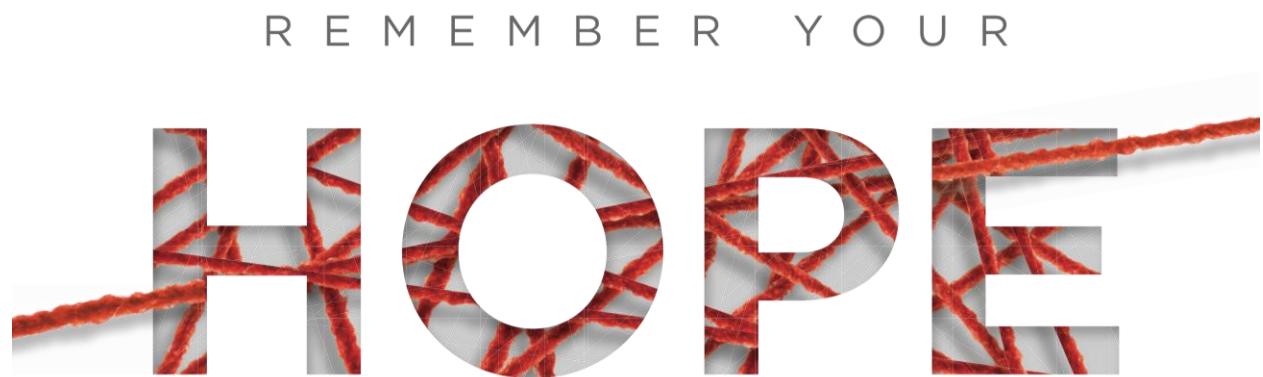


Lesson 6: 2 Peter 3:14–18

Hook



Main Point: Believers should learn the truths of God and live by following them.

iFLY is an entertainment company with facilities located across the nation in which people can fly on a cushion of controlled air. A vertical wind tunnel has fans that push the air up through the flight chamber keeping the flyers off the ground. According to their website, this indoor facility has hosted more than 9 million flyers from three years old to 103 years old. The first-time flyer – over the course of an hour and a half – will have a training session as well as two opportunities to fly in the wind tunnel for 60 seconds each.¹

Q: Have you ever been skydiving before?

Q: If you are afraid of jumping out of a plane, would you consider going to a place like iFLY?

Q: Would you differentiate floating in a wind tunnel with skydiving out of a plane?

Book

Main Point: Believers should learn the truths of God and live by following them.

Text Summary: Peter closes his second letter with a reminder of his appeal to live holy lives, spotless and blameless, and at peace with God. He also reminds them that God is patient in coming back because He wants to save as many people as possible. Paul agrees with him and wrote the same thing. Peter says false teachers distort the truth because they don't understand Paul's theology. He reminds them to be on guard against false teaching and to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:14–15 [Read]

Talking Point #1: Make every effort to be at peace with God.

Q: How can we be found spotless and blameless before God on the Day of Judgment?

Q: What does it say about God that He is trying to save as many people as possible? What does it say about our mission?

Peter closed his letter by calling his recipients "beloved." He wasn't writing to strangers; these were people Peter dearly loved. Not only did he love them, but by calling them "beloved," he also reminded them how much God loved them. "Beloved" was more than just an adjective; it was their *identity*. Many of the New Testament writers used this term of endearment as a *title* for God's people. It was a significant title that comes from the Old Testament prophecies about God's relationship with Israel, comparing it to a marriage (Hosea 2; Romans 9:25). When we become believers, God calls us His beloved. We have a new identity as beloved children of God. Whether we are broken, undeserving, rejected, or don't feel worthy of love, God's love defines us from now on. He pours out His love on us so thoroughly that our very identity changes to "the one who is loved by God." That is who we are (1 John 3:1).

Those of us who are defined by God's love for us, whose identity as children of God sets the pattern for our lives, are "waiting for these" (3:14). "These" refers to the events of the Day of Judgment – the punishment of the wicked and vindication of the righteous. If your relationship with God defines your life, then it is characterized by waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus. It is our hope. As we wait, Peter said we are to do two things, repeating things he has already said in this letter – remember, he believes repetition is important for learning:

- Be diligent to present ourselves to Him without spot or blemish and at peace (3:14).
- Count the patience of Jesus as salvation (3:15).

If Jesus is really coming back and the world is really going to be judged, then we need to do our best to be ready for it. That doesn't mean we can earn our salvation, but as Barclay puts it, "If there are to be a new heaven and a new earth and if that heaven and earth are to be the home

of righteousness, obviously a man must seek with all his mind and heart and soul and strength to be fit to be a dweller in that new world.”²

The only way we can be spotless and without blemish and at peace with God is by the righteousness of Christ, not our own good works. In Christian theology, *justification* is God’s act of removing the guilt and penalty of sin while at the same time declaring a sinner righteous through Christ’s spotless and blameless atoning sacrifice (Galatians 2:16). It is how we can stand before the Lord justified, how we can approach His throne with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). The Bible describes us taking on Christ’s righteousness as our own, what theologians called *imputation* so that when God looks on us, He doesn’t see our sin, our imperfection, our messiness. He sees us as being as spotless as Christ. Our righteousness, what makes us “blameless and spotless” before God on the Day of Judgment, is found in Christ and Christ alone. So our righteousness is the same yesterday, today and forever just as Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It doesn’t get stronger when we live right, or weaker when we struggle or doubt. It is perfect all the time because it is Christ’s righteousness.³

Yet, Peter encouraged them to *be diligent* to live holy lives (3:14), to grow in holiness, which is *sanctification*. The goal of the Christian life is to grow to be more and more like Jesus. Not because we think our good works can earn our place in heaven, but because we *want* to be like Him. We see His beauty and goodness and want to emulate Him.

Peter also reminded them to count God’s patience in waiting for the Day of Judgment as His way of saving more people, this time adding that Paul wrote the same thing in his letters (Romans 2:4; 3:25; 9:22; 1 Timothy 2:4). By this time, the letters of Paul had been copied and circulated throughout the Church, and Peter’s audience would have been familiar with them. It was important for Peter and Paul and all of the New Testament writers to stress that they all preached the same Gospel, the same Christ. Paul said as much when he wrote that whether you followed him or Peter or Apollos didn’t matter because they were all following Christ (1 Corinthians 3). Over the centuries, some scholars have tried to say that Paul’s theology differed from Peter’s or James’s or John’s, but Peter made it clear here that Paul was a beloved brother and that none of their writings disagree if you understand them properly (3:15–16).

Peter and Paul both wrote that the only reason Jesus was “delayed” in coming back was to give them the opportunity to bring more people into the kingdom. So, as we wait for God’s kingdom to come, our mission is twofold – our own sanctification and bringing as many other people as possible to come to know Jesus. These two things should be our primary focus and mission as we walk this earth, looking forward in hope to Christ’s return.

Q: What does it mean to be diligent in pursuing holiness? How can we maintain that diligence throughout the marathon that is our Christian life?

Q: We know our justification only comes through Jesus, but what kinds of things can we do to grow to be more like Him? How can we pursue *knowing* Him?

Q: What do you find difficult about witnessing to others and why?

Q: What would your life look like if you fully committed to these two things – sanctification and witnessing? How would your life change?

2 Peter 3:16 [Read]

Talking Point #2: Believers should know what God’s Word says in order not to be swayed by false teachers.

Q: Why do false teachers distort the Scriptures?

Q: What does it mean theologically that the New Testament writings all agree with each other if we really understand them? How does that affect the way we read and study Scripture?

Q: How does it help to know that even Peter acknowledged that some of Paul’s writings were hard to understand?

Many people point to this passage as a relief – even Peter thought some of Paul’s writings were hard to understand. This wasn’t a passive-aggressive stab at Paul. Peter was just honest. Through the centuries, people have struggled to understand the writings of Paul, and indeed many heresies have started by a misunderstanding of Paul’s theology, just as Peter described (3:16). Martin Luther struggled mightily with some of Paul’s writings, but eventually, once he “got” them, they changed his life and the whole Church forever. It was Luther’s wrestling with Paul’s doctrine of justification by grace through faith that resulted in the Protestant Reformation. Luther’s journey with Paul began as a love/hate relationship. At the end of his life, Luther would recall this time in his spiritual journey as volatile:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed,” that had stood in my way. For I hated that word “righteousness of God,” which ... [I had understood as that] with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner ... I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God ... Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted!⁴

By this point, Paul’s letters had been copied and distributed throughout the whole Church. The early church considered them to be useful for all believers, not just the churches to which they were originally written. More importantly, they considered them to *be Scripture* (3:16). Peter said, “as they do with *the other Scriptures*” (3:16). Peter called Paul’s writings Scripture, just like

the Old Testament, the Gospels, his own letters, John's letters, etc. Paul did the same when he quoted as Scripture the passages from Luke in his letters to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:18).

The apostles knew that the teachings they were given were not merely their own ideas but were inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12–13; 2 Timothy 3:16). It was not until the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 that the church officially “decided” which books would be included in the current New Testament, but those books had been considered Scripture by the Church for hundreds of years already. As British biblical scholar F. F. Bruce wrote, “One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect.”⁵

While a council of people decided on the canon, we believe the Holy Spirit orchestrated the entire process – writing, collecting, and canonizing, so, really, *God* is the one who decided which books belonged in the Bible. As evangelical theologian J. I. Packer wrote, “The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up.”⁶

Peter recognized that because Paul's writings could be hard to understand sometimes, false teachers could easily distort and twist them. In this final warning of his letter about being on guard against false teaching, Peter reminded them how easy it is for false teachers to twist Scripture (3:16). One of the most effective ways Satan can deceive us is to take something true and twist it just a little bit or mix it in with a lie. Because it sounds close to the truth, people who are “ignorant and unstable” can be easily deceived (3:16). Peter wasn't necessarily referring to people who aren't intelligent but rather those who were ignorant of the truth – those who have not really studied the Scriptures. Deception doesn't only happen to dumb people. It can happen to anyone who doesn't really know Scripture. This is one final call from Peter to study God's Word, to know it so well that you recognize false teaching immediately when you hear it.⁷

Q: Share an example you have seen/heard of a false teacher mixing a lie with the truth or distorting the truth in a way that makes it sound true and how you knew it wasn't.

Q: Which things about the Bible have you found hard to understand? What do you still have questions about? How can you find the answers to those questions?

Besides talking to friends, mentors, and pastors and reading commentaries and books about the Bible to help us understand it better, we can also ask the Holy Spirit to supernaturally help us understand God's Word (1 Corinthians 2:6–16). If we continue to study and diligently listen for God's voice, we can recognize false teachers and flee from them, just as sheep flee from a stranger who doesn't sound like their shepherd (John 10:4–5).

Q: How can we train ourselves to recognize Jesus's voice among the other voices of the world calling out to us to follow them?

2 Peter 3:17–18 [Read]

Talking Point #3: Be on guard against false teaching by growing closer and closer to Jesus.

Q: Why does Peter remind them to take care not to be carried away or lose stability?

Q: How does growing in the grace of Jesus help us with that? How does growing in the knowledge of Jesus help us with that?

Again, Peter reminded them to be careful not to be carried away by the error of false teachings and “lose your own stability” (3:17). The Greek literally says to “be on guard,” like a military guard, as we discussed in lesson 9. Like a lookout in the military, we need to keep our eyes open and scan the horizon, realizing that the Enemy will try to sneak in unawares. He is sneaky and will try to worm his way into your life if you aren't paying close attention. Just as Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 about spiritual warfare and putting on the armor of God, Peter encouraged them not to lose stability, to stand firm. As we learned in lesson 9, this phrase means to hold a critical position while under attack. Throughout the Bible, God continuously tells His people that He will fight the battle for them; they just need to stand firm (Exodus 14:14). If we don't hold our position, we will fall to the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:11). The devil is a very real threat, but we can stand firm against him. We can resist him. When we do, for those of us who endure to the end, God will restore and establish us in His kingdom forever (1 Peter 5:10).

In these closing verses, Peter let them know how they could stand firm – by growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. He has said all along the way to recognize false teaching is by studying the truth. The way to resist the devil is to know Jesus more and more. For all the New Testament writers, this is what it all boils down to – knowing Jesus. In Philippians, when Paul was writing from prison and wasn't sure if he would live or die, he wrote that the only thing that mattered to him was knowing Jesus. “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish [literally, garbage!], in order . . . that I may know Him” (Philippians 3:8–10). Nothing else matters. Nothing. All of it is garbage compared to knowing Christ.

That's all it comes down to, that relationship. We could argue all day about Paul's theology and what this or that Greek word “really means” and all the finer points of Bible study, but when the rubber meets the road, all that matters is knowing Christ. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount and described those who *thought* they were going to heaven because of all of their religious deeds and mighty works, He said He would declare to them, “I never knew you.” Our goal and our calling is this – knowing Jesus. It's more than just knowing *about* Jesus, it's *knowing* Him personally, in the ancient sense of knowing by experience. Because faith is about knowing Jesus, it doesn't happen with just a short prayer of salvation; it takes a lifetime of

walking with Him. Just like getting to know a person takes spending time together, so does getting to know Jesus. You are never “done” knowing Jesus because it’s not a class or a program; it’s a relationship with the person of Jesus. These are the final words of life advice Peter left with his beloved Church – grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. This is a life well lived, a life focused on what matters, one that will lead to eternal life in heaven.

Q: What does a life fully committed to knowing Jesus, as Paul described, look like?

Q: How can you get to know Jesus better? In what ways does your life need to change to grow in the grace and knowledge of Him?

Q: What have you learned most from this study of 2 Peter? How will your faith walk change after doing this study?

Took

Main Point: Believers should learn the truths of God and live by following them.

One new option for indoor skydiving at iFLY is virtual reality skydiving. In this scenario, you will be floating on air as usual but wearing a special set of goggles. These goggles show an image of you quickly approaching the ground as if you were actually skydiving out of an airplane.⁸ Even though you are immersed in the experience in thinking that you are skydiving, there is a difference between going in a wind tunnel and jumping out of a plane. The difference is all in the “jump.”

The “jump” for us as believers is the jump between a head knowledge and a heart knowledge. As believers, our goal is not to just gain an intellectual understanding of God or a “head knowledge.” Knowing things about God is useful and essential, we also need to dive deeper and have a “heart knowledge” of God as well. “Heart knowledge” is where we take the understanding of God and His truth and apply those truths of God’s Word into our lives. For example, someone who has a head knowledge would know that stealing is wrong in the eyes of God. However, someone who has heart knowledge would take that idea and apply it; they would not steal as a result of God’s standard.

Q: How does one move from head knowledge to heart knowledge? How does the life that has a heart knowledge of God look?

Q: How can we help others apply the truths of God’s Word?

Q: What did you learn from 1 & 2 Peter? How will this change the way that you live?

CHALLENGES

THINK: *Is my life focused on knowing Christ?* Be really honest with yourself. It’s just you and God here now. Can you really say with Paul that everything else in life is garbage compared to knowing Jesus? If not, why not? If so, how are you showing that by the way you live?

PRAY: *For those who don’t know Jesus.* It may seem like we do this a lot, but it is so important that we really should be doing it every day. Peter repeated over and over that our mission while we wait for Jesus to return is to grow in our own spiritual maturity and to lead others to Jesus. As much as witnessing is important, it is even more important to pray for people who don’t know Jesus. We can talk and plant seeds and water seeds that have been planted, but it is God who causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3). It is only through the power of the Spirit that people even come to faith. So prayer is our greatest witnessing tool.

ACT: *Grow in knowing.* Take some time this week to really focus on your relationship with Jesus, on knowing Him better. Spend time in prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines, all focused on getting to know the person of Jesus more deeply. Consider asking a friend or mentor who seems closer to Jesus how you should go about pursuing a deeper relationship with Him. They may have some specific Scriptures, disciplines or books to share that will help you. Consider sacrificing time you normally spend doing other things in order to focus on building this relationship. Maybe you could cut out your hobbies for this week to spend more time with Jesus. Maybe you could carve out a whole afternoon or a whole day to “retreat” alone with Him.

¹ www.iflyworld.com

² William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 574.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, vol. 34* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 336–37.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 27.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1965), 81.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1942).

⁸ <https://www.iflyworld.com/programs/virtual-reality/>