

A Call to Growth and Maturity Summary

A Study on 2 Peter 1:1-9

What Is The Study About?

This final study puts all the pieces together. The Sin and Faith Circles Story helped you identify the progression of your sin and faith. It also pointed out how fear and control are the centers of sin. The 15 Pitfalls Study helped you identify WHERE and WHY your thinking may be off. The 2 Peter and Ephesians 4 Contrast Study helped you see how sin matures and eventually chokes out your emotions and leads you into darkness.

This study begins with faith and ends with love. A life lived by faith always results in self-denial and an overflow of love. Think of this study as a study of the life of Jesus. We are called to be imitators of Christ. He modeled for us what holiness and righteous living should look like, and we are being transformed into His image. But remember, Jesus is patient; He does not expect instant perfection. You will be working on this process when you die. Be patient with yourself and continue your pursuit of Him.

How Will This Help Me?

This study is like looking in the mirror. The mirror does not tell you what you want to see; it tells you the truth. As you go through this study, you will see clearly

where you are struggling and where you are conforming to the will of God. Are love and brotherly kindness reflected in your life? If not, you can easily look at the pyramid chart and see what is causing love to be choked off. It may be your lack of faith. It may be you have not realized your goodness and have not found that thing you do that makes you feel alive. I view love and brotherly kindness as the blood pumped through the heart that gives life and health to the body. Any blockages in the other areas restrict the blood flow and can cause spiritual death.

How To Use

I would encourage you to take notes on the first 3 studies. Write down areas where your thinking, behavior, and emotions are not what you desire. Then write these things down in the categories of the pyramid chart. If you realize you believe in God but do not trust him, write that down under faith. If you realize you have never found your “calling” in life, write that down under goodness. If you struggle with gossiping, a critical spirit, or sexual lust, write that down under self-control. Do this for every section of the triangle chart and you will have a visual graph of your life.

Do not be overwhelmed as you look at

your areas of struggle. The chart helps you organize and prioritize your approach. Do not begin by trying to correct a self-control issue or wonder why you may be struggling to persevere under hardships. **Always begin at the base level.** Begin with the things that cause you to not have faith. Fear and anxiety will always be present at the base level. Fear paralyzes people and causes them to not obey. We believe fear protects us when in reality it is a prison. The walls we build to protect us only serve to enslave us.

Again, I encourage you to be patient. You did not get to where you are in a day or a week but over a lifetime. You cannot snap your fingers and expect your thinking and behavior to change overnight. **This is a slow process. Allow the Holy Spirit to be your guide.** We are more dependent on Him than we ever imagined. He is the one that leads us into all truth. He is the one that points us to Jesus. Do not be afraid of Him, and do not grieve or quench his presence. When He prompts you to do something, be quick to obey. Go back and look at the first few verses of 2 Peter 1. Verse 3 says “He has given us everything we need for life and godliness through his divine power”. The Holy Spirit is the conduit for that power! You are not being transformed by your strength and by your effort. This can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit present in us.

A Call to Growth and Maturity

A Study on 2 Peter 1:1-9

2 Peter 1:1-9

“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord.

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. **“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.** 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.”

Peter was encouraging people to be strong and mature in their faith. Maturity is necessary to combat the false teachers that had entered the church. The false teachers claimed special knowledge (apart from God) and were full of greed. They were highly motivated to make money and commercialize the faith. They also despised authority and were sexually deviant. They invited and encouraged their listeners into these indulgences without restraint. Some believed those with special knowledge did not need moral restraint.

The encouragement for us today is the same. **Beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing who are teaching in the church. Their words are smooth, and they promise what the sinful heart desires: prosperity and sexual indulgence.** To recognize the wolves, we must be familiar with our Shepherd.

Why is it so easy to be deceived? How do seemingly smart people listen to and follow deceivers without recognizing they are dangerous? We have allowed ourselves to be lulled to sleep. Most are bored with Christianity or see it as old-fashioned and out-of-date.

If you are like most people in our hurry-up

culture, you speed past the first four verses of this passage and concentrate on verses 5-7. Here is yet another list of what “we must do” to be good Christians and not be ineffective and unproductive in our life. I don’t know about you, but I am exhausted by the “do these 5 things to be a winner list.”

This passage has a significant and powerful message for a world that is bored with life. The core question we all ask is what were we made for? Why am I here? You were created to know God and make him known to others. It’s that simple. When I say to know God, I do not mean a structured, academic approach to learning about someone. **In God’s original design, knowledge was relational.** In the Old Testament, wisdom and knowledge are personified. In Proverbs, it says acquire understanding, acquire wisdom. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you. Love her and she will watch over you (Proverbs 4:5-6). Knowing God is deeply personal. It is something to be lived, not understood.

The longing of mankind is to be significant. We want to be part of something larger than ourselves. We want something exhilarating, dangerous, and adventurous. We want something that captures our hearts and imaginations and changes the world. This is what Jesus offers us. He doesn’t offer us religion; he offers us Himself. He was against religion. Religion had reduced relationship to rules, programs, structure, and duty. Does that sound like

what Jesus meant when He said “I have come to give you life, and life to the full”? (John 10:10).

We put a heavy emphasis on studying the Word of God. That is important, but it is not all that is required. Remember, the Word (Jesus) became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14).

In Jesus, we have the undoing of all that we call religion. In the life of Jesus, the kingdom of God breaks out among those whom the religious system had marginalized—the poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the prostitutes—and the religious leaders find themselves under the judgment of God (Matthew 23:13-39). It should be apparent to us that we who call ourselves followers of Jesus can expect to be misunderstood and insulted.

As the battle between good and evil intensifies, tribulations and persecutions will increase and become the norm. The good news in all of this is profound. As we are persecuted, we lose our sense of self and are humbled. We realize our weakness and cry out to God for mercy and protection. **God is strongly drawn to weakness and will come to our defense. The hardship we dread will actually be the catalyst that ushers in the move of God we have anticipated and hoped for.**

If you are bored with your brand of Christianity, I suggest you consider the fact that knowing the Creator of the universe is not a boring thing. Have you watched the

power of a storm, listened to the rumble of thunder, and marveled at the splendor of lightning streaking across the sky? Is a sunrise or sunset boring? Do you feel small as you look out upon the ocean and watch the continual crashing of the waves knowing millions of living creatures exist under the surface? The Creator of everything beautiful that we behold on this earth is issuing you a personal invitation to enter into His life. You are not inviting Jesus into your life. You are spiritually dead without Christ. How does a dead person invite anyone into his life? He is rescuing you from death, setting you free from the torment of sin, and giving you His life, the life of the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

Taste and See

With that context, let's go back and look at this passage again. **The key word in 2 Peter is knowledge. This knowledge is the means by which God's grace and mercy may be received and experienced. It is an invitation to "taste and see" that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).** To taste is to try a mouthful of something to appreciate its flavor. Do you want to look at a picture of a chocolate ice cream cone or taste it? To "taste and see" in a relationship is to identify yourself with another person and become emotionally involved in each other's concerns. To "taste and see" God is to feel what He feels and know He feels what you feel. It is to think of him as He thinks about you. It is to rejoice when God is honored and to feel distressed when He is attacked

and misrepresented. **This concept of knowledge is to become emotionally involved with God with a constant desire to know Him better. This is so much more than knowing about God. It is personal and intimate.**

Knowledge (Relationship) is the Key to God's Power

Verse 3 says "His divine power (dynameos or dynamite) has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him, who called us by his own glory and goodness." Think of glory and goodness like this. His glory is His essence (his character or attributes) and His goodness is His excellence expressed in what He does. It is who He is and what He does. He shows His glory through all the miracles he performs. God's goodness extends from His nature to everything that He does. He is good and everything He does is good. The great and precious promises given in His word allow us to participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. This new nature is none other than Christ in you. A new nature should change your appetites. You are a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. You should begin to live your life in the reality of the new nature within. **Everything you need in life and the power to live above the sin in the world is provided. You are lacking nothing.**

Be Christ Imitators

The list of virtues in verses 5-7 is now possible and expected as you live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit with the mind of Christ you have received. You are to imitate Jesus. I illustrated the 8 virtues in these verses as a pyramid. The foundation is faith and the pinnacle is love. Matthew 22:37-40 tells us to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

As you go through this study, remember to look at the life of Jesus in each of these areas before you look at your life. He was our model to follow.

I look at this pyramid in 3 sections:

1) Faith, Goodness, and Knowledge

Faith, goodness, and knowledge are all gifts of God. He is the author and finisher of our faith. Without Christ, all of our works are filthy rags. We have already mentioned knowledge is relational. Without a relationship with Jesus, we will never have supernatural knowledge that is only available through Him. The way these three virtues interact with one another is staggering when you examine your life. As your faith increases, you begin to tell others about Jesus. We all find a particular calling or particular thing we do that is specific to us. As we continue to do “our thing,” God begins to show more of who He is. I cannot tell you how many times I have read the Bible intending to help someone else, and God took me on a journey through

the scriptures. I may start out reading in Hebrews and end up in Leviticus and Judges. I was asking one question and God not only answered that question but showed me things I had never known or knew to ask. That increases my faith exponentially as I encounter God on a personal level. The whole process continues again and again and again until my faith is grounded and secure.

Notice, faith comes before knowledge. The Jews believed in order to understand. The Greeks sought understanding so they could have faith. Faith is always the springboard to knowledge.

Think of it this way- Faith, goodness, and knowledge are about God.

2) Self-control, Perseverance, and Godliness

After the base of faith, goodness, and knowledge is established, we move into the personal application section. **Self-control, perseverance, and godliness are about us.** Isn't it interesting the first thing we are asked to do on a personal level is have self-control? Many in the church never get past this level, and we wonder why the church is not involved in outreach (brotherly kindness and love).

Self-control is about handling the pleasures of life mentally and physically. The two main areas of control people struggle with are sexual control and controlling the tongue. Perseverance is handling the pressures of life. It means to bear under the load and

come out on the other side. Godliness is produced from perseverance. It reflects the right relationship between God and man.

3) Brotherly Kindness and Love

Brotherly kindness and love are about others. Brotherly kindness is loving people like yourself. This is much easier to do than the command to love others who are different than us. Loving others and considering other people more important than yourself is the ultimate imitation of Christ.

I look at the 2 Peter chart like I do the Isaiah 6 passage. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw 1) the Lord high and lifted up 2) he saw himself as a man of unclean lips, and 3) he saw the people he lived among as people with unclean lips.

2 Peter is looking at 1) God and how the gifts of faith, goodness, and knowledge change how we think, 2) looking at ourselves and changing our behavior, and 3) looking at the people around us with love and compassion.

Verse 8 says, “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.” We are expected to always be increasing these virtues in our life so we are not swept away by idleness or false teachers. By contrast to a growing Christian, the person who does not have these virtues is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten he has been cleansed from his

past sins. They are choosing to ignore the new divine nature that is within them and live like they did before they were saved.

Now, we will look at each of these qualities from 2 Peter 1 in more detail.

Faith

How do you define faith? In its simplest form, faith is proving to the mind the reality of things that cannot be seen by the eye. You have faith every time you sit in a chair. You believe what you cannot see. You believe the chair will not collapse as you lower your body into it. You have faith every time you board an airplane. You have faith the pilots are trained, the mechanics are competent and have checked the plane, and all the checks and balances required by the airline for a safe flight have been followed. Faith always requires you to believe something you cannot see. That belief must be followed up by action. You believe and trust the chair and the airplane, so you sit in the chair and you board the airplane.

Biblical faith is the same thing. For simplicity, let's define faith in 3 parts: Faith is 1) Believing 2) Trusting and 3) Obeying. If you believe something, but do not trust it or act upon it, you do not believe it. People always act upon what they believe to be true. The demons believe but do not trust or obey.

Hebrews 11 states that faith is being sure of what we hope for and **certain of what we do not see.** This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith, we understand that the universe was formed at God's command **so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible** (Hebrews

11:1-2). The next several verses tell the stories of faith-filled believers in the Old Testament. **By faith, Enoch** was taken from this life so that he did not experience death; **by faith, Noah**, when warned about things not yet seen, built an ark to save his family; **by faith, Abraham**, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, **obeyed and went; by faith, Abraham**, even though he was past age and Sarah herself was barren, was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

Faith is not blind optimism. It is not an intellectual acceptance of some doctrine. It is not believing despite the evidence. **Faith is quite simple. God speaks, and we hear His word. We trust His word and act upon it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be.** Why? Because God is faithful and never fails to be true to Himself.

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Anything that does come from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). The righteous will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4 and Hebrews 10:38).

It's easy to see faith is a huge deal to God. Faith excites God, and He is attracted to it. **The faith of the centurion soldier in Matthew 8 astonished Jesus. Jesus said**

he had not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. What did the centurion say that excited Jesus to this extreme? He humbled himself by saying “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.” He fully believed Jesus could heal his dying servant just by saying the word the word and he will be healed. The centurion expressed faith in Jesus’ authority by communicating that Jesus’ power was not bound by space. Remember, he was a Roman military leader with full authority over Jesus and all the Jews in that place.

Don’t you want your faith to excite Jesus like that? I get choked up just thinking about it. How I long for my faith to be something that astonishes and excites Jesus. For this to happen, we must remind ourselves of His character and His intentions. He has given us authority to do the things He did. Having faith in a silly chair or airplane is much harder than having faith in God who is responsible for everything good in the world. **His glory and goodness are on display every day all around us. Open your eyes and behold His beauty. Every time I hear the thunder during a storm, I remind myself that is His voice, and the lightning is directed by His hand. Job 38:24 says “what is the way to the place the lightning is stored?”** It goes on to say that He gives orders to the morning and shows the dawn its place. He shut up the sea behind doors, bars when it burst forth, and told it how far it could come.

I could go on and on about the greatness and majesty of our God. **It is not hard to have faith in a God like that.** It is not hard to trust in a God that loves us like that. And it is not hard to obey a God like that. As we trust and obey, faith becomes easier and easier. The object of our faith (God) grows as we experience Him. He invites us to “know Him”. Taste and see that He is good. Step out of your comfort zone and experience intimacy with Him that cannot be understood by study alone.

Goodness

After faith, we are told to add goodness. The word used here in verse 5 is the same word used in verse 3 to describe Jesus. The word means virtue, excellence, or goodness. To the Greek philosophers, it meant the fulfillment of a thing. When anything fulfills the purpose it was created for, it is virtue or goodness. The land that grows a crop is excellent because it is fulfilling its purpose. The saw that cuts wood is excellent because that is what it was created for. **Since we who believe have been given the divine nature of God within us, when we glorify God, we show excellence because we are fulfilling our purpose in life. We are called to advertise the virtues of God by how we live our lives.**

For many years, the goal of my life was to make disciples. I desired to be that person that believed in others and encouraged them to live the life they were called to. The goal was to see lives transformed through their knowledge of Jesus. If I had it to do all over again, I would focus more on walking out the teaching than the teaching itself. Knowledge does not transform a life like walking in that knowledge does.

The transformation in my life came through helping others understand God properly and walk in the freedom that was produced. **As I watched others set free from sin and addictive behavior, my faith soared. The one being helped was receiving the**

grace of God and so was I. When we view other people as our family, God gives us His perspective of that person. We see someone dearly loved by God, created in His image, but struggling under the weight of deception and sin. When we offer a loving hand and their lives are changed, it is the greatest feeling in the world. I love giving presents and watching the face of the person who receives the gift much more than I like receiving a present.

My encouragement to you would be to think of yourself as a beggar that found a supply of bread. When a starving person finds food, the excellent thing to do is to tell all the other beggars where the food is. Jesus is the bread of life. He is our peace, our hope, our rock, our salvation, the one that captivates our thoughts, and the one that gives us life to the full now.

Being a partaker of the divine nature is not the end-all; it is the beginning. Share this precious prize you found with the world. They are desperate and in need of a Shepherd. God has uniquely gifted each person according to how they were made. What is it you do that makes you feel fully alive? What is that thing you would do every day even if you did not get paid to do it? Slow down and think back on the moments you felt you were giving of yourself and the feeling you had. Sadly, many have not figured out what their purpose is. Satan knows once we figure out who we

are and what we do, we are an unstoppable army for righteousness.

Do not listen to the lies of the enemy or the others telling you that you are not qualified or capable. Listen to the Spirit of God within you that nudges you to step out of your comfort zone and be who you are. You are not doing this in your strength but in the divine power of God.

Knowledge

The word knowledge means full knowledge or knowledge that is growing. It is practical knowledge or discernment. Jesus said and did only what He heard His Father in heaven saying. This knowledge suggests an abiding closeness to God. **We all have an insatiable longing for something. We pursue what we believe will satisfy us.** Add to this the constant comparison on social media and you have a society seeking pleasure and significance. We gorge ourselves on R-rated TV series, lush and expensive vacations, lust, material possessions, alcohol or drugs, and it all leaves us more dissatisfied. God is encouraging us to pursue Him with that same intensity because He knows He is the only thing that will satisfy our souls.

I remember praying and telling God I wanted more of Him. Immediately, I heard in my spirit a response that stunned me. God said, "You have all of me you want because I reveal myself to those who choose to pursue me." Our church fasts and prays the first 21 days of each new year. During that time, my notebook is full of thoughts and promptings I receive from the Holy Spirit. After the 21 days are over, life goes back to the normal busyness and routine and my pursuit of God throttles back as well. This year, in 2023, I decided to not stop the pursuit after 21 days. What would it look like if I devoted a year to pursuing God vigorously? I realized I had pursued many things in my life with some

level of vigor, but I have never pursued anything with all of myself. I do not want to get to the end of my life and have regrets.

I have a very active mind, many different interests, and a lot of energy. I remember many years ago hearing the Spirit prompt me by saying that I would exhaust myself daily pursuing something, but let that something be Jesus. The only thing that captures my mind fully is the pursuit of God. I can spend hours on my back porch reading, studying, and praying. It is like being transported to another place and time. The depths of God's character and His goodness are unsearchable and beyond our ability to fully comprehend. But I have seen his willingness and felt His pleasure as I have pursued Him with reckless abandon.

It is difficult to express to someone what it means to pursue having full knowledge of God. The following is a description of what it has looked like for me patterned after Paul's admonition in Philippians 3: 4-14 to put no confidence in the flesh:

1) Life is not about me. God's kingdom has been advancing long before I was born and will continue long after I am gone. **I am part of a much bigger picture, and I will be most fulfilled when I discover my part to play.**

2) Paul was a Pharisee. They believed they had attained righteousness (right standing

with God) due to their self-efforts of keeping the law. Paul also was a persecutor of the church. He was zealous and “doing” all the right things required by his form of religion. But he counted it all as loss or dung compared to knowing Christ. Nothing else mattered to him any longer. Having Christ was all he wanted. All that was gained by religion and effort he counted as nothing. **Paul had gained Christ, meaning he was in Christ and Christ was in him. That knowledge had become Paul’s identity.** I encourage you to take time and consider how you have put value in your self-effort. Humble yourself before God and agree with Him that all your effort is worthless. His sacrifice alone makes you right before God.

3) **Paul knew Christ as his savior, but he is telling the Philippians he wants to know Him more intimately as his Savior.** The word **knowing** in verse 8 means not only a knowledge of facts but knowledge gained through experience that transforms the entirety of the person. In verse 10, the word **know** goes even deeper. He says, “I want to know Christ, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10). **Paul doesn’t want to know about Jesus; he wants every area of his life to look like Jesus, even to the point of suffering and death. He is expressing his total surrender to the One that can raise him to life again even if he dies. That is living a life of total surrender and that is where we see the power and presence**

of God. This power helps us overcome any resistance we face. Are you willing to suffer and die to advance the kingdom? Do you “know” Christ well enough to trust him with your future and your life?

True knowledge of God transforms us into His image. We gain the mind and heart of Jesus. To have his mind means we can perceive and understand things we cannot even see. It is the ability to discern things. Discernment is “knowing” God’s mind for the situations we face each day. Discernment means to separate or set apart. We develop sound judgment, we understand the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and truth and lies.

As we see the world around us spinning out of control and evil rising, true knowledge of God is the only hope we have. We cannot discern the times and know what needs to be done, but He does. “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chron.16:9). Bold and audacious faith excites the heart of God. Commit to know Him fully!

Self-Control

Faith, goodness, and knowledge represent gifts from God; our focus is upward toward God. Self-control, perseverance, and godliness focus inwardly, helping us become what we know to be true.

The first thing we are asked to pursue in this section is self-control. Self-control begins by realizing we must be careful how we handle the good things in life that bring us pleasure. We must have our passions and desires under control. I have never talked with a person that did not have struggles in this area. Sadly, many never add the other virtues to their life because they never gain self-control.

Self-control is a vast topic and there are many ways we can look at this. For our purposes, I want to focus on 3 main areas where self-control is vital: 1) controlling our thoughts 2) controlling our tongue and 3) controlling our sexual appetites.

Controlling Our Thoughts

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 says, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” What an incredible verse. **This is a verse you must understand and use daily in your**

life if you want freedom in this area of your life. In 2 Corinthians, a group of men had come to Corinth who presented themselves as apostles. They were false teachers who were challenging Paul’s integrity and his authority as an apostle. Chapters 10-13 intensify from the first 9 chapters as Paul addresses the ones causing trouble.

Notice the use of the words wage war, weapons we fight with, and strongholds. These are military terms and suggest conflict. **But in verse 1 of Chapter 10, he says, “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” The first thing we must understand as we attempt to control our thinking is people are not our enemies.** The spirit of the antichrist that is influencing or controlling them is the enemy. The weapons of the world are learning, intimidation, personal influence, credentials, and experience. The weapons Paul used were the Word of God and prayer (see Ephesians 6:17-18).

It was initially a little disappointing for me to understand that the way we fight our fight as believers seems a little wimpy. We appear meek and weak. Ephesians 6 tells us to put on the armor of God so that we can take our stand against the devil’s schemes because our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the

heavenly realms. **No power of evil can oppose the power of God. No thought, including those of our opponents, is beyond the reach of the One who “catches the wise in their craftiness” (1 Cor. 3:19). Nothing is hidden from Him!**

This passage excites me as I read it. I have seen the power of God’s Word and prayer utterly demolish strongholds in people’s lives and set them free. I received a podcast recording recently from a couple I had the pleasure to work with, whose marriage was restored, and they talk about the victory and freedom they experience today. The husband was engulfed in pornography, lying, deceit, and prostitution. As we talked about his story, God revealed the areas of his thinking that needed to change and the right behavior that needed to follow. To look at the marriage from a worldly vantage point, you would have given it a zero percent chance of survival. My friend chose to agree with God and ask God to forgive him and restore his relationship with God and his wife. His marriage is now a living testimony to the power of God’s love. **The problem was not the behavior but the incorrect thinking he had adopted and chosen to live by.** God is always there to rescue and redeem us when we humble ourselves, turn from our sins, and ask him to restore us. I get emotional recalling the undeniable power of God that was available to demolish these arguments and ideas that were from the devil and opposing God. That doesn’t sound wimpy or weak at all to me now.

Controlling Our Tongue

James 3 speaks about the importance of taming the tongue. “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse men who have been made in God’s likeness” (James 3:5-6, 9).

The tongue is difficult to control. Those who do control it gain control of themselves in the other areas of their life as well. What is the source of the evil of the tongue? Verse 6 says it is set on fire by hell. The source is Satan. Verses 11-12, fresh water and salt water should not come from the same mouth. A fig tree cannot bear olives, and a heart not fully redeemed and renewed cannot control what it speaks. Refer back to the section on knowledge as you contemplate this thought. Growing knowledge of God will transform the mind, and a transformed mind will produce speech that is edifying to the body of Christ. If you want to control what you say, control what you allow into your mind and what you dwell on..

Controlling Sexual Appetites

I have never talked with a man that did not struggle with his sexuality at some point in his life. It seems like husbands and wives have a major disconnect in this area of their marriage. Most husbands are expecting a greater frequency of sexual intimacy than

their wives. I have listened to this discussion so many times I have lost count. So, what is the problem?

We live in an over-sexed society. Everything is about sex and sexual expression. Sex is used to sell everything from cars to cereal. A society consumed with sex and sexual perversion is a society that is in decline and will eventually collapse under the weight of its sin. The very thought of letting an 8-year-old child decide if they think they are a boy or a girl is ridiculous. Parents trying to intervene on their child's behalf are seen as the problem. It seems like this happened overnight, but it did not. Sexual perversion is rampant in the scriptures. Entire cities and governments were destroyed because of sexual perversion.

Please refer to the chart entitled "Pride Leads to a Fall." Pride includes envy and self-ambition which leads to rebellion and then to indulgence. Indulgence includes greed and lust for power and control and sexual indulgence. Most prideful and arrogant people always want to control people and indulge themselves sexually. Just look at the Jeffrey Epstein scandal. The elites and elected officials were indulging themselves at Epstein's "island of sinzo" The World Economic Forum hosts a conference each year in Davos, Switzerland where the elites meet to discuss how to control the world. Does it surprise you that prostitutes from all over Europe are flown in to be at the conference? Or does it surprise you that child trafficking is out of control? Or

does it surprise you that trafficking minors and prostitution is a staple at the Super Bowl each year?

Refer to the shaded chart entitled "A Reflection of Our Choices." This is a simple circle that has white, gray, and dark pieces of the circle. The white represents areas we have submitted to God, the gray represents an area where compromise exists, and the dark represents areas that have been selfishly withheld from submission to God and continue as areas of indulgence in our life. Sexual thinking and behavior will normally show up as gray or dark. For some reason, we think we can hold on to sin in some areas of our life, and it will not affect other areas of our life.

I recommend referring back to study Study 3, A Contrast of 2 Peter 1 and Ephesians 4, and the chart that goes with it. This chart contrasts the progression of faith and sin in life. This study goes into greater depth as it looks at what an un-surrendered life or area in life looks like when sin is allowed to grow unchecked.

Notice the title of the self-control section is handling the pleasures of life mentally and physically. I have talked to men who thought if they were controlling their sexual behavior, they were good. I always ask how are they doing in their thinking. Most admit they struggle in their thoughts. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 that if anyone has looked at a woman lustfully, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. That is the standard we must hold our

thinking to.

Take the 21-day challenge.

I will conclude this section with a thought on why men often desire sex in the marriage more than their wife. Men have told me they struggle mightily with this area in their marriages. They wonder why they have so much sexual interest and their wives have so little interest. **I ask them if they would be willing to do an experiment. I ask them to be very aware of what they allow themselves to see and what they allow themselves to think for 21 days. Guard your hearts and make a covenant with your eyes to be pure during this time.** Each time you are tempted to look at someone or some image on your computer inappropriately, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to say no. If they struggle with pornography, I ask them to agree with God that it is not good to look on the nakedness of another woman that is not your wife. At the end of the 21 days, every man comes back and says they are astonished at how much more normal their sex drive is. They were feeding the beast within all this time and had no clue they were creating a monster.

Perseverance

To persevere is to hold up under pressure. It is steadfastness, constancy, endurance, and patience. It is the ability to hold on to one's faith and not be discouraged by the greatest trials and sufferings. The original word in Hebrew means to remain under, not simply with resignation, but with a vibrant hope. Isn't that a beautiful picture of what is possible in Christ? We do not have to just suck it up and endure the pressures of life; we can do it in a manner that glorifies God.

Perseverance follows self-control. **Those that give in to pleasures usually are not disciplined enough to handle pressures either, so they give up.**

Patience is not developed automatically; we must work at it. Romans 5:3-5 says, "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know sufferings produce perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Patience does not come easy for me. I remember praying for patience as a young man. You must be careful what you pray for. My answer to the prayer for patience was God giving us twin daughters. Who said God doesn't have a sense of humor? My girls both weighed almost 8 pounds when they were born. My wife had major

reconstructive abdominal surgery a few weeks later after it was determined she had a hernia from the pregnancy. She could not hold a baby for six weeks. Both of the girls had colic during this period and were not sleeping well. One would wake up, and I would feed her and get her back to sleep. One hour later, the other one would wake up, and I would do the same thing. I was getting very little sleep, and I had just started a new job. I remember reminding myself at some gosh awful early hour in the morning, that this was my answer to prayer and perseverance would eventually come if I did not die first. As I said earlier, patience is not developed automatically.

Many of us do not give up during the pressures of life, but we do lose hope. We wonder when will it end. Our expectations of what it should look like to follow Christ can be off. If we expect to not go through trials, disappointment will overwhelm us. Disappointments can be devastating in our life. **Hope is the cure for disappointment.** Remind yourself God is in control. He is refining us like pure gold and as our flesh is consumed, we are a better reflection of Him. As James says in Chapter 1, "consider it pure joy, my brothers when you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything" (James 1:2-4).

Godliness

We are to add to our perseverance, godliness. Godliness simply means “God-likeness.” That is a simple concept but not easy to understand. When we look at our lives, we do not see God-likeness. We see struggle, effort, work, exhaustion, and frustration. **It seems like the harder we try to be like Christ, the more intense the opposition and the more we fail the test.**

Before I go on, I want to put this in perspective. I have mentioned the rise of evil and brazenly sinful behavior on display in our world today. We look at our political leaders and wonder how they could make such poor decisions that do not reflect what we hold to be true. **We are on the brink of experiencing persecution, prosecution, and financial hardship on a level we can not conceive.** Satan knows his time is short, and he is frantically swinging for the fences. **The global effort to control and manipulate the population is coordinated at a level of precision that is impossible for man to pull off. It is evil and comes from the spirit of the antichrist at work in the world.**

When all hell breaks loose (literally), people will be in despair. They will be disillusioned and confused. Anyone who has self-control, control over their emotions, and is persevering through the trials will show godliness. People will be looking for anyone

that can offer hope and an answer. I urge you to be desperate for God and seek him before the storm is in full force.

In summary, people will be attracted to people that are reflecting the character of God. When Jesus sent people out, he said if there is a man of peace in the house, let your peace rest on Him (Luke 10:5-6 paraphrased). Don't forget we carry the power of God within us. Desperate people sense that when they are around us.

The Mystery of Godliness

In 1st and 2nd Timothy, Paul mentions the word godliness 10 times. In 1 Timothy 3:16, he says “Beyond all question, **the mystery of godliness is great:** He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.” It is clear from this passage that the mystery of godliness was Jesus. A mystery is something revealed that once was concealed. I refer you to a sermon by Dr. Tony Evans titled “The Mystery of Godliness.” Tony has a great way of explaining things in a way all can understand. I will paraphrase from his sermon to help you understand this mystery.

This great mystery is tied to Jesus. We have virtually nothing recorded in the scriptures of the first 30 years of Jesus' life except the

story of him teaching at the temple when he was 12. It took him 30 years to perfectly fulfill the 1600 requirements of the law. The law was not given to free you up; it made you aware of your sin and your need for a Savior. When Jesus fulfilled the law, it was counted as righteousness. This means that when we are saved, we exchange all of our sins for all of his righteousness.

God's grace was revealed in Jesus. You can't buy grace and you can't earn grace. It is always free and is given freely by God. If grace isn't increasing in your life, the mystery (Jesus) is being concealed. We receive Jesus in seed form. You choose to allow the seed to grow in you or to be stifled in you. The Bible gives us instructions, but it does not give us the power to live them. Jesus is the grace of God living inside you. Grace is a person and that person (Jesus) is the master key that unlocks everything in life.

As Jesus is released in your life, grace is increased which leads to godliness. **You possess perfect righteousness and godliness in your soul through Jesus Christ.** Is your life reflecting that reality? If not, ask Him where and how you are restricting the flow of His power and grace in your life.

Brotherly Kindness and Love

Brotherly kindness and love are the expressions of the other virtues that produce a well-founded, fruitful, and maturing life.

Faith, Goodness, and Knowledge

Faith (believing, trusting, and obeying) in God provides the spiritual life we lost in the Garden of Eden. When we begin to imitate the goodness of God in our lives, we find our calling and purpose. As we begin to walk out our faith by our goodness, God graciously allows us to gain His knowledge and see the world as He does. Our minds are transformed by that knowledge. God wants us to have full knowledge of who He is.

Self-control, Perseverance, and Godliness

As our minds are being transformed, we are to live out in our bodies what we are in our Spirit. The perfection of God's grace and righteousness is within us. We choose to grow in that or to stifle the gift of God's grace (Jesus) living within us.

Brotherly Kindness and Love

The mind of Christ in us should be reflected in how we love and respond to people around us. If we love Jesus, we must

love people. 1 Peter 1:23 says, "Now that you have **purified yourselves** by **obeying the truth** so that you have **sincere love** for your brothers, **love one another deeply from the heart.**" Notice how a purified heart is a result of obeying the truth. In John 14, Jesus says if you love Me, keep my commandments. A purified heart produces a sincere love that loves deeply. **It is not merely tolerating other people.**

John 13:34-35 says, "A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

An old saying is "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care". My wife can be in line at Walmart or Taco Bell and end up having a deep conversation with a total stranger. I have seen it happen countless times. I ask her if she knows that person and she says no; I just told her I liked her boots. People automatically sense if someone is loving and genuinely cares about them. These strangers open up to my wife and tell her their life story in a line at a store because she said she liked their boots. It must be a rare thing to find people that care because people respond to it with enthusiasm.

Here's an illustration that will help

make this point. My neighbor walks her black Labrador retriever around the neighborhood. When the dog sees me, his tail wags and he is so excited to come and greet me. I automatically reach down to pat him and talk to him. We all react to an animal like that unless we dislike animals. Why is that so? Because they are showing us love, and we respond to it. Is it any wonder a dog is man's best friend and the pet business is booming?

God is telling us in the Word if we really "get" Him, then the world will see Him in us by how we love them. Our love freely given to others will attract them to God in us.

Brotherly kindness comes from the word Philadelphia. Brotherly kindness can be translated as "mutual affection" or simply "concern for others." Romans 12:10 tells us to "honor one another above yourselves." To put someone else and their interests above your own can only come from a heart that has truly been changed. Our brothers and sisters in the Lord are our families. We are all children of God that share the same Father. If we love those around us, we are to care for their needs.

Love is the ultimate expression of our love for God. The word for love used here is agape. Agape love is always shown by what it does. God displayed His love for us by sending Jesus to restore our relationship with God and give us spiritual life. Agape love raises the bar considerably

from brotherly kindness. **We are to love others with agape love, whether they are believers (John 13:34) or enemies (Matthew 5:44).**

It is hard enough to love those that are like us and impossible in the flesh to love our enemies. When someone vehemently opposes us and what we believe, we feel threatened and in danger. Yet God calls us to love that person with sacrificial love. That type of love can only be produced by God in us.

1 Corinthians 13 is a description of what agape love looks like. 1 Cor. 13:4-8 says, **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."** It goes on to say in that chapter that prophecies will cease, tongues will be stilled, and knowledge will pass away when Jesus comes back and we see him face to face. **Verse 13 says, "And now, these three remain; faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."**

Summary

2 Peter 1:8 says, “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.” To possess these qualities means our hearts have been made new by the Spirit’s presence in our hearts. To possess these qualities in increasing measure implies growth. Growth requires our decision to relinquish our illusion of control and trust God to be in control.

The growth of these qualities within us will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive. We are magnifying to the world the presence of grace in our lives and what it looks like to have the divine nature within us. By contrast, the person that does not possess these qualities is blind and nearsighted. Since his life does not reflect the grace of God, the world does not see God working in him. Such a person has forgotten the free gift of grace that he received. He has stifled the growth of grace in his life because he refused to grow.

Verses 10 and 11 conclude this section by saying, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election **sure**. For if you do these things, you will **never fail**, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The word for “sure” referred to a warranty deed somewhat like you use today when you buy a house or property. Your godly behavior is

a warranty deed or proof to yourself that Jesus has indeed cleansed you from your past sins. The word “fall” can mean stumble. The word means to trip up or experience a reversal. The person who is maturing in Christ will not trip up in his spiritual life like the one who is immature and nearsighted.

Jesus will welcome us home someday. I want to live my life in such a way that it is evident the grace of God is within me. We are to be reflections of His splendor to the dark world around us. I pray He will increase that in all of us. I want to hear Jesus say “Well done, son. You did what I asked you to do. You represented me well.”