



GREAT GOOD NEWS

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Today, I bring you good news—GREAT Good News!

The angels announced it as such over the hills outside the village of Bethlehem. The prophets before them said the same. And it is in play today.

Over the last three weeks I have preached to you from the first chapter of Peter's second letter.

***² Peter 1:3** By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the one who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence.*

God's calling to our hearts (to *your* heart) came because of His "marvelous glory and excellence." Out of the great goodness of His heart He has invited us to share everlasting life with Him.

***² Peter 1:4** And because of His glory and excellence, He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to **share His divine nature** and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

God's "great and precious promises" don't simply paint a hopeful picture of what's in store for us. They ENABLE you to pursue them and possess them. No matter how broken, how flawed, how lost you may be—for we may have the desire and the will, but we lack the power to consistently perform—God gives power to His chosen people to overcome sin and practice righteousness.

The world in which we live—filled with unrighteousness, injustice, and corruption—is no match for the power of God's promises to deliver His people, to work His righteous plans through you.

Worldly power corrupts, but God's power sets us right, as Paul declared:

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Should we be ashamed of such a Gospel, such good news? No! It is God’s power—His power to forgive, His power to set free, His power to heal, His power to reveal the truth, His power to save.

God’s Righteousness

Romans 1:17 For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel **from faith to faith**, just as it is written, “The righteous by faith will live.”

The Gospel is intended to unveil God’s righteousness (not *yours*). We need that, because we all have misjudged God as unrighteous. Every time we ask Him, “Why?” we have judged Him as unrighteous—as though He harbors secret designs or ulterior motives toward us.

And if we don’t see Him as “right” in all His ways, we won’t give Him control of our lives (because we think ourselves more right than He). Every area of your life where you retain control is an area in which you think God is not right(eous).

When you propose to share the Gospel with others, who have not yet entrusted themselves to the care of Jesus Christ, be careful that your words aim to reveal *the righteousness of God* (and not your own). It’s *your* testimony—your story of faith—but it’s aim is not to lift *you* up, but to lift up Jesus Christ. It’s not “my faith” that is vital, but “my Savior.” Only He has power to awaken faith and rescue a lost soul; my faith (my story) cannot do that.

From Faith to Faith

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FAITH is the **engine** of Christian living.

FAITH is the **end(game)** of following Jesus.

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Faith is how we *begin* our walk with Christ. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

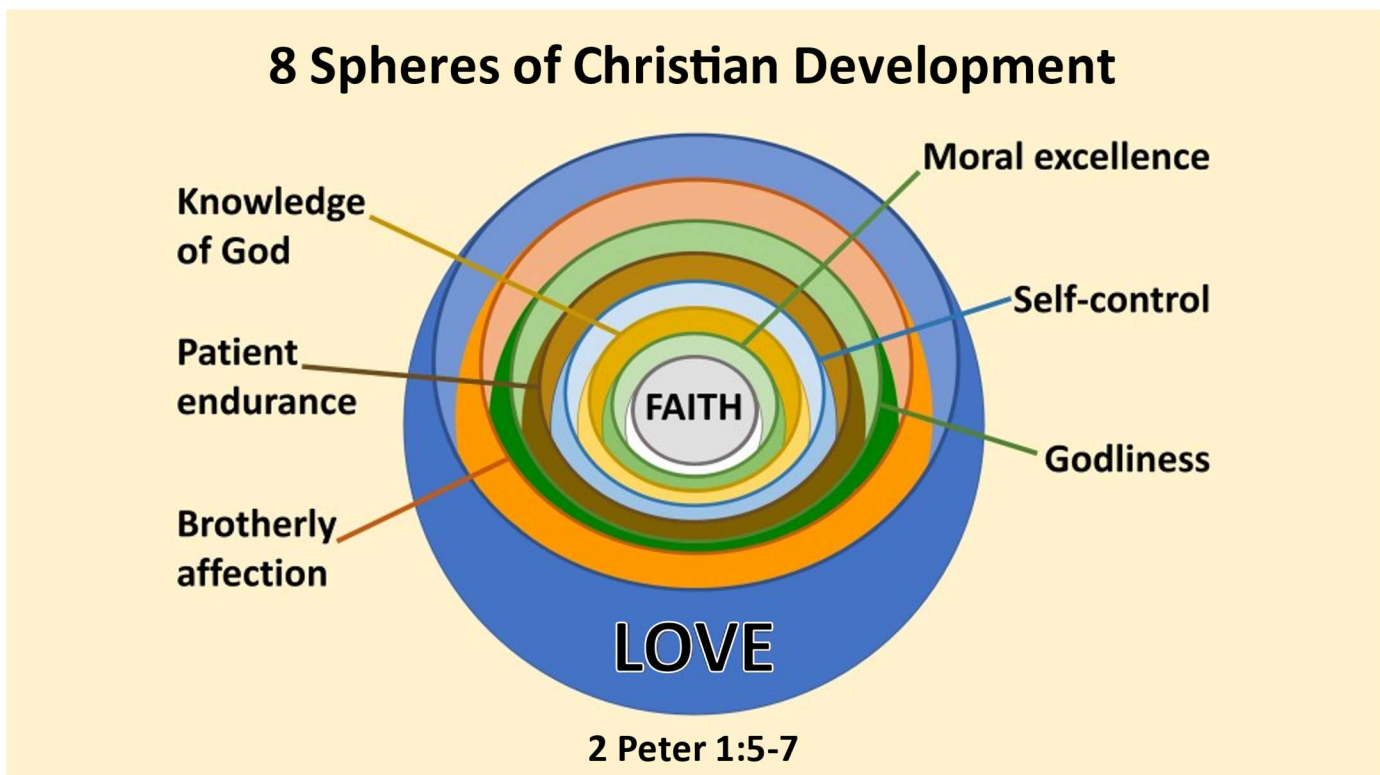
And faith is also how we *proceed* in the Christian life. “I can do all things (that God requires of me) through Christ who gives me strength.”

What’s more, faith is the objective of this Christian journey. It’s not just a tool for getting to the end, but it is the end to which we should aspire, that we may never again doubt God’s righteousness.

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight—the only thing that matters is **faith working through love**.

Your life in Christ is not measured by ritual precision. Only one thing matters: faith working through love, from beginning to end.

The eight elements of Christian living (2 Peter 1:5-7) are like eight nesting spheres (meaning they are not a linear pathway, but a holistic environment—a way of life).



2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your **faith** excellence, to **excellence**, knowledge; *1:6* to **knowledge**, self-control; to **self-control**, perseverance; to **perseverance**, godliness; *1:7* to **godliness**, brotherly affection; to **brotherly affection**, unselfish love.

These are the Christian way that “faith works through love.”

Faith

This is the heart of the Christian life—the beginning, the middle, and the end. God, condescending to human form, in order to stage our redemption from the sin that held us captive. Each of us, in response, personally trusting in the person of Jesus Christ as “*the way, the truth, and the life*”—God’s righteousness.

Moral excellence

Faith has a face, and that face is virtuous integrity. Often, virtuous behavior supplants real faith as a shallow counterfeit. But, virtuous integrity is more than skin deep; it is part and parcel, the whole, through and through, rooted in faith and showing its fruit.

Knowledge

This is knowledge of the truth, of God. It’s the knowledge that sets people free. More than intellectual knowledge *of* God, this is intimate awareness of God in His nearness to us (Emmanuel). It is a bright sense of God, awakened through faith and strengthened by moral excellence.

Self-control

This is not behavioral control by myself, which all of us may exercise from time to time, temporarily. Rather, it is the enduring control of my self by the Holy Spirit’s leadership that transforms my habitual or unconscious behavior into God-pleasing responses to my faith in and knowledge of Him, displayed in moral excellence.

Patient endurance

We will all be tested in life, because our faith must be put to the test—not merely to reveal its weakness, but to tone its strength—like fire tests gold. We need persistent trust when we are tested, to carry us through to the end successfully. In fact, many times, God deems us successful if we simply make it to the other side of the test in one piece through our faith in Him to protect us and see us through. Sometimes, the only change to come from a test is the practice of our faith, which purifies our moral excellence, our knowledge of God, and our self-control.

Godliness

Over time, the repeated experience of faith’s testing develops a submitted devotion to God’s ways. If you are often fighting life, you’re also fighting God, because He is sovereign and He is right. This is godliness—having the “*same mind (attitude) as Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus said, “*I only do what I see the Father doing. I only say what the Father has commanded me.*” Your godliness will be complete when you can say the same.

Brotherly affection

Jesus’ command is to “*love one another*” as He has loved you, to pay forward the merciful and loyal love of God. This is how the Spirit generates unity within the family of God, the Church. The local church is the classroom, the laboratory, for learning to love others as Jesus loved us.

Lessons start with those who share a “*like, precious faith,*” as we’re most likely to succeed there. The course requires faith, moral excellence, awareness of God, self-control, patient endurance, and submission to God’s plan—all along the way. It is an intense class! And you won’t graduate without it.

Love for everyone

The final level of working out our faith and salvation is to demonstrate love for everyone, including neighbors (who aren’t “like us”), and enemies (who don’t like us), just like Jesus did for us. Every other element of this path comes into play at this level; there’s nothing you can afford to leave behind. But this is what it means to be “conformed to the image of God’s Son.”

I have presented these eight elements as nesting spheres, rather than linear steps, because life isn’t strictly linear; you will circle through these elements again and again throughout your lifetime, and not in any particular order. Yet, each layer (lesson) will require all of the elements within it to be successful.

Re-Presenting Jesus

Peter presented these elements succinctly for an overview, but you will encounter them in various extrapolations throughout the Scriptures, especially the apostolic letters of the New Testament. For instance, Paul wrote:

Colossians 3:12 **Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.** ¹³ *Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.* ¹⁴ **Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.** ¹⁵ *And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

¹⁶ *Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom He gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.* ¹⁷ **And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**

This is the task of the faith life: to re-present Jesus Christ to the world around us—a mostly non-verbal way of bearing witness to God’s righteousness.

There will be challenges and opposition—from enemies and from well-meaning friends, who don’t want you to succeed, or who don’t understand the process.

The power of the Holy Spirit is required to make forward motion and to keep your balance. There is no shortcut here.

2 Peter 1:8 For if these things (eight elements) are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately.

We are all at risk of being “*ineffective and unproductive*” in this Christian life. Don’t presume that, once started, it’s a slam dunk. Knowing that we will be judged “*according to our deeds,*” and considering Jesus’ parables about ineffective and unproductive servants should encourage our diligent effort to make our calling and choosing certain, for God is “*able to do exceedingly abundantly above and beyond all that you can ask or imagine, according to the power that works within us.*”

The power of the Holy Spirit is required to make forward motion and to keep your balance. You cannot do it without Him, and He will not do it on your behalf; it is a cooperative effort, a partnership. This is communion. This is the Way.

*Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good,
and what the Lord really wants from you:
He wants you to promote justice, to be faithful,
and to live obediently before your God.*