But don't give up, keep at it. Edison tried about a thousand ways to make an incandescent light bulb before he found one that worked.

It can take effort to pray.

It can take effort to get up on a Sunday morning and make it in to church.

But all that effort is important in helping you mature to be like Christ.

It's the same with godly character. It would be great if we woke up the morning after getting saved and poof we were godly in every way.

We never yell at the kids any more.

We don't kick the dog.

We don't get angry sitting behind the guy who won't turn.

We won't get irritated at our boss for making us work late.

We don't lie or have impure thoughts or gossip or

cheat on our taxes.

Life is perfect because we are.

But that's not the case is it.

Besides me, anyone else mess up last week?

So while God has given us everything we need for godliness His Word makes it clear that we have some responsibility in the matter as well. They're outlined in verses 5-7. If we take a lackadaisical or haphazard approach to pursuing godliness we are in danger of floating away to our peril.

Listen to what Pastor John Piper says. "The evidence of God's power has been given to you by faith is that you are making every effort (as verse 5 says) to advance in the qualities of Christ."

Scripture outlines our responsibility and the effort that is involved.

I Corinthians 10:14

Galatians 5:16

Ephesians 4:22-5:4

Ephesians 6:10-18

Colossians 3:8-10, 12-14

I Timothy 6:11-12 (II Timothy 2:22)

James 4:7

This of course isn't a complete list, but it serves to illustrate that our responsibility in pursuing Christ-likeness is a serious one that touches every area of our lives.

In theology we call it sanctification. It simply means to set apart. Its root can be translated into words like saint and holy. There are three aspects to this word for the Christian. Two are definitely or only the work of God. One is the combination of God's equipping and our doing.

The first aspect of sanctification is what we call positional sanctification. This is something that every Christian experiences at the moment of salvation. By your faith in Christ you are positionally set apart into God's forever family, regardless of the degree to which you attain Christ likeness in your character. The thief on the cross

had no opportunity to work on his character yet he was guaranteed eternal life the moment he died, set apart for the family of God. In that regard he was no different than the Apostle Paul or Martin Luther or Billy Graham. Positional sanctification isn't determined by how much like Christ you are in character today only that you are in Christ. I Corinthians 6:11 "But you were washed, you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

Charles Ryrie writes "The tense of the Greek verbs indicates that it's an accomplished fact, not something to be attained."

The last aspect of sanctification is what theologians call ultimate sanctification or complete glorification. This won't occur until we see Christ and we become like Him.

I John 3:2-3

Ephesians 5:26-27

Jude 24-25

In our verse Peter is referring to the second aspect of sanctification. This is what theologians call progressive sanctification. It simply means that today I am more like Christ than I was yesterday. Each day we strive to become more like Christ in actions, attitudes, thoughts and motives. If you want some areas to work on, just go back to the passages noted a few moments ago. It boils down to the admonition we discovered early in Peter's first letter.

I Peter 1:13-16

The admonition to be holy places the responsibility squarely on our shoulders to pursue godliness all the while recognizing and using everything God has given to us to be able to do just that. It's His tools and our toil.

Ryrie continues "Progressive sanctification is the process of maturing in a life that properly reflects our position, while ultimate sanctification occurs when our practice and position are in perfect

accord."

Our motivation is clear.

But then, our method is also clear.

II. OUR METHOD IS CLEAR – v. 5b

"Make every effort to add..."

"Giving all diligence add..."

Here is the means by which we take the responsibility seriously. Here is the blood, sweat, and tears of becoming godlier in character. Paul gives us a great example. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I *press on* to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and *straining* toward what is ahead. I *press on* toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14)

That's the kind of effort required in progressing each day to become more like Christ. He shows us the work required on our part in sanctification. We have a part to play in this journey we call the Christian life. It is to be pursued with diligence. The word "diligence" carries the idea not only of effort but also of urgency, to hasten.

The word "add" means to bring in beside or in addition to, to work alongside of. This doesn't mean that we are adding works to our salvation. It does mean that there should be growing evidence in a changed character that shows we are saved. That's what James meant when he said to work out your own salvation.

The word "add" has an interesting etymology. It comes from the Greek root word for chorus and choreography. The word Peter used was taken from Greek culture and referred to a wealthy person who voluntarily paid for the production of a chorus or play. This person not only paid for the production, but also trained the personnel and equipped the production with everything it needed. The word

speaks of lavishly pouring out everything for the production. No expense was spared.

William Barclay writes in his commentary that Peter used a much strong word in the Greek to describe how lavish or generous the Christian is in adding or supplying the characteristics that follow. He says the word “can mean to equip an army with all the necessary provisions; it can mean to equip the soul with all the necessary virtues for life.” We are to give our all for spiritual growth.

Someone wrote that where there is life there must be growth. We have a Christmas cactus that was given to us about three years ago. It’s been in the original pot for most of that time. But toward the end of last summer we noticed that the leaves started to look withered and it began to look pale. No new growth was occurring. We bought a new pot and replanted it, stuck it out in the greenhouse for a few days and within a week it looked healthy again and began to grow new leaves and flowers.

In his book *Balancing the Christian Life* by Charles Ryrie writes “we must recognize that although sanctification is the work of God it is also the work of the believer.”

Most of you will remember service stations. When you needed gas, you drove up and a little bell went ding inside and out came an attendant. He would gas up your car, wash your windshield and even check your oil. Someone did it all for you.

Now we drive up and pump our own gas, wash our own windshield and check our own oil. Everything we need has been provided for us, but it means that we have to get out of the car and do the work.

Some people view of spiritual growth like the old service stations. They want God to do it all. Drive up to the spiritual gas station and ask God to fill you up. Instead spiritual growth doesn’t happen automatically. It is cooperation between what God has provided for us and our diligently using what

we have been given. This is not in some way adding what we lack, it is growing into what God wants us to become.

He has given us His Word.

He has given us His Spirit.

He has given us prayer.

He has given us His armor.

He has given us fellowship and worship.

Even circumstances are used to help us mature.

Paul tells us where all this effort comes from. Colossians 1:28-29 “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.”

The zeal to add spiritual maturity has a divine origin. My efforts must come from God for only in that way can these character traits be God centered.

Once again we come back to Ryrie’s thoughts here. “Even in verses where the Spirit is mentioned as being involved in carrying out the exhortation the individual is also included as a necessary part of the process. Notice the careful balance between the individual person and the Spirit in the very basic matter of putting to death the deeds of the body: ‘but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live’ (Romans 8:13). The subject of the verb ‘putting to death’ is ‘you’ not ‘Spirit.’ Nevertheless, what I do I do ‘by the Spirit.’ God’s working is not suspended because I work; neither is God’s working always apart from my working. Again the human and divine are joined in the matter of walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).”

We also see this in Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Both our motivation and method is clear.

Peter then provides us clarity on what Christ-like character traits we should be adding. Here we see that our manner is clear.

III. OUR MANNER IS CLEAR – vs. 5c-7

Seven characteristics are given, eight if you include faith. Faith is the foundation stone on which these other traits grow. Faith is what begins us on this journey. James says that faith results in action. These actions require diligent effort to grow. Like Abraham we need to be strong in faith if they are to be evident in the Christian life. Faith is what brings us into the family of God. Faith is the soil in which sanctification grows.

Bruce Barton says that these “qualities move us from a couch-potato faith to a marathon faith.”

Now, before we briefly look at each one of these let me say that they are not building blocks, that unless or until you develop one, the next will not begin. They are characteristics that grow simultaneously, some growing a bit more than others.

A. The Manner of Goodness (Virtue)

Your translation may have “virtue”. Goodness means moral excellence or moral courage to do the right thing. This isn’t just polishing up your moral character by giving it a spit shine. How many of you mothers when your kids were going up took a little spit on a hanky to clean a smudge or two off a dirty face? This moral excellence is produced by the Holy Spirit from within through the transformed heart that begins at the new birth. It’s what Paul calls becoming a new creation.

B. The Manner of Knowledge

In the previous verses Peter used a stronger word for knowledge. We might call it a super knowledge that we gain by experience in knowing God. Here he simply uses the word gnosis. It refers to insight, understanding, wisdom, something that is practical, an ability to apply what one learns. It is truth that is

properly applied. That Peter is talking about Christ like character we can assume he is referring to the ability to apply the truth of God’s Word in practical ways that help us become more like Christ. It’s the kind of knowledge that Paul speaks about in Colossians 1:6 when he encourages the believers to “grow in the knowledge of God.”

In verse 9 there he speaks of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will.

According to II Corinthians 10:9 “we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” by the knowledge of God.

Romans 15:14 says that knowledge makes us competent to spiritually teach instruct others.

From Proverbs 9:10 we see that knowledge of the Holy One leads to understanding.

C. The Manner of Self-Control (Temperance)

It literally means to hold yourself in or back and refers to the ability to hold yourself back from sinful desires.

Solomon had knowledge but he lacked self-control.

I worked with a nurse in hospice who boarded horses. She had a retired race horse she boarded. She said that when riding the horse she could feel the horse holding back from doing what it was bred to do.

That’s self-control. The Greeks emphasized self-effort in self-control, but that never works. If you’ve ever been on a diet you know self-effort never works.

Paul likens self-control to an athlete training for the games. He had to have self-control when it came to diet, exercise, rest and even pleasure if he was to compete well and win the prize. (I Cor. 9:27) We need self-control through the Spirit over sins of the old nature.

D. The Manner of Perseverance (Patience)

This is more than just the ability to patiently wait in a traffic jam or in the doctor's office. It refers to the endurance to keep on going and doing what is right in the midst of hardship. In I Peter 1:20 he says this kind of endurance is commendable before God.

Patience in this regard isn't just enduring in the here and now, this kind of patience has a forward look to it. It knows that it won't last and that there is something better coming.

William Barclay refers to it as "courageous acceptance turning it into another step in an upward way."

E. The Manner of Godliness

This is a genuine reverence for God that results in obedience to His Word with a desire to do what pleases Him. It's loving God so much you don't want to do anything that will grieve Him. It's an awareness of God in everyday life so that it affects behavior to do what is right. It is putting into practice the hymn we sing "*Oh To Be Like Thee.*"

F. The Manner of Brotherly Kindness

This is warmhearted affection for all of God's family. It's a genuine desire to worship with them (Hebrew's 10:24); meet for study, prayer, communion and fellowship (Acts 2:42). It is a fervent care for others, rejoicing with them when they rejoice and weeping with them when they weep. It is showing hospitality, devotion and affection.

G. The Manner of Love

If faith is the beginning, love is the culmination. It is that selfless attitude that is willing to sacrifice for the benefit of others. It always seeks the well-being of others evident in I Corinthians 13:4-8a.

It is patient. It is kind. It is not boastful.

It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking.

It is not easily angered.

It keeps no records of wrong.

It does not delight in evil. It rejoices in the truth.

It always protects. It always trusts. It always hopes. It always perseveres. This love never fails.

It was this kind of love that moved God to do something about our sin by sending His Son to die on the cross.

It was this kind of love for the Father that moved the Son to come to earth and obey His will to go through with the crucifixion.

It was this kind of love Jesus had for us that moved Him to die for all those who opposed Him.

For us, this kind of love allows for the weaknesses and imperfections in others. It is this kind of love that bonds believers together no matter how difficult the suffering or trials that are faced.

It seeks the highest good for others and never settles for doing second best, giving second best.

Where brotherly love loves because of likenesses, this love loves in spite of the differences.

Well that's quite a list and a lot to work on isn't it? The good news is that while we are to "make every effort to add" these characteristics God has given us everything we need to help them grow in us through His Word and by His Spirit. If they are to grow in us depends on whether we are swimming or drifting.