

Simple Math

2020-07-12 By Pastor Sharon Tidd

Today we continue our study in 1 and 2 Peter, “Bold Obedience”, moving into 2 Peter. I invite you to take time now to prayerfully and reflectively read 2 Peter 1:1-11 in preparation.

As we worked through 1 Peter we learned that, at the time of Peter’s writing, the Church faced severe persecution. Emperor Nero had identified Christians as his favourite scape-goat and as a result they were insulted and slandered, arrested and killed simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ. By the time Peter pens his second and last letter, the “Circus” of Nero (a Roman arena/amphitheatre) became a place where Christians were tortured and killed as entertainment for the masses. As a result, some had abandoned their faith in favour of physical protection. Others (most) remained steadfast during this very difficult period, continuing to proclaim the Gospel and “do good” to others.

Given the heightened level of the persecution, Peter was not able to travel as freely as he had when planting churches, but he remained eager to teach and instruct these baby believers. Thus, he pens this last letter. He is convinced, through the Spirit of Christ, that the time of his own arrest and death is nearing (2 Peter 1:13-14) and wants to offer one last word of encouragement to the faithful.

(Peter died by crucifixion a year after this letter was written. He was a martyr for the faith.)

Given the context, it is no surprise that Simon Peter begins this letter written “to those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (verse 1) with a prayer of blessing; a prayer for Grace and Peace “in abundance” (verse 2). And how was that abundant grace and peace to be theirs? “Through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord!” To quote a more current unknown author: “No God, no peace! Know God, know peace!” It is God’s Righteousness that makes faith possible. It is His Presence that makes peace possible. And the more we know Him ... at the level of heart and soul ... the greater our experience of grace and peace.

As a “servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (verse 1), Peter’s deepest longing for these persecuted believers was that they would know God, revealed in Christ Jesus, and through knowing Him know peace and grace throughout their lives. In the midst of the persecution, in the face of pain and sorrow and death, peace and grace could be experienced “in abundance” simply by making knowing God the #1 priority of their lives.

This is a challenge that rings true for us today too. Though we don’t personally have to fear being thrown before the gladiators or hung on crosses to

die for our faith, we do face different perils because of our allegiance to Christ in these days. In the midst of our own struggles and difficulties, peace and grace can be our lived reality. God is present to us. He wants to be known by us. And in choosing to know Him ... to walk with Him daily in close, loving fellowship ... we will experience that peace and grace deep within. Life won't be pain-free. Life won't be trouble-free. But, life will be rich and abundant!

Peter goes on in verses 3 and 4 to highlight the blessings that are ours through the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

#1 – Never-Ending, Abundant Supply (verse 3)

He says, “His (God’s) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness!” Nothing is held back. God’s giving is abundant and complete. His giving is in direct proportion to our need. His giving flows with divine (supernatural) power. His giving brings us life! His giving makes us holy! Do we believe this? As always, Peter emphasizes that this is all God’s work for us and in us! We must simply trust that He gives and gives and gives again!

How do we receive from this never-ending, abundant supply? By KNOWING the God who called us “by His own glory and goodness”. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? But to truly know God does take effort on our part. It takes a commitment to spending time with Him through prayer and the reading and

study of His Word. It takes a commitment to surrender our lives to His ways. The more intimately we know God, who is all glory and all goodness, the more our lives will reflect His nature. Knowing Him will make us more alive! Knowing Him will make us more holy! It's in knowing Him that the flood-gates of His never-ending, abundant supply are opened to us.

This was Peter's experience from the day Jesus first called him by the Sea of Galilee. His life was transformed, its priorities re-arranged, by knowing Jesus, the Son of God. Even his name changed ... from Simon to Peter, the Rock! And in walking with Jesus his very life became a rock ... steadfastly committed to God and His Kingdom; unmoveable and unshakeable in his belief that God loved him and saved him by grace. And Peter reminds those early believers, and us today, that knowing God will do the same for us. In knowing Him we will have full access to everything **we** need for life and godliness! Are you grabbing hold of it all?

#2 – Rich, Trustworthy Promises

Peter goes on to say that through these (God's "own glory and goodness") "He (God) has given His very great and precious promises" (verse 4a)! I love the wording here, and am especially taken with it because these affirmations are stated by a simple fisherman who, through the power of the Spirit of God within him, became a powerful orator and wordsmith. According to Peter, God's

promises aren't just any old promises. Absolutely not! God's promises are "very great"! They far exceed human promises, most of which are spoken then broken. God's promises are full of glory and goodness; a reflection of His very nature. Like God Himself, His promises are great and glorious. They are majestic. The Maker of these promises is our All-powerful and All-mighty God. He is able to make and keep out-of-this-world promises! They can be counted upon. They aren't "pie in the sky", they are true because they are spoken by our God of Truth and Love.

Peter also describes them as "precious"! They hold infinite value and, as such, are to be treasured. They are rich and abundant, flowing from God's generous and gracious heart. They are lasting and enduring like precious gems. Their glory will not fade. Their truthfulness will stand for all eternity.

What makes God's promises very great and precious? Peter says, "Through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world because of evil desires" (verse 4b)! Do you hear that? Is there anything more glorious? You (and I) share the divine nature because of God's very great and precious promises. His promises offer us eternal life, grace and peace, abundant love, mercy and forgiveness, cleansing, regeneration, holiness. The divine nature lies within us because the Spirit of God and of Christ abides within

us. God promised it, and it is so! We are not God, but His character ... His very image ... lies in us and is being continually renewed and restored by His Spirit.

And not only do we participate in the divine nature, but through those precious and very great promises we are granted the courage and the wisdom to escape corruption caused by evil desires. We don't have to succumb to the ungodly pull of this world. We are no longer ruled by evil desires, because the goodness of God is planted in us. Yes, temptation will continue. Yes, we will face trials and persecutions. Yes, we will have to work hard, in the Spirit's power, to live in holiness. But we can escape it all as we lean on God's precious promises, claiming them for ourselves, in each and every situation. Peter affirmed this for believers who were being rounded up to be burned at the stake or devoured by hungry lions. They were able to remain steadfast in their faith and live in holiness in the face of these unimaginable horrors because they held on to the promises of God! Is there anything stopping you from doing likewise? What precious promises do you need to grab hold of today so that you can escape corruption and live in holiness? Claim them! Read them! Memorize them! Live them!

Having shared these affirmations of the greatness of God's Gospel and the blessings that flow to believers from it, Peter shares what believers are to do in response. It's a matter of simple arithmetic! Basic addition, $1 + 1$, to be specific!

Peter says, “For this very reason (that is, in light of the amazing truths just shared), make every effort to add!” (verse 5a). Starting with that mustard seed of faith that God has granted us by grace, we are to **add** goodness, then knowledge (wisdom), then self-control, then perseverance, then godliness, then brotherly kindness, then love (verse 5-8). Once we have secured a new measure of something needed to live in holiness, we are to strive ... to put in the effort ... to attain a new measure of something else that is needed. Everything we are to ADD is available to us through the Spirit. Everything we are to ADD is a gift/fruit of the Spirit. But we have to do the work to add these beautiful character qualities. We have to want them. We have to pursue them. We have to diligently apply them as they are granted by the Spirit. We must do our part.

And why wouldn't we? Aren't these qualities that will make our lives richer and fuller? Is there any reason why we wouldn't want to goodness, wisdom, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to grow in us? I know these are things I want in my life! These are qualities that will make me a better mother, daughter, sister, friend, neighbour, boss, leader, and servant. These are values and characteristics that, when offered to others, can help make this world a better place. These are qualities that will bring peace and joy to me and to those around me. And, boy, do I need them! Peter wisely commands,

“Make every effort to add” all these things, with one building upon another and another and another.

Will we ever have enough of any of these qualities? We will ever max out on God’s rich supply? No! So once we have added each in turn the first time, I believe Peter would readily say, “Now start again!” And as we lean on the Spirit again and again, we will be granted an increasing measure of each quality again and again ... until we reach eternity and they are fully seen in us. This is how the Spirit renews and regenerates us. This is progressive holiness being applied in us by God’s grace.

Though math was my least favourite subject in school, I am eager to do it where my spiritual life is concerned! I want to add and add and add! What about you? Are you willing to follow Peter’s directives here? It’s worth the effort because, as Peter shares, “if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of Jesus Christ” (verse 8). Our growing knowledge of Jesus that comes through close fellowship and communion with Him is intended to make us effective and productive in building up His Kingdom on earth. These qualities, Christ’s character which is to be revealed in us, will ensure that we are effective and productive.

The opposite is possible, though. If we aren't prepared to make every effort to pursue these divine qualities we will be near-sighted (only focused on ourselves and the struggles of the moment) and spiritually blind (closed off from the truths of God's Word and from the glorious future He has planned for us). We will even forget the gift of cleansing from sin that Christ made possible for us (verse 9). As has already been shared, at the time Peter that wrote this letter some had fallen away ... they'd lost their faith ... they'd abandoned their calling. They'd become near-sighted, blind, forgetful because they were not willing to make every effort. Since they were no longer doing their part, the Spirit's transforming work could not be accomplished in them. Peter didn't want this to be the story of those who were still standing with Christ in those days. His parting word to the early Church was, "Do the math!" He would not want near-sightedness, blindness or forgetfulness to be our story either. He wants us to heed his wise counsel, inspired by the Spirit, and DO THE MATH!

In doing the math, making the effort, adding and adding and adding the qualities that are needed for life and godliness, Peter says you will "make your calling and election sure" (verse 10). What God has promised to us, the call that He has placed upon our lives, will remain sure as long as we stay fully committed to Him. There is to be an eagerness in us. I believe it is planted there by the Spirit,

but we do have to nurture it and give it room to grow. We are to be eager to do the simple addition that, in partnership with the Spirit, will reveal God's image in us in ever increasing measure.

These divine qualities, available to us, will keep us from falling! They will also ensure, for us, a "rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (verse 11). Peter isn't preaching a "works salvation" here. He's merely reminding all believers that the Kingdom of God, promised to us, is built on these qualities: faith, goodness, wisdom, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love. God wants His Kingdom to be revealed in us, and He has made that possible through the Spirit. We also must desire that these Kingdom qualities flow in and through us and out to this world. In pursuing these qualities we will have the privilege of bringing God's Kingdom to earth. In living these qualities we will bring honour and glory to Him.

God gives us the gift of faith. To that, in leaning on the Spirit's power, we are to make every effort to add seven divine qualities ... again and again and again ... in increasing measure. It's simple math that takes bold obedience. Are you willing to start adding?