



FAILING TO DEVELOP

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Jesus and his disciples headed toward Jerusalem. Along the way He saw a fig tree, full of leaves—the look of health. And because it was the season for figs, He approached the tree to gather some fruit, but He found it had not developed any fruit—only the appearance of fruitfulness.

If you've read the story, you probably recall that He cursed the tree, and before the wondering eyes of His disciples, the tree withered and died. They were shocked—by Jesus' action and the suddenness of the result.

This striking story, recorded by both Matthew and Mark, emphasizes the value of fruitfulness (or, the value of fulfilling God's plan) in our lives. And the stern cost of fruitlessness.

Today, let's read about this subject from another perspective—that of Peter, who had watched with astonishment what took place during that walk to Jerusalem (2 Peter 1:1-11):

2 Peter 1:1 This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior.

² May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

In his first letter's introduction, Peter prayed: *May God give you more and more grace and peace.* (1 Peter 1:2)

But in his second letter, Peter emphasized the means of grace and peace in his prayer: *As you grow in your knowledge (personal and experiential, in addition to abstract intellectual) of God and Jesus our Lord.*

Why the shift? To halt the drift!

Full Experience Requires Growth

In his first letter, Peter urged his readers: *“Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.”* (1 Peter

Evidently, they did not pay attention to that admonition, but had demonstrated a lack of intentional pursuit (which Peter was about to address), their faith remained passive, and they had begun to drift into worldliness (even if still religious).

²Peter 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. ⁴And 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 (having escaped) the world’s corruption caused by human desires.*

Notice the spiritual pathway that Peter described...

Our ultimate aim is to KNOW HIM; that is, Jesus.

Getting to know HIM (in His Glory & Excellence) yields great and precious promises from God (favor and blessing).

Those PROMISES lead us to (1) SHARE His divine nature and (2) ESCAPE the world’s corruption (which is the result of living by human desires instead of the will of God).

THIS is the fruit God wants to see in each of our lives—whatever your station in life, whatever your circumstances. For your situation never determines your response—only the nature of your test.

The Growth Plan

²Peter 1:5 *In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, ⁷and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.*

The Amplified Bible gives further light to this process of growth:

[AMP] ⁵For this very reason, adding your diligence [to the divine promises], employ every effort in exercising your faith to develop virtue (excellence, resolution, Christian energy), and in [exercising] virtue [develop] knowledge (intelligence), ⁶And in [exercising] knowledge [develop] self-

control, and in [exercising] self-control [develop] steadfastness (patience, endurance), and in [exercising] steadfastness [develop] godliness (piety, devotion), ⁷ And in [exercising] godliness [develop] brotherly affection, and in [exercising] brotherly affection (phileo) [develop] Christian love (agape).

Here's the equation Peter mapped for us:

God's Promise + My Diligence = Exercise/Application → Development (growth/maturity)

God has a part and I (you) have a part. He provides the empowered promises, and I apply them diligently in my life. Each step along this pathway prepares for and leads to the next.

Diligently exercise faith to develop virtue (moral excellence, goodness, good character) This should be your first aim.

Diligently exercise virtue to develop knowledge (of God, spiritual understanding) Then build your personal fellowship with God.

Diligently exercise knowledge to develop self-control (self-restraint, alert discipline) Then gain victory over your natural impulses.

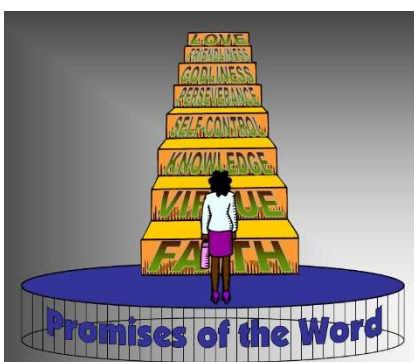
Diligently exercise self-control to develop perseverance (patient endurance, steadfastness) Learn to be faithful in all circumstances, especially when interrupted, hindered, or opposed.

Diligently exercise patient endurance to develop godliness (devotion, reverent wonder) Maintain personal worship and devotion by the power of the Holy Spirit, whom God has given you.

Diligently exercise godliness to develop brotherly affection (warm friendliness) Practice loving ALL the church family, not just those you have a natural affinity with.

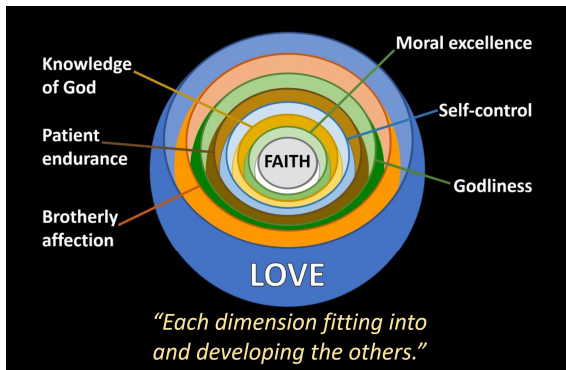
Diligently exercise brotherly affection to develop godly love (generous, unselfish) The ultimate aim is to take His love to outsiders—the indifferent and the opposed.

I have illustrated this process as a series of stairs to climb, based upon the promises of God.



2 Peter 1:8 *The more you grow **like this**, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.*

I have also illustrated this process as nesting spheres:



This is in keeping with Eugene Peterson's translation of the same passage:

[MSG] ⁵ *So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, ⁶ alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, ⁷ warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others.*

Then, Peterson continued:

⁸ *With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus. ⁹ Without these qualities you can't see what's right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books.*

It's high time for all of us to GROW UP. That will mean different things for different people.

Where is the growing edge in your life where the Holy Spirit is working? Where are you feeling the pinch? Where are you feeling the pull?

To what do you need to apply your faith?

- Virtuous behavior?
- Knowledge of God?
- Self-control?
- Patient endurance?
- Personal devotion?
- Brotherly affection?
- Godly love?

Wherever it is, you now know how to get there. Build on God's promises by applying your faith.

Finally, Peter drew the lesson to a conclusion with a challenge and a promise:

^{2 Peter 1:10} So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. ¹¹ Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Work hard... to do these things. If you do, you will never fall away.