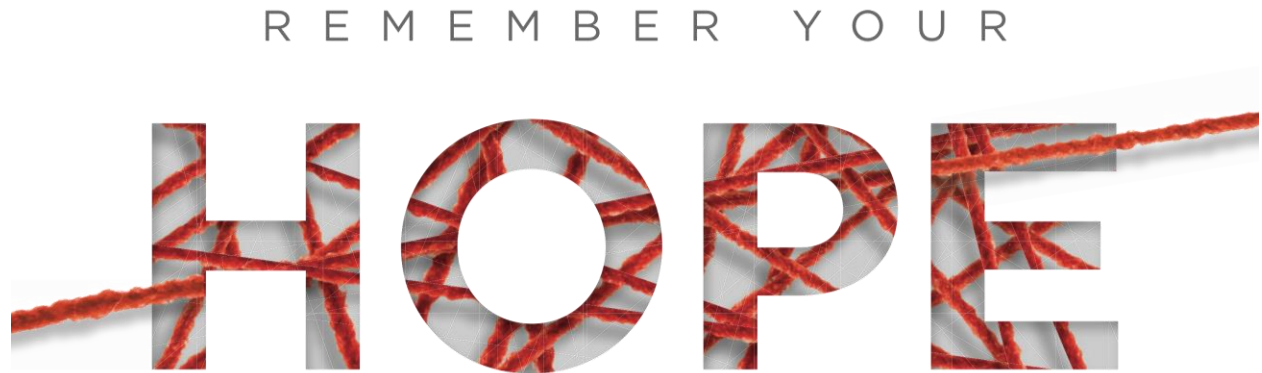


Lesson 1: 2 Peter 1:1–15

Hook



Main Point: Believers should encourage each other to remember and reflect the qualities of Jesus in their lives.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have the ability to remember everything you need to know? To never forget anything? This might sound like an amazing “superpower,” but researchers continue to confirm that it will probably never happen for any of us. The human brain is a fascinating and complex instrument that God gave us, but it has limitations, and finite memory is one of those limitations.

Over the years, researchers have tried to create and enhance methods for remembering all kinds of information. Although there have been rare instances on record of some individuals remembering hundreds of pieces of information, most people can only hold “three or four things in mind at once.”¹

Q: Have you ever forgotten something really important? How did it feel not to be able to remember that information?

Q: What are some ways you keep track of important information or items in your home? What taught you those systems?

¹ <https://www.livescience.com/2493-mind-limit-4.html>

Transition: There are some things that are worth remembering. As the apostle Peter begins his second letter to the churches, he tells believers that one of his goals is “always to remind you of these qualities” (v. 12) that he will share that relate to a Christian’s understanding of his or her salvation and how to live for Christ. Peter wants believers to remember these truths and hold tightly to them every day.

Book

Main Point: Peter's final exhortation to his churches is to live lives of godliness.

Text Summary: The book of 2 Peter is Peter's final word to believers, written when he knew he was about to die. His final words to his churches instruct them to pursue lives of godliness, to put their hope in the Gospel, and not to listen to false teachers. Though the main issue he addresses is different than the one he addresses in 1 Peter (false teachers here instead of persecution), the way to deal with it is the same – remember your hope in Jesus and in the final inheritance of the kingdom of God.

2 Peter 1:1-7[Read]

Talking Point 1: With His divine power, God has given us all we need to live godly lives

Q: What would be your final words to your children about what is most important in life?

Q: Why would Peter call himself both a servant *and* an apostle?

Q: How can we be partakers in the divine nature? What does that mean?

This is Peter's final letter, his final word to the churches; he lays out what he thinks is important for living life with Jesus. He knows he won't be around much longer (1:12–16), so these are essentially his deathbed words to his beloved spiritual children. First, he calls himself both a servant and an apostle of Jesus. At first glance, these two titles may seem opposite from one another to our modern thinking. But they go hand-in-hand. *Apostle* doesn't just mean chief leader in the church. What it really means is "messenger." Peter primarily identifies himself as a servant and a messenger of Jesus. His whole identity is wrapped up in serving Jesus and sharing the Gospel, and this is what he encourages his people to do as well. Even if we use the meaning we have developed for "apostle," a high-ranking leader in the church, the two still go hand-in-hand since as we learned in lesson 9 that both Jesus and Peter commanded all church leaders to be servant leaders (John 13; 1 Peter 5:1–5).

The way Peter describes his audience is fascinating—"those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours" (1:1). There are no other greetings quite like it in all the letters. Other greetings call the people "the elect" or "the saints," but this very specific greeting is meant to assure the people that, because of their faith, they are on equal standing with the apostles in God's kingdom. Josephus writes that this phrase, "equal standing," was particularly used in connection with foreigners who had been given equal citizenship with the natives of the new country in which they lived. These believers, who were once Gentiles, had been given equal citizenship in God's kingdom, not just equal with the Jewish believers, but with the apostles

themselves. Remember, although Paul was the one given the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), Peter was given a vision about the Gentiles—that God does not show favoritism and that all are welcome in the kingdom of God (Acts 10:34).ⁱ

Peter's first deathbed command to them is to live godly lives, and he assures them that they are perfectly capable of doing so. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have everything we need to live godly lives. We have the supernatural wisdom to understand the Scriptures and the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2). We have the power to stand firm against the forces of evil and the schemes of the Devil (Ephesians 6). We have the Spirit growing the Fruit of the Spirit in us (Galatians 5). Peter spends much of his first letter encouraging people to put their hope in eternal life in the kingdom to come, but here, he focuses on how they are to live in *this* life. Jesus didn't come just to give us eternal life in heaven; He came to give us abundant life here on earth (John 10:10). And the way to have abundant life is by walking in godliness, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Those of us who find life hard sometimes should find Peter's words extremely encouraging. We have *everything* we need to live a life that pleases God. Wisdom for raising kids, making good decisions, and handling hard times. Courage in the face of opposition. Peace in times of turmoil. Patience for dealing with difficult people. Comfort in bereavement, loneliness, or isolation. Healing for woundedness. Strength in overwhelming situations. All these things come from the Spirit. A relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit is *all* you need for life. No matter what you are going through, if you aren't sure what to do, ask God (James 1:5). We have the power to live a godly life because Jesus has given us:

- The divine power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (1:3).
- The knowledge of Him (1:3).
- His own glory and excellence (1:3).
- His precious and very great promises (1:4).

Through those promises, we have become partakers of the divine nature. We may tend to skim over this phrase because it sounds familiar and churchy, but stop for a minute and think about what it says. *Partakers* of the divine nature. Does this mean we can actually become gods ourselves? There are those who have argued this before, but that's not what Peter means, of course. Peter is describing union with Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for *partakers* means "sharer." We share in the divine life because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, growing His fruit in us (Galatians 5), giving us supernatural spiritual wisdom we could not have deduced through our own logic or human reason (1 Corinthians 2).ⁱⁱ This is how we can escape

corruption and sinful desire (1:4). Not by our own power or wisdom, but by leaning on the Holy Spirit, by staying connected to the vine (John 15).

In verse 5, Peter links together the “qualities” of the Christian life, which sound very similar to the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). He tells them to supplement X with Y and Y with Z. When you look at the sentence, it almost looks like a train of words:

Faith—virtue—knowledge—self-control—steadfastness—godliness—brotherly affection—love

This isn't a progression, with one leading to the next or building upon the previous one. They go together, all at the same time. The Greek verb translated “make” here even means “to introduce *simultaneously*.” We are called to have *all* these qualities in the Christian life; the Spirit brings *all* these things. As Tim Keller says about the Fruit of the Spirit, they are not like spiritual *gifts*. You don't have some and not others. The Spirit grows *all* of them in your life over time.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Spirit is the one who has the power, and the Spirit is the one who does the work of growing these fruits in our lives. Yet we have a role in this, too. Our job is to dwell in the vine, to walk by the Spirit – to *stay connected* to Jesus. Peter encourages his people to “make every effort” to supplement their faith with these fruits. The Greek verb used for *supplement* literally means “to equip,” like equipping an army for battle. It was often used in the theatre world, which the Greeks took very seriously. Their plays were lavish productions on which wealthy donors spent tons of money to have the best performances. This word carries with it that sense of lavish generosity in equipping the soul with all the necessary equipment for life.^{iv} We are to “make every effort” to lavishly equip our lives with every virtue – constant prayer, daily Scripture reading, spiritual disciplines. To do all we can to stay connected to Jesus and walk by the Spirit. The Christian life is not easy; it is a daily battlefield (Ephesians 6). God gives us the divine power, but we must “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Q: Look at the qualities listed above. How do we attain these qualities?

Q: How do we tap into the power of the Holy Spirit?

Q: What do you find difficult about living a godly life? How can you find help for that struggle?

2 Peter 1:8-11 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Pursuing godliness confirms our election in Christ.

Q: Why does Peter focus on the fact that these qualities need to be increasing?

Q: How do these qualities confirm our election, our identity as children of God?

Peter assures his people that if these qualities are *increasing* in their lives, then they are being effective and fruitful (1:8). As we said above, the Spirit grows these qualities in our lives like fruit of the vine. We don't have some and not others, like spiritual gifts. But that doesn't mean that the day we become a Christian these fruits magically appear full-grown in our lives. When you plant an apple seed, you don't have a ready-to-pick apple the next day. It takes time. It takes six to 10 years for an apple tree to grow and bear fruit. It may take years for self-control to grow in our lives. The key is that it is *increasing*. Sanctification is a lifelong process. No one expects you to live a perfectly holy life every moment from the very beginning. But if you are walking in the Spirit day by day, you should expect to have more self-control than you had last year or five years ago. Keller says, "with botanical growth, you never see it happening – you can only measure it after a time." You may not really notice its growing quietly, but then suddenly, you have a difficult situation and realize you are being so much more self-controlled than you would have been years before.^v

God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to be growing in godliness year after year. If we don't have these qualities or if they are not increasing in us, Peter writes that we are not really living the Christian life, and perhaps even not really saved. Christianity isn't saying a prayer to get our ticket to heaven and then living however we want. Christianity is following Jesus.^{vi} If there is *no* evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit in the lives of those who call themselves a believers, then we have every reason to question whether they really are a believer (Matthew 7:15–20). Peter writes that having these qualities present in our lives "confirms our calling and election" (1:10). They show the world the authenticity of our faith, because faith without works is dead (James 2:14–26). If a person shows *no* growth in any of these areas, he is spiritually blind (1:9).

Peter writes not to shame his readers but just the opposite, to give them assurance of their salvation. Some Christians constantly doubt whether they are "really saved" because they still struggle with sin, because they aren't doing everything just right all the time. The false teachers of Peter's day were capitalizing on that fear, using it to control the people—telling them they had to do x, y and z, or they might lose their salvation. Peter assures them that even if they don't have it all together spiritually, if the Fruit of the Spirit is increasing in their lives, even just a little bit, they can be confident in their salvation. No one's sanctification process is going to look like a perfect, upward diagonal line. We will all have ups and downs. God doesn't want us to worry that we may lose our salvation every time we struggle! God's gift of eternal life brings with it the benefit of *full* assurance (Hebrews 10:22).^{vii}

Q: Why might some people struggle with worrying that they aren't really saved or that they might lose their salvation at any moment? What kind of false teaching might they have heard that keeps them worried?

Q: How have you seen these qualities increase in your life since you became a Christian?

Q: How can we continue to increase in these qualities throughout our lives with Jesus?

Q: How can we encourage one another to increase in spiritual fruitfulness?

2 Peter 1:12-15 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Our leaders leave a legacy for us to follow.

Q: How does Peter know he will die soon? How do you think that makes him feel?

Q: Look at how many times Peter used "remind" or "remember." Why do you think he reminded them of the same thing over and over?

As he writes this letter, Peter knows he is going to die soon. Jesus had revealed it to him, whether in a vision or a dream or direct word we don't know (1:14). Peter is most likely in prison in Rome, awaiting his martyrdom, when he writes this letter around 67 or 68 AD. Even before He ascended back up into heaven, Jesus had told Peter that he would die a martyr's death (John 21:19), but it seems he was given some kind of additional sign from Jesus that this was truly the end for him (1:14).^{viii}

Peter doesn't seem upset about his death. Like Paul, Peter isn't concerned about his own life at all, only that he finishes the mission God has for him (Acts 20:24). He, too, believes that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). The word he uses here translated as *body* literally means "tent," emphasizing, like Paul, that our bodies are only temporary dwelling places (2 Corinthians 5:4). This image harkens back to that first generation dwelling in tents during the wilderness wanderings of the Exodus. They lived as sojourners on the earth, not having a permanent home. In the same way, we are sojourners on earth, and our permanent home is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Peter even uses the word *exodus* (translated "departure" in the ESV) for his death (1:15).^{ix}

Peter writes with a pastor's heart for his people, sharing with them what is important for living a godly life. He uses the word *remind* several times, emphasizing that he knows they already know this and already have these qualities (1:12), but since he is going to die soon, he wants to *continue* to remind them as much as possible while he is still living so they will remember it well *after he is gone* (1:13–14). Like any good teacher, he knows repetition is important for searing things in our memories. He wants them to remember so when times get hard, they will know

what to do, even though he won't be there to ask. He wanted to leave a legacy. We have Peter's spiritual legacy and the legacy of the other apostles here in the words of the Bible. This is why it is so important to study and memorize their words – so we can “recall these things” whenever we need them (1:15).

Peter remains their faithful pastor, teacher and spiritual father until his last dying breath, continuing to “make every effort” (1:15) “as long as he is in this body” (1:13) to remind them how to follow Jesus. He uses the same phrase about himself that he used for them – he will *make every effort* to remind them just as he encourages them to *make every effort* to confirm their calling. “Making every effort” means putting our whole self into it. The Christian life isn't just one of many activities we do, such as going out for tacos on Tuesdays, playing basketball on Thursdays, and going to church on Sundays. It's how we live our whole lives. It's following Jesus in the way we eat tacos on Tuesdays and play basketball on Thursdays and work Mondays through Fridays. It's about pursuing godliness in everything we do. Living the Christian life is worth *making every effort*, running the race with perseverance (Hebrews 12:1–3), putting your all into it (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). So we can say, like Paul and Peter, that we fought the good fight and persevered to the end (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Q: Think back to mentors, leaders or family members who have passed away. What do you remember about what they taught you?

Q: How can you take steps to be able remember God's Word when you are in a difficult situation and don't know what to do?

Q: How can you leave a legacy for your children, grandchildren, or spiritual children to follow Jesus after you are gone? What things do you need to be teaching them now, over and over, to help them remember what to do?

Took

Main Point: We should commit to remember what has been taught to us and pass it on to others.

For many years, if you walked into someone's home and saw a large, bound book on a coffee table, you could have safely guessed you were looking at a family Bible. Maybe your family still has one of these (*note: if you do, bring it with you to show your group*). These Bibles were typically very large and commonly contained important dates and information regarding various important events in the lives of family members. These might include salvation or baptism dates, marriages and anniversaries.

Some people today write down important items in their Bibles they want to remember. For instance, you might have the name of a friend written down in front of your Bible who needs to come to Christ. Perhaps you have sermon notes from a message that impacted you or you have highlighted and made notes next to Scripture passages that have deeply impacted your walk with Christ.

Q: Why is it important to remember important spiritual moments in our lives?

Q: Have there been some spiritual truths or passages of Scripture on which you used to reflect regularly but have now started to neglect?

Q: What things have you learned in your walk with Christ that you know the Lord wants you to share with others?

CHALLENGES

THINK: *What things in my life need to change to make every effort to pursue godliness?* What spiritual disciplines do I need to add into my life? What things do I need to take out of my life? How can I focus my whole life, all that I am and all that I have, on living a godly life? How can I make every effort to develop the Fruit of the Spirit in my life?

PRAY: *For divine power in your life.* Remember that divine power isn't for the purpose of gaining wealth or fame or power for ourselves. The purpose of the divine power is to enable us to live godly lives. Pray specifically for *power* from the Holy Spirit to live a life of godliness. Pray through the list of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 and the list of qualities here in 2 Peter 1:5–7, specifically asking God to grow each one in your life. Submit yourself to His authority and His lordship in your life and commit to following Him and walking by the Spirit to increase the fruit.

ACT: Write a legacy letter. This letter can be to your own children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews, or spiritual children (or all of the above). Imagine that your time on earth is coming to an end soon and, as Peter did, write to your spiritual children what you think is important in your own words.

ⁱ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The New Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

ⁱⁱ Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ Timothy J. Keller, *Galatians for You* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2013), 151–152.

^{iv} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The New Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

^v Timothy J. Keller, *Galatians for You* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2013), 151–152.

^{vi} David Platt, *Follow Me* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013).

^{vii} John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 38.

^{viii} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The New Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

^{ix} John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 52.