

The 8 Stages of Discipleship

From 2 Peter 1:3-11



By Joshua Stucki

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.” – 2 Peter 1:5-7

Restoration Movement Literature

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PERSONAL NOTE

Sometimes it is possible to make a friend in the most unlikely of places. This book was inspired by such a friend, through his own personal discovery of Scripture. His enthusiasm for this particular passage of 2 Peter 1, and in sharing it with me, is what inspired the idea for this book. I have only written one other book on discipleship specifically (“The After Baptism Guide”), and I had been looking for the next logical approach in Scripture to learn and teach more on discipleship. Thanks to this new friend, moved by God in His Word, the idea and direction for this book was born. To my new friend, thank you for your willingness to let God’s Word touch you as it is about to touch many others through this work. “Sola De Gloria” (To God be the Glory)

DEEPER AND WIDER

As this author has studied 2 Peter 1:3-11, two immediate truths about discipleship are given by the text itself:

- 1) Discipleship starts at faith and grows to love (vs. 5-7)
- 2) Each discipleship quality also must be built up individually (vs. 8)

These two truths dictated how “to chart out” discipleship based on this passage. The chart below attempts to reflect both of the above truths by demonstrating how each characteristic from 2 Peter 1:5-7 builds on the other. As well, the chart attempts to show how each quality is grown and developed through the study and imitation of godly examples in the Bible and through the study of Scripture itself.

It is interesting to note how the Bible begins the story of Jesus’ direct lineage with an example of faith (Abraham), culminating in the last characteristic, the example of love (Jesus Himself):

Progress of Personal Discipleship from 2 Peter 1:5-7

Chart by Joshua Stucki

Quality	Verse	Quality Before	Quality After	Other Scripture	Bible Examples	Application
Faith	Vs. 5	--	Goodness	Hebrews 11:6	Abraham Moses	Believe God's Promises
Goodness	Vs. 5	Faith	Knowledge	Philippians 4:8	Joshua Tabitha	Obey (or, begin to obey) God's commands
Knowledge	Vs. 5	Goodness	Self-Control	Colossians 2:3	Luke Bereans	Study the Scriptures
Self Control	Vs. 6	Knowledge	Perseverance	Galatians 5:23	Joseph Job	Resist Difficult Temptations
Perseverance	Vs. 6	Self-Control	Godliness	Hebrews 12:1	Jeremiah Daniel	Patiently wait on God's promises
Godliness	Vs. 6	Perseverance	Mutual Affection	1 Timothy 6:6	Paul John	Imitate Christ's Attitude and Behavior
Mutual Affection	Vs. 7	Godliness	Love	Romans 12:10	Barnabas Ruth	Work out difficulties with others
Love	Vs. 7	Mutual Affection	--	Colossians 3:14	Jesus	Selfless, personal sacrifice for the sake of others

The remainder of this book will flesh out the above chart in detail, as there are many more Biblical examples of both Scripture passages and characters in the Bible that exemplify the above discipleship qualities. It is this author's hope that through the discovery of this material that each Christian (including the author) can judge for him or herself our place in our walk with Christ and therefore have specific direction as to where to progress next in our walk with Him.

There is a great promise from the end of our featured passage that inspires our pursuit of this study: "For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." – 2 Peter 2:10b+11

What greater prize for which to strive?! (Philippians 3:14)

FAITH

“Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” – Hebrews 11:6

Of course, entire volumes have been written on this subject, but for the context of this study faith’s role in discipleship will be discussed:

Faith has two definitions in Scripture that are complementary:

- 1) Believing God’s promises (“Belief”)
- 2) Doing what God says (“Faithfulness”)

All Christians start with #1 and end up at #2 as progress in walking with Christ ensues. This progress does not happen overnight; all of the Biblical examples of faith in Scripture started with belief in God and His promises and in time led to consistent faithfulness in obeying God’s commands.

Abraham “believed” God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). It was not, however, until after Abraham’s obedience in the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) that no error of Abraham was ever recorded again in Scripture. This does not mean Abraham was sinless after this point (1 John 1:8+10); rather, Abraham’s life demonstrates for us that God “sees” us as without sin for the purpose of judgment when we have demonstrated our commitment to be faithful to Him and His Word.

What is the New Testament, or Christian, context to the above? The Apostle Paul strings the concept of “faith” from the Old Testament with the New by quoting Habakkuk 2:4:

“The righteous shall live by faith.”

Paul quotes this Old Testament verse in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. Why?

This is because “faith” has **always** meant “obeying God” that first begins with “believing in His promises”. A person will not obey God if He does not know or trust in His promises; there would be no point. Instead, Paul draws the Old Testament and New Testament together in one simple principle – Old or New, young or old, this era or that, this place or anywhere – we **must** obey God (John 9:4).

It is easy to see that every discipleship quality after “faith” in 2 Peter 1:5-7 is some form of faithfulness: after we begin to believe in God’s promises, then the various steps of faithfulness, or discipleship, can develop and take place.

Some need further evidence that faith and obedience are undeniably intertwined in Scripture. The following summary was developed in a previous work of the author entitled, “Faith and Works in the New Testament”, which is also available without cost:

Acts 6:7 – “a great many... were becoming obedient to the faith.”
 Acts 14:22 – “...continue in the faith”, Romans 1:5 – “the obedience of faith...” Romans 3:27 - “law of faith”, Romans 16:26 - “obedience of faith”, 2 Corinthians 5:7 – “walk by faith”, 2 Corinthians 8:7, “in faith...abound in this righteous work”, Galatians 2:20 – “live by faith”, Galatians 3:11, “live by faith”, Galatians 5:6, “faith working”, Galatians 6:10, “do good... by faith”, Ephesians 6:16 – “taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish...”, Colossians 1:23 – “continue in the faith”, 1 Thessalonians 1:3 – “work of faith”, 2 Thessalonians 1:7 – “work of faith”, 1 Timothy 1:19 – “keeping faith”, 1 Timothy 2:15 – “continue in faith”, 1 Timothy 3:13 – “served well... in the faith”, 1 Timothy 5:8 – “does not provide... has denied the faith”, 1 Timothy 6:12 – “the good fight of faith”, 2 Timothy 2:22 – “pursue...

faith”, 2 Timothy 4:7 – “kept the faith”, Hebrews 6:11-12 – “same diligence... not be sluggish, but be imitators of those who through faith...”, Hebrews 10:22 – “full assurance of faith... our bodies washed with pure water...”, Hebrews 10:38 – “live by faith”, Hebrews 11:3 – “by faith... the worlds were prepared...”, James 1:3 – “faith produces endurance”, 1 Peter 1:7 – “your faith...tested by fire”, 1 Peter 5:9 – “resist him [the devil]... in your faith”, 2 Peter 1:5 – “applying all diligence, in your faith supply...”, 1 John 5:4 – “whatever is born of God overcomes the world... our faith”, Jude 1:3 – “contend... for the faith”, Jude 1:20 – “...building yourselves up on your most holy faith”, Revelation 2:13 – “did not deny My faith...”, Revelation 2:19 – “I know your faith...that your deeds of late are greater...”, Revelation 13:10 – “the perseverance and the faith”, Revelation 14:12 – “who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

The reader is encouraged to check out the above-mentioned book if more information on the subject of faith in the Bible is desired.

Faith in the New Testament is demonstrated most concisely by Hebrews chapter 11. It lists 11 (ironically) specific heroes of “faith” who always obeyed: “Abel offered...” (vs.4) , “Noah prepared...” (vs.7), “Abraham obeyed” (mentioned twice – vs. 8+17), “Moses...endured...kept...” (vs.24-28), “Rahab welcomed...” (vs. 31), “Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah... David, Samuel... the prophets... conquered... performed... shut... quenched... escaped... put...” (vs. 32)

So a brand-new believer is going to start with faith as in “believing God’s promises” then stepping naturally into the first steps of obedience (the continuation of faith), or “godliness” (our next discipleship quality from 2 Peter 1:5-7): repentance, confession, and immersion in water for

the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12, etc.).

GOODNESS

What follows faith is obedience, because the two are intertwined all throughout Scripture (Acts 6:7, 14:22; Romans 1:5, 16:26; 2 Corinthians 5:27, etc.).

The word “goodness” in the Greek is “arête” meaning, “virtue, righteousness, doing God, or doing what God says”. Goodness is a positive word, as in, “do this”, versus a negative word, which would be “don’t do that.” The Ten Commandments, for example, are all “negative” commands (this does not mean “bad”; this means “things not to do”). So, by contrast, goodness is literally “doing good things, as defined by God.”

It is therefore important to realize that “doing good” and “not doing bad” are separate issues; they have to both be worked on, but in this particular step of discipleship, we focus on the “doing good” part of the equation.

By deciding to start by doing many of the good things God has for us to do in Scripture, we begin to fulfill this step.

Although we still have to consciously make choices regularly to steer clear of sinful behavior, that particular part of discipleship, “self-control”, or, resisting difficult temptations, is spelled out in detail in discipleship quality #4 in 2 Peter 1:6. “Knowledge” is between “goodness” and “self-control”, because although we can begin our basic moral goodness after faith, it takes significant Bible knowledge to both “do good things” and “not to do sinful things” faithfully. This is of

course the end goal, but do not worry about getting all of the way there in the beginning: in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gives us the ultimate “do good” instruction in making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them everything I have commanded you. The reader can see how there is a progression of a disciple’s spiritual life in Jesus’ commission.

“Making disciples” is discipleship quality #1, or, faith. “Baptizing them” is the beginning of discipleship quality #2, or, goodness. And “teaching them everything I have commanded you” obviously takes discipleship quality #3, or, knowledge.

Is it not amazing how God, all along, knew exactly what we would need to do to grow from a new believer to a Christian who can chew on the mature meat of Scripture and engage in Kingdom living? (Hebrews 5:14)

It would be tragic to leave this discipleship topic without a whole host of “good options” to choose from for a new believer to do what is right. A preacher long ago told me that living for God is like walking into a candy store and the store owner saying, “Pick what you want. They are all good!” That is what the following list is like: there is no point in wandering “what good” I am “supposed” to do; they are all good! Choose one and get started!

First steps of discipleship quality #2, or, goodness:

- 1) Repentance – commitment to turn from sin and turn towards God
- 2) Confession – admit one is Christian, a follower of Christ

3) Baptism – immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (these two gifts given at baptism are an impetus to the rest of discipleship)

A list of “do goods” from Scripture (not in any order):

0) Adjust personal conduct to Christian selflessness instead of self attention, self glory, or self gratification. Adopting modesty (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Corinthians 12:23) and positive, uplifting speech (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:8) both have their birth in the life of a disciple of Christ.

1) Make more disciples, tell others

2) Do charity and give service or resources in the name of Christ

3) Be kind when others are kind **and** when they are not

4) Pray for others (both for those who are kind and those who are not!)

5) Teach and/or tutor others about what you have learned about Christ, the Bible, and the church

6) Volunteer at church

- Background jobs like communion preparation, janitorial services, service preparation, help the church staff, etc.

- Foreground jobs like serving communion, praying in public, communion devotions, or even preaching or teaching down the line (there is training and Biblical qualifications for some roles)

7) Contact missionaries and missions organizations for opportunities to help, give, or specific items or people to pray for

8) Attend and participate in every service or study your schedule allows

9) Actively consider and replace time-consuming or negative-influencing activities or characters from your life.

10) Continue to read and review the Bible's discipleship development plan from 2 Peter 1:5-7 and see what the next step is, or what can be done to bolster or shore up another step (as Peter tells us in verses 5-8, the discipleship qualities build on each other, and also are fostered individually in the process).

A final thought on "goodness": so many sincere, well-intending believers get caught up in "what God's will for their life is." You, the reader, may be considering the same. An old preacher gave me the best advice I ever heard to that question: "After you have done everything Jesus and His Apostles have instructed in His Word, THEN ask what else God has in store! Until then, we all have plenty to do!"

Amen. If you want to know the will of God is for your life, God wrote it down for you: read the Bible (specifically, the New Testament) and do what it says!

KNOWLEDGE

The Bible has a great deal to say about knowledge, including that it can become "a trap" of its own:

"For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief." – Ecclesiastes 1:18

So how can we avoid making knowledge a trap, and instead use it as the discipleship quality 2 Peter 1:5 means it to be?

This preacher was at an all-church conference a couple of years ago and heard a preacher say, “Bible knowledge unused is like sitting down at an all-you-can-eat restaurant but never leaving.” Personally, I have never heard a more profound statement as to this fact: knowledge, when it is attained but not put to use, will stagnate and even rot! However, knowledge put to use is discipleship quality #3 from 2 Peter 1:5 coming to life and producing great things for God! (And blessings for you!)

Unfortunately, the fate of many Bible students (also “Bible college students”) actually ends right here: the absorption of knowledge never sees an exit into effective service and ministry. For this reason, this discipleship quality is one of the most important to understand! If there is any chapter in this book worth reading and re-reading, it is this one. Too many people sit through classes, Bible studies, sermons, etc. and never find a way to put knowledge to use, or never try (some people feel “religious” simply sitting in a pew many times in their lives). Often times, it is this very lack of application of knowledge obtained that result in not only a potentially stagnant believer, but a backslidden one. Many people “who have tried religion” but failed to get anything out of it are often people who started to learn but then never put their new knowledge to use (or were never given the opportunity to do so).

Possibly the greatest truth about Christian service is that no matter who we are, where we come from, or what we have done, God can and will use us if we submit to His will dictated to us by His Word. The Apostle Paul was a murderer; David was an adulterer; Rahab was a prostitute. God used all of those people (and many others) to greater things than most people in all of history have accomplished; so, friend, God can and will use you too!

The truth is, if we are following Peter's explanation of discipleship from 2 Peter 1:5-7, we should *have already been starting* our good works that we were created to do! (vs. 5, also see Ephesians 2:10) This is also why some people "fail to launch" – they went straight from faith (quality #1) to knowledge (quality #3) and got stuck. What is ripe will rot if we do not use it!

James puts it best in his book at chapter 2, verse 17: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

So approach this discipleship quality with a purpose: that what you are going to learn in terms of Bible knowledge is going to be put to use in a ministry. You may or may not know what specific ministry yet; however, simply being intentional with your learning will transform it from mere academic exercise to actual pursuit of the purposes of the Kingdom of God! And take it from this preacher, there is nothing better.

So how does one fulfill the discipleship quality of knowledge?

The author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts was the physician Luke, and he gives us a great perspective as to how to obtain knowledge of God's Word:

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled^[a] among us,² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." – Luke 1:1-4

There are many great truths to be gleaned from the above passage, but for the sake of our study, there are two primary lessons to be learned:

- 1) Many have already studied carefully and thoroughly
- 2) Now it is our turn to do the same, and benefit from their learning all the same

The great Bible scholars, teachers, preachers, ministers, and others did not start out full of Bible knowledge; just like anyone else, they started out with a blank slate (their mind) and a Bible. Then, through a variety of avenues, learned (even memorized parts of) God's Word. The following are many ways to learn God's Word:

- 1) Regular Bible reading (suggestion: choose a Bible reading plan that is five days a week [to allow for occasional misses], and starts in the New Testament)
- 2) Regular church service attendance (and even better, participation in some way, which is a genuine requirement of discipleship over time)
- 3) Bible Class / Sunday School attendance (and interaction!)
- 4) Evening and/or Wednesday night attendance (and again, if possible, participation in some manner)
- 5) Take home Bible literature to read, study, and compare with Scripture (depending on the church, this may be periodicals/magazines purchased and given out to the church, or Sunday School material that is available, or even self-authored or other literature given out for personal/home study)
- 6) Independent Study (many high-quality, college-level Bible courses are available for low cost – the Diploma of Biblical Studies

through Summit Theological Seminary is an excellent program finished by this author – available at www.summit1.org)

7) Home Bible Studies (either start one or attend one)

8) Monthly or Quarterly Gatherings of local, like-minded churches for fellowship and group worship and learning

9) Teach or preach while studying in any of the above or other means of obtaining knowledge (teachers learn as much or more than the students, any teacher will tell you)

Of course, there are many more options. The point, again, is like the candy story illustration given under “goodness” above – they are all good – pick one! Too many people wander and meander and second-guess themselves when all of the above are good options – you cannot go wrong. Get into the Word, and then be prepared to move onto discipleship quality number #4, “self control”, in order to put it to use!

Remember what James says in his book, chapter 2, verse 26: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Faith, goodness, and knowledge have now prepared us for that next crucial step of discipleship – “self control”. Many never move beyond “knowledge”, so be prepared for blessing (and challenge) overflowing for pressing onward in Christ!

SELF CONTROL

At this point in discipleship, belief in God’s promises, obeying (or beginning to obey) God’s commands, and studying the Bible, has prepared us for possibly the most difficult of all discipleship steps – self control.

The good news is that Peter knew that self control is not automatic; one does not believe, repent, and be baptized, and suddenly have it altogether! In fact, many approach faith and salvation that way and come out sorely disappointed that they still deal with the temptations of the flesh.

One of the greatest myths propagated in the world is that Christ promises relief from temptation. Mostly commonly, this is called, “praying away” whatever temptation it is. The truth is that the Scriptures do NOT teach this!

In fact, the stories and verses of anyone in the Bible dealing with temptation (which is basically all of them) are a matter of **overcoming** the temptation, **not** getting rid of the temptation itself. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:13 –

“¹³No temptation^[e] has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted^[d] beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted,^[e] he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

From this verse we can say that any temptation is ultimately “common”; this does not mean a majority suffers from every temptation, but rather that certainly more than one person is struggling with any given temptation – so we can take comfort that we are not alone.

Paul himself had a “thorn in his side” that he prayed God would take away, but God did not. Instead, Paul testifies in 2 Corinthians 12:7b+8 –

“I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹But

he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.””

Even the Apostle Paul could not “pray away the thorn!” This is very important to realize about any temptation; God is not necessarily going to take it away (although sometimes He does).

Jesus Himself endured EVERY temptation (think about that) that man has, yet He resisted/overcame them all:

“¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” – Hebrews 4:15

So Jesus knows what it is like to have too big of an appetite and yet resist eating too much. Jesus knows what it is like to have the temptation to lust after a woman (or, a man) and resist. Jesus knows what it is like to feel any temptation – anything – and still resist and overcome!

Therefore, any so-called therapy that tries to tell someone that God will take away their temptations is lying; God never said that. God said He would give us the ability (i.e. ability to choose right) not to give into those temptations. Then, that He would give us the strength to “endure” it (implying struggle, but a struggle we can win!).

Indeed, if we can be patient when we do not feel like it, if we can resist cheating because of our commitment to our spouse, if we can hold back when we are angry, if we can be peaceful when others are violent – then we can resist temptation when we choose to, with God’s help (especially if we have been developing all the stages of discipleship as described in 2 Peter 1:5-7). UNDENIABLY, all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and therefore we are ALL going to fail sometimes. However, this

does not excuse any of us; God's grace and plan for eternal life are not a license to give in or give up (Romans 6:1).

This author thinks a genuine understanding needs to be had for those who struggle with ANY sin in today's world; some do not know anyone who struggles the way they do: only their Lord Jesus understands (Hebrews 4:15). This author does not claim to understand every sin personally, only empathize and help in overcoming it.

So the next time an understandably-upset individual is upset about a temptation they are sincerely struggling with, listen first, and then tell them about how Jesus has felt what they feel, and that He understands, because He has been there and done that. Pray for strength, as that is what is Biblical, not just for the temptation "to go away."

Finally, do not expect someone to be able to pray effectively or receive strength from God if they have not come as they are to the cross: if they have not believed upon Jesus, being willing to turn away from their sin (repentance), confess Him, and be baptized into Him, they have not even begun their journey out of sin yet! As well, growth in faith, goodness, and Bible knowledge (discipleship qualities #1-3 from 2 Peter 1:5-7) simply needs to happen to have long-term success at resisting any temptation. It is important to lead people to salvation and regular discipleship before they can have consistent (not perfect) victory over their temptations. We all come as we are to the cross, not already fixed, but broken!

Our feelings cannot tell us what is right or good, but nonetheless they can be cruel sometimes. Be understanding, kind, gracious, and patient. Truth has never been easy to swallow, although it is sweet to the core when it finally sinks in.

In the Bible, there are many stories of people who had to endure great temptations but overcame them. The Apostle Paul was already quoted above in 2 Corinthians 12:7b+8, but let us consider Joseph for a minute:

1) Born into privilege, but his brothers despised him because he was treated as the favorite of his father Jacob (despite popular media and modern telling of the story, Joseph never once “rubbed” anything into the face of his brothers; in fact, no fault of Joseph’s is ever recorded in Scripture)

2) Thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers

3) Then, sold into slavery by those same brothers

4) Made a slave in Egypt

5) Advanced by his master’s wife and then punished after having rightly run away from her advance

6) Thrown into prison in Egypt

Yet, look at Joseph’s responses throughout those same struggles:

1) He never retaliated to his brothers; he only desired their fellowship.

2) Later, when he reconciled with his brothers, he not only forgave them and provided for them, he also told them that what they had meant for evil, God meant for good (Genesis 50:20).

3) Made the best of his slavery in Egypt, rising to the top of the servants of his master’s house

4) Ran away from his master's wife's advances, obeying God even knowing he could never prove his innocence

5) Was so well behaved and served so well in prison, he rose to service the whole jail under the warden (Genesis 39:20b-23).

6) For his faithfulness, God gave him the special ability to interpret dreams – ultimately Pharaoh's.

7) Joseph's faithfulness to God, his previous master, the prison warden, and now Pharaoh resulted in him rising to be second in command over all Egypt!

Now – did God take care of Joseph through circumstances honestly much worse than our own? Yes!!

Joseph had to resist many temptations, but with God's help and a commitment to remain faithful to Him, he did so. At no point in time did God remove Joseph's temptations; no, God gave him the strength to overcome them and endure them.

There are many other examples of temptations resisted by faithful people in Scripture because they had discipleship qualities: faith (trust in God's promises, goodness (a commitment to obeying God), and knowledge of God's Word (a useful knowledge of God's teachings and commandments in His Word). May we strive for the same!

The ability to successfully resist and endure difficult temptations is discipleship quality #4. This naturally builds to the fifth discipleship quality, perseverance, which means to patiently wait on God's promises. It is one thing to believe God's promises – it is another to patiently await their fulfillment! In the next chapter, we will see some promises happen

shortly, but others are a lifetime in coming, or even will be fulfilled in lifetimes past our own (this happened many times in Scripture).

By resisting and enduring temptation, we by nature learn the skill to endure the patient waiting associating with receiving our reward in heaven. We look forward to it, with great anticipation, with great patience!

One final aspect to self control: we are all going to fail sometimes (1 John 1:8+10). When we do, we must be willing to put down our pride (Galatians 6:3), admit it (James 5:16), receive forgiveness (1 John 1:7), and proceed back towards faith (#1), goodness (#2), knowledge (#3), self control (#4), etc. We do not start over, but rather recognize what we did wrong, and resolve not to repeat our past mistakes, all while still pursuing God's will from God's Word.

Simply put, if it has been a long time (especially years) since we have had to say "I'm sorry" for a wrong done to another, we are likely not being honest with ourselves. We have all fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Who do we need to apologize to and receive forgiveness?

PERSEVERANCE

There is a lot of talk of perseverance and endurance in the Bible – Old or New Testament.

Think about the first promise given in Genesis 3:15 – it took 4,000 years for God to send the promised Messiah after His first promise! That's a wait!

God promised Abraham that from him would be a great nation – but it would not be until his grandson Jacob's offspring that the nation would even begin. By this time, Abraham was dead (Genesis 25:8).

From the time of Moses, God predicted that a prophet would come “like Moses” to lead the people into salvation (Deuteronomy 18:15-19, spoken of as fulfilled in Acts 3:22 by Christ). This was a promise 1,500 years in the making!

God promised David that the Messiah would sit on His throne (Jeremiah 33:15). It was a millennia before Christ would come.

So, in comparison to the above, the promises of God are short in coming to us!

As well, perseverance in the Christian life is likened unto God’s similar perseverance, or, patience:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9

One reason we have to wait upon the Lord is because the Lord is waiting upon us! 😊

On a more personal note, perseverance is specifically when we learn to wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled. At each of our death’s, if we have been faithful (Revelation 2:10), we will receive the victor’s crown (salvation). We wait upon the resurrection of our bodies (Romans 8:23); we wait upon the vengeance God will take against all those who persecuted His church (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Revelation 6:10).

In the meantime, we learn *the skill of perseverance*. There is a reason why this is #5 on Peter’s list of discipleship qualities, each largely building on the last; perseverance is an advanced discipleship quality few master, and it is basically impossible to master without faith (Hebrews

11:6), goodness (Philippians 4:8), Bible knowledge (Colossians 2:3), and self control (Galatians 5:23).

One of the aspects of developing the skill of perseverance is realizing one cannot do it alone:

Hebrews 12:1-3 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Notice that Hebrews 12:1 repeats discipleship quality #4 – that in order to “run with perseverance”, we must “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.”

We must also notice therefore that throwing “off everything that hinders” is necessarily different from “the sin that so easily entangles.” Otherwise, there are things that are not sinful, per say, but they are hindrances to our ability to grow in Christ, to be a disciple of His. These things we must throw off!

What are some examples of things that are not sinful but may hinder us?

1) Hobbies or habits that far exceed rest and relaxation (like several hours of TV in a day)

2) A job that regularly takes away time from family or church

3) Friends (or even family) who drag us into any negative state: sin, of course, but also pessimism, distraction from family or church, or people who add stress to our lives without cause

Of course, there are other things that hinder us, but the above helps us think about those things that reduce our ability to endure, persevere, and do so without unnecessary burden or difficulty along the way.

This is also where the ability to develop good habits to replace bad ones can take place. If someone has been struggling with a lifelong addiction to tobacco, this is the step to begin to conquer it (after faith, goodness, knowledge, and self control). If someone has been struggling with their weight (like your preacher), this is the stage upon which to sacrifice that hindrance. From personal experience, and I think we can all agree, it is not easy to overcome whatever it is that hinders us, but this is the step where we believe in God's promises that we CAN overcome!

A character in the Bible that exemplifies perseverance is Jeremiah: God had brought judgment on Israel for their continued sin and disobedience by bringing in Babylon to conquer Israel and drag them off to captivity. According to Scripture, King Nebuchadnezzar came up to four times to Israel to drag away items and people of his choosing. Each time, he left behind what he felt was not worthy to carry away. On his last visit, who and what he left behind – according to tradition – was not even worth his blade's sharpness to slay. Believe it or not, Jeremiah was among that group left behind!

The world (typified by Babylon in this story) literally threw Jeremiah away. The people who were left with him were "the trash" that Babylon did not want, and did not even want to waste the blade of a sword on. These same people, left abandoned in Israel, were STILL disobedient to

the word of the Lord preached through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:1-14). He told them that if they stayed in Israel, God would still provide for them; instead, they took off for Egypt (an old time Bible mistake dating back to Abraham). Jeremiah was dragged off against his will with them, and he died there, without ever seeing Israel restored (although it was as his contemporary, Daniel, prophesied and he himself prophesied).

Through all of the agony of watching his country destroyed, his friends and relatives carted off into exile and slavery, and being left behind to die in a desolate land with the thrown-away people also left behind, Jeremiah wrote the prophetic book of Jeremiah as well as the book of Lamentations (which literally translates, “sadness”, or “weeping”). Jeremiah is known as “the weeping prophet” for this reason. His entire life was one, long, sad story, where his preaching and prophecy and ministry was never taken to heart in his lifetime.

Yet, through all of that, Jeremiah endured! Jeremiah had grown capable of waiting patiently on God’s promises, although he would not live to see them fulfilled himself. All the same, we must trust in God’s promises, and with faith, goodness, knowledge, and self control, developing perseverance with God’s help becomes possible and less burdened because of His grace:

“My grace is sufficient for you.” – 2 Corinthians 12:9

GODLINESS

The Apostle Paul makes some very bold statements that are often ignored or simply unknown by many although they are in Scripture:

“Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the

gospel.¹⁶ Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.” – 1 Corinthians 4:15-17

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” – 1 Corinthians 11:1

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” – 1 Thessalonians 1:6

“For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.” - 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” – Philippians 3:17

“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance...” – 2 Timothy 3:10

As well, there is similar language from the author of Hebrews:

“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” – Hebrews 11:6 (the author of Hebrews gives 11 human examples of faithfulness to imitate)

This preacher has many sincere, God-fearing believers tell him that

“they only talk about Jesus.” Or, that to avoid conflict, they only instruct people to imitate Jesus.

The problem with that approach is that is not the language of the Scriptures, but ecumenicism, that is uncomfortable with the Apostle Paul, or Peter, or any other character in the Scripture other than Jesus (and really, Jesus too, because He says some pretty uncomfortable things! But those things Jesus said are often, simply ignored)

The truth is we do not have a right to “only talk about Jesus.” The Bible is our rule of faith and practice, and therefore we have no right to shut up any part of it! Instead, we are told in the above passages that Paul says – multiple times in multiple letters – “imitate me.” Otherwise, we do have many examples in Scripture, Christ being the foremost, to imitate, and we would do well to study them and do likewise!

This is how we learn godliness – from not only studying Jesus (although we do so first and foremost) – but also studying all of the other characters in Scripture and imitating their lives and work, because they reflected Christ’s.

This also means that we can learn godliness by imitating godly people in our own lives. If what people in our lives are doing is according to Scripture – and thus not contradictory to it – we can also learn godliness from them.

This makes the discipleship quality of godliness three-dimensional: we learn and imitate Christ first, then other godly people in Scripture, and then godly people in our lives. Finally, we become a godly person that renders faithfulness for others to imitate.

So how does one develop godliness?

First, like the other discipleship qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, a significant portion of development depends on our progress of its preceding discipleship qualities – faith, goodness, knowledge, self control, and perseverance.

Godliness, or the Greek word “eusebeia”, means “devotion or piety towards God.” This exceeds goodness because it is more than doing what is good and moral; it exceeds self control because it is more than just consistently resisting difficult temptations. Godliness means that we have taken it upon ourselves to imitate Christ’s humility (John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:6), service, selflessness, mutual affection (brotherly love – discipleship quality #7) and love (discipleship quality #8).

As well, it means a commitment to follow Paul’s example (1 Corinthians 4:15-17, 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; Philippians 3:17; 2 Timothy 3:10), and other godly people (Hebrews 11).

Obviously, this requires Bible knowledge (discipleship quality #3), and the other discipleship qualities like goodness to really get a grasp on godliness as a part of developing discipleship.

Some have still objected, saying, “We can learn absolutely everything we need to from Christ.” Actually, this is not so:

1) We cannot learn how to apologize from Christ; He never had to apologize! But Peter (Acts 10:34; Galatians 2:11-21) and Paul (Acts 23:5; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15) both did; we can learn from their humble examples.

2) We cannot see how to repent from Christ; naturally, He taught repentance, but He Himself never had to repent! He gave the command to repent, but to learn – or “imitate” – as the above verses say, we need

an example: we find such examples in Paul in Acts 9 (also retelling his conversion story in Acts 22), Peter (in repenting of his denial of Christ – Luke 22:62), Joseph’s brothers (Genesis 45:14+15), and David’s repentance over his sins of adultery and murder (Psalm 51).

3) We cannot learn how to be an elder or deacon from Christ, or even how to be a missionary (Jesus specifically ministered to “the Lost Sheep of Israel” – Matthew 15:24 – leaving the ministry to the Gentiles to others).

The above are just a couple of examples why Scripture tells us to imitate not only Christ (although He is first and foremost) but also other godly characters in Scripture. It is in this complete education of godliness through multiple examples, all given by God in His Word, that we can grow in faith, goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, and now godliness.

It is through godliness – imitating Christ and others who imitate Christ – that we become a “light” unto a dark world (Matthew 5:14), and “salt” to a tasteless, void earth (Matthew 5:13).

MUTUAL AFFECTION

Does it really take faith, goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, and godliness to develop genuine mutual affection?

Ever witness a simple conflict boil over to split a church? Ever witness two or more people “burn bridges” because they could not confront each other and work out their differences? Ever notice how so few people are willing to talk to the people that upset them, but they are willing to talk about them with everybody under the sun?

Overcoming all of these problems is what is meant by mutual affection; and that is no small feat!

Certainly, a degree of “conflict management” can be learned outside the church, and those skills (still developed by God, as He created and invented all things) are still helpful. However, with Satan intermixing in every church conflict (by the way, Satan is always in the business of the church – he has no work out to do in the world!), it is important to realize that it takes more than “conflict management” and “problem resolution” skills from a workplace or secular book to work out church issues. This is also true of genuinely resolving interpersonal issues between believers or between believers and the world: it takes discipleship quality #6 from 2 Peter 1:5-7 – it takes “mutual affection.”

This concept is also closely related to the concept of unity: we can only have unity in the Body of Christ with mutual affection for one another. Paul writes in Philippians 2:2 –

“...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”

It is an absolute falsehood told by many believers and non-believers alike that genuine Christians cannot agree on what the Bible says. God is not confusing; instead, man is confused! Many so-called “interpretive rules” actually inhibit genuine Bible study. When people truly go “back to the Bible”, and shed their denominational, traditional, familial, and cultural bias in favor of the New Testament standard, remarkable unity can happen without creeds, votes, or sectarian labels. This is, in essence, of why the Restoration Movement churches began, though it is highly in need of a refresher itself having taken on many denominational elements as of late.

As a last talking point on unity, Scripture never says that we should try to “balance” unity with Scriptural truth: how absurd would it be if Christ actually said, “If it means everybody can get along, you can take some of what I said as suggestions.” NO! The only genuine unity is one built around commitment to the Scriptures, not commitment to unity for the sake of unity – because that’s not a church – that’s a social club.

So, if we can have unity based on adherence to the Bible, we are part of the way to mutual affection. The other half is honestly just as tough (there is a reason why this is discipleship quality #6!): resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Let us first state, based on the discussion just finished above, that we **must** resolve conflicts the Biblical way. How is that done?

First, it must be understood that the Bible gives DIFFERENT sets of instructions for two kinds of conflicts: 1) sin against us (Matthew 18:15-17), and 2) sins that have occurred but not against us personally (Galatians 6:1-6).

As for sins committed against us, Jesus lays it out for us in Matthew 18:15-17 –

- 1) Go talk to the person privately, directly, in person!
- 2) If no progress, then take a witness or two and go talk privately again, directly, in person.
- 3) If no progress, then take it before the church (vs. 17).

It is also reasonable to take any matter before the elders in confidence first (Acts chapter 15, 20:28, etc.). This is especially true if there is not unquestioned acknowledgment that a sin has occurred. Also,

if there is disagreement over a decision made by the eldership, it is NOT appropriate to discuss that with others. As difficult as it may be, all problems **must** be worked out with those whom we have a problem with!

As for sins committed that were not personal in nature, Paul lays out different instructions in Galatians 6:1-6 –

1) A penitent Christians should work to restore that person gently, privately, directly, and in person (vs. 1) – a warning is attached to the verse that the person doing the restoring should be careful not to be sucked into (or sympathize with) the temptation itself.

2) Christians should carry each other burdens. We cannot live for Christ alone; the verse specifically says pride must be put away (vs. 2+3). Hebrews 10:25, as well Acts 20:7, inform us that we meet together for the sake of being with the Lord and each other in His prescribed way. If we do not regularly attend a New Testament church, discipleship will always “fail to launch.”

3) Finally, each one should test his own actions; we must take personal responsibility (vs. 4-6). We cannot fix what we blame others for!

The specific Greek word for “mutual affection” is “Philadelphia”, which translates to “brotherly love” or “devoted love to a friend, neighbor, or family member.”

It is only used five times in the New Testament (including 2 Peter 1:7), so it is a special word meant for this special aspect of discipleship:

Romans 12:10 – “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

1 Thessalonians 4:9 – “Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.”

Hebrews 13:1 – “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.”

1 Peter 1:22 – “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

It is a legitimate question why “love” appears in the above verses, when “love” is the eighth quality of discipleship listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, instead of “mutual affection” (the seventh quality, what we are discussing here). This is because English actually has only one word for “love”, when Greek has four! So when an English translation of the Bible says “love”, it loses its meaning in aspect of what kind of love is being discussed. In the love of “mutual affection”, the seventh discipleship quality, “love” means “brotherly love, or devotion to friends or family”, whereas “love” in the eighth and final discipleship quality is “love without condition”, or “agape”.

Barnabas was a disciple of Christ who had mutual affection down pat: when the whole church of Jerusalem was skeptical of Saul’s conversion, he welcomed him in and stood in the gap for Saul (Acts 9:27; also see Ezekiel 22:30). Will we believe in those no one else will, but the Lord does?

The ability to work out interpersonal conflicts BIBLICALLY is the seventh, second-to-last quality of discipleship. To be fully developed, it certainly needs its predecessors – faith, goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, and godliness. If a church, or even just beginning

with a single Christian, can get a handle on this seventh quality of discipleship as discussed in 2 Peter 1:7, great blessings of unity of mind, love, and purpose can occur. This is so rare, honestly – and unfortunately so – that few churches benefit from this kind of same mindedness, same purpose, and rock-solid, Satan-can't-get-to-them brotherly love. It is a definite pursuit worth the cost however. Will you learn to love your brother and sister in Christ, and pursue conflict resolution God's way as described in His Word?

LOVE

The final discipleship quality listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 has no successor – if we can learn to love like Christ – if we learn to have “unconditional”, or “agape” kind of love for our neighbor, friend, biological family, church family, stranger, pagan, and even our enemies – then there is nothing God cannot do through us!

The Greek word for “love” in this context is the Greek word “agape”, or “unconditional love”. Unlike “philadelphia”, or “brotherly love” in the seventh discipleship quality – that only occurs five times in the New Testament – “agape” occurs 116 times! This is the kind of love God wants us to attain to – for ALL men – just as He has. By far, this is the toughest “kind of love” to develop, because it has no terms, conditions, or parameters. Jesus sums up this kind of love in Romans 5:8 –

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Otherwise, before man even knew God, even before we repented, and even unto those who never will repent, God still sent His Son to die for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2, 4:10), so that whoever would

be faithful to Him would have everlasting life (John 3:16). If only we would follow His terms of pardon, the price for sin can be paid for us! (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16).

Of course, the quintessential model of love in the Bible is Jesus. The truth is, only Jesus exemplifies all eight discipleship characteristics perfectly, but on this particular discipleship quality, He is the example we ultimately want to try to imitate:

Jesus revolutionized how we should treat our enemies in Matthew 5:44:

- 1) Love them (“agape” – without terms, conditions, or parameters)
- 2) Pray for them (and not for their demise but for their repentance and blessing!)

Jesus gave His life not just for His friends and family, but even for those who hated him in Romans 5:7+8. Otherwise, there was no condition God made to offer the means by which anyone could be saved. No, the terms of pardon He gives us (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16) are not how we “earn” salvation; it is how we accept the free gift He gave us on the cross!

Jesus made the blind see, the lame walk, the hungry fed, and the unworthy feel worthwhile. Through the Gospel, we can make the blind see; through the Gospel, we can give the lame a better hope than this world, and through the Gospel we can give out the Bread of Life that never allows hunger again. The Gospel makes the unworthy able to receive the reward of eternal life. Truly, there is no message like it, and no lord of that message like Him.

Paul summed it up well in Colossians 3:4 –

“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Paul sums up love in 1 Corinthians 13 right in the middle of discussing various interpersonal conflicts happening in the church at Corinth over spiritual gifts (a contentious issue to this day!). Otherwise, in the middle of strife, conflict, and heartache with each other and the world, we ultimately need an “agape” kind of love – one without conditions, parameters, or demands – so that like Christ, we can overcome the world through Him (John 16:33).

An “agape” kind of love is the penultimate discipleship quality: although it cannot truly be mastered, it can be built up, built upon, spread around, and continually fostered until that day when we ascend into the perfection Christ has waiting for us up in heaven!

THE CONTEXT

It is very important to realize the following about the above discipleship qualities described: they were written in the context of other verses that give us the background (and foreground) by which to properly understand and apply them.

1) vs. 3 – It is only by God’s divine power we can develop “everything we need for a godly life.” Otherwise, no matter our effort, it is to God’s credit we can do it at all, so there is no room for pride here (Ephesians 2:8-10).

2) vs. 4 – One purpose of discipleship is that we can “participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” Otherwise, discipleship is for our sake, to the glory of God, just as salvation itself is: coming out of the waters of baptism is just the

first step, and there is so much more to do and so many more blessings to have as a result!

3) vs. 10 – “...if you do these things...” We must be faithful, to “make every effort to confirm” our “calling and election.” If we are faithful, therefore, this same verse promises that “we will never stumble” (specifically referring to staying in the process of “being saved” – see Acts 2:47, 27:20; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15). As Paul also puts it, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

4) vs. 11 - Our final reward is to “receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Is there anything greater to look forward to, is there anything greater worth our every effort to please our Lord by becoming a greater disciple day by day? (Philippians 3:14)

CONCLUSION

Absolutely no one will ever “perfect” these discipleship qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7. It is a constant striving, an endless reach – until our Lord returns – to continue to try to live in such a way that honors and pleases Him. Thankfully, through this passage among others, we can learn what a disciple is, what a disciple does, and specific steps to get closer to Jesus’ standard.

So many wonder what to do after baptism; this booklet has imperfectly attempted to answer that question. Most importantly, our Lord gives us His Word, and if we read it and do what it says, we will simply be busy with righteous things for life. ☺ Let us strive to be faithful in order to receive the victor’s crown! (Revelation 2:10)