



2 Peter 3:11-18
Undistracted: 2 Peter
“Grow In Grace”

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Today we wrap up our series in 2 Peter that we have been in for the last several weeks. Next week will be Youth Sunday, and you won't want to miss it as our middle and high school students lead worship. Being here and engaged in worship shows your support and encouragement of them as they lead us. Some aspects of the service will be familiar, other aspects will be new and different. So, we can all look forward to next week. The week after that we will start a brief sermon series looking at some of the parables Jesus tells.

So, as you know, and we acknowledged earlier, today is Mother's Day. And the desire of mothers who follow Jesus – as well as fathers – is to raise children who will also follow Jesus. The first step in raising kids to know Jesus is for us to know him as well...to be close to Jesus with a vibrant, growing, flourishing journey of faith. If we aren't following close to Jesus ourselves, it's going to be hard to lead others toward Jesus. Well, Peter closes out his second letter with wise, spirit-filled words on how we grow, and what matters most in our growth, in following Jesus. So, let's turn to the last 8 verses of 2 Peter this morning, as we finish out our series in 2 Peter and staying undistracted in following Jesus. Let's read **2 Peter 3:11-18**...

Sermon series graphic. So, I want to start at the end, in the last couple verses (17-18), because these last two verses summarize the whole letter, and help us understand the verses right before them, that we also read this morning. He ends with these words, as we just read: **“Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:17-18).**

First, we get a final reminder word of warning that he spent some time on earlier. We need to be on our guard in regards to false teaching that leads us away from Jesus. The result could be, he says, that we might “fall from our

secure position.” He said something earlier back in chapter two as well. This is not the only place in the New Testament where we see this idea that one can “fall away” from Jesus, that we can “lose” what Jesus offers. Hold onto this thinking for a moment. There is another line of thinking, that is also Biblically supported, that a person cannot fall from our “secure position” as Peter puts it here. This theology is usually summarized in the phrase “once saved, always saved.” It is also supported by a number of passages.

Maybe the most famous is from the apostle Paul. Since Peter mentioned Paul here with that humorous aside that what Paul writes is the same in all his letters and hard to understand, let’s look at something Paul writes in his most difficult to understand letter, Romans: **“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).** Though Romans is challenging to follow, this sentence isn’t really all that hard to understand. It tells us that God’s power and ability to keep us in his love can’t be defeated by anything.

So, can we “fall from our secure position” as Peter writes here, or can nothing “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”? Jesus himself gives us the answer in a number of places, and let’s look at two. First a parable from John 15. In it, Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (John 15:2)** You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

What we see in this teaching from Jesus is that Jesus saves us – he makes us “clean” as he puts it here – but we must remain in him. We have to stay connected to him, just like a branch must stay connected to a tree, and we need to bear fruit. We demonstrate and even maintain our relationship with Jesus through bearing fruit: the fruit of the Spirit, pruning of sin from our lives, living a more Christ-like life, leading others toward him, and so forth.

This is all fruit from being connected to Jesus. The other thing from Jesus' teaching I want to highlight is from the end of the sermon on the Mount, where Jesus puts it even more bluntly: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).**

So, nothing can separate us, so long as we remain in Jesus and doing God's will: believing in and trusting him, confessing our sin, and living a Christ-like life that bears fruit for his Kingdom. The apostle Paul – again, who wrote “nothing can separate us” – puts it really well in Colossians: **“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (Colossians 1:21-23).**

So, the key is continuing in faith...continuing to trust in and follow after Jesus, doing his will, seeking to live and grow more and more into his likeness, bearing fruit as we stay connected to him. And Peter then encourages us to do exactly that in verse 18: **“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18a).** Now, there's a bit of a tension here with how we tend to think. It's the grace of God that brings Jesus into the world and into our lives, and leads him all the way to the cross on our behalf. You can't earn this grace, or it wouldn't be grace. God freely chooses to do this in Jesus. We see that in Scripture from cover to cover.

But then we are to “grow in grace.” This is our response. We have an active part in living into this grace, in allowing it to be active and grow in our lives so that we would be less worldly and more Christ-like in our living, even as we engage with people of the world. We want to be shaped more and more by the grace of Jesus, be impacted by it more and more, so that we are growing in knowledge of Jesus, and in our living of our faith. This is what Peter is encouraging them, and now us, to do.

So now, if we back up and read the verses that come before 17 and 18, we see a number of ways that we can grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus and live like him and for him more and more each and every day. For instance, in verses 11 to 14 (though I will focus on 11 and 12) we see a few things about growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. **How do we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus? First, live holy and godly lives.** A lot of commentators separate these as two separate things, but there is redundancy in them. The word for holy is “hagios.” It’s a word we see some 230 times in the New Testament, and another 400 in the old testament Greek translation of the Hebrew. And first and foremost, hagios is about God. It means, “that which is worthy of veneration.” That which is worthy of honor. God is the one who truly fits this. But then it is also used to describe those who are “set apart for God,” or are “exclusively his.”¹ And so this is how we are to be – holy.

This has Old Testament roots going all the way back into Leviticus, where we read that God calls us to be holy as he is holy (Leviticus 20:7). We are to live as though we are set apart for him and are exclusively his. Not in a “holier than thou” kind of way in the world, because that will turn people off to Him. Rather, we want to live set apart for God in a way that is open and compassionate and gracious toward others (still holding onto the truths of our faith), so that they are drawn toward Jesus, just as Jesus himself did. We want to reflect and radiate the character of God into the world...to shine the light of Christ. We do that by being in the world, engaged with people who are far from Jesus, using the gifts and talents he has given us and investing them in the Kingdom of God...using them in such a manner that disciples are made and the good news of Jesus is shared.

In verse 12 we see more about growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, including looking forward to “the day of God.” This is a statement about the end of times, which he has written about earlier in this letter including in the passage we looked at last week and also back in chapter 2. At the heart of this is that believers will have a final and eternal place of living in the presence of God (whether they die before the “day of God” or not). And he’s saying that we want to live with a sense of anticipation and

expectation for that, which he reiterates in verse 14 as well. We *look forward* to our eternal union with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This past week my wife bought my Father's Day gift, which is a pair of tickets to see the Seattle rock band Pearl Jam when they play at Climate Pledge Arena on May 28th. I haven't seen them in concert since December of 1993 when I was a junior in college, and I saw them on back to back nights in Seattle. Ticket prices then were about 80% less than what we spent this time, even though last time, for both shows, I was on the floor directly in front of the stage maybe 50 feet away and this time we're gonna be up in the 200 level a ways from the stage and off to the side. But I'll tell you what, I'm looking forward to this concert unlike any other I have in a long time; I can't wait for May 28 to get here. This kind of anticipation is how we are to look forward to the day of God and eternity with him.

Not only are we to look forward to this “day of God” with anticipation, but we are to “speed its coming” (verse 12). Sadly, because I'm already losing sleep in anticipation of it, there's nothing I can do to make May 28th and that concert come sooner. I might be living on coffee the next couple weeks. But I can't speed up time. I can't ask them to move the concert date up earlier. Similarly, God's activity is in his timing, not ours. But, we saw last week that God is patient, and doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to be saved. And that message is reiterated in verse 15 today. So, if his patience is wrapped around people coming to faith in Jesus, then one thing we can do to “speed his coming” is to lead others to faith in Jesus.

So, we see that following Jesus, and growing in grace and knowledge of him, is not about basking in the sunshine of his radiance or riding into eternity on his coattails: there is work to do. There are people to teach about Jesus and disciple them in the ways of Jesus – whether that's neighbors, co-workers, friends we go hiking or biking with or make music with, or whether that's a spouse or our kids. Moms, and dads too (and I think this can be adapted to other relationships as well), have this task of discipling our own kids. **Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train a child up in the way he or she should go, and when they are old, they will not depart from it.”** It's not a 100% guarantee, but it's a reminder that we parents have more influence over

our kids than anyone else. From morning until night, we spend more time under the same roof with our kids than anyone else, and we have opportunities to disciple them in everyday situations.

It's like the mom who had a discipleship opportunity for her boys one morning at breakfast. She was making pancakes, and her 5-year old son, Kevin, and 3-year old son, Ryan, were arguing about who would get the first pancake. She told them, "If Jesus were here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" See? Great opportunity in the midst of an everyday thing. We all have those opportunities, and her boys seized it: Kevin looked at his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus."² 😂

The fact is: **Compared to everyone else in our kids' lives: parents have the greatest opportunity to introduce our kids to Jesus and to disciple them.** We parents are the ones who can initiate those conversations and intentionally instill those discipleship habits and disciplines. But let's remember that kids mostly learn by watching us. When JD joined our family about 18 months ago at age 5, he didn't know any English. Now he's fluent. In fact, he was several months ago. And it wasn't because we sat down and had daily English lessons with him. We just talked in English. That's how kids learn language (whether adopted at age 5 or newborns), and it's how we can teach them the faith, too. We just live it out. So, are we modeling a life that looks like Jesus – such as the godliness and holiness mentioned earlier? Are we patient as God is patient? Are we setting an example of anticipation and excitement about our relationship with God – from worship on Sundays to serving in ministry to being in Jesus' presence in eternity when that day comes? Are we excited about our faith, and living with anticipation?

When we do live like this, not only will *we* be growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus, but so will our kids...Or whoever it may be in your life that you have the opportunity to do this with – grandkids, neighbors, spouse, co-worker, whoever it is. We want to be growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus not only by learning from him, but by living like him. And when we do that, we'll be discipling the people in our lives as well (and yes, it does take words as well, speaking about our faith, let's not forget that). So, let's stay undistracted from that task as we follow Jesus each day, leading others

toward him. This isn't for our benefit, but theirs; and as Peter closes his letter, it's for Jesus: **“To him be glory, both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18)**. May we live our lives so those words are true. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g40/niv/mgnt/0-1/>. See the full “Strong’s G40” definition (click on the “Show All” button next to “Strong’s G40”).

² I've had this story in my files for years. I have no idea where I got it, but I'm sure it's widely available online.