



*Bruce Butler*

This year I have been on a quest to conform my life to a set of biblical values, using them as a guide to keep me on the Jesus way of living. I have chosen 2 Peter 1:3-11 to help sculpt me into Christ's man. It contains a list of seven virtues we are to add to our faith. Peter says, "If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). I want to be productive and effective for Jesus.

I live and pastor in Glendora, California, in the shadow of Los Angeles and the San Gabriel mountains. Hospice chaplaincy takes up one day of my week. I ride bikes, read books, watch English mysteries and cowboy movies, and hang out with folks. My three adult children live in three different states.

*BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 1:3-11*

I became a fan of lists when I was in high school. The more demanding the classes became—and the more my desire grew to succeed academically, to work, and to have a girlfriend—the more I used lists to keep my life in order. When I became a pastor, I became an even bigger fan of lists. They help me keep track of the details and allow me to live more faithfully before God for the benefit of his people.

We all figure out ways to keep us going in the right direction, markers or guidelines to keep from getting lost. Goal lists help us plan for the future. Budget lists keep monies in our possession from possessing us. Contact lists keep us in immediate touch with folks in our families or businesses.

The New Testament writers utilize lists in order to keep God's people on track toward faithfulness. These lists can be composed of positive virtues to emulate or sins to avoid. One of these virtue lists is found in 2 Peter 1:5-7 which we will explore this week. Peter urges us on in our faith in God who has given us everything we need. To our faith we are to add goodness, which means virtue, moral excellence, or praiseworthy deeds. Peter has already extolled God for his own goodness (2 Peter 1:3). Now he calls us to emulate God's goodness in our living.

One solid way to add goodness to our faith is to think about virtuous things, as suggested in Philippians 4:8-9. When we take our thoughts captive to God's goodness, we can learn to live for his glory every day with more intentionality.

*SONG: Goodness Is Stronger Than Evil*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, take captive every thought for your glory, so that I may think on the good you would have me do today. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 3:14-18*

My family started passing around an old copy of an autobiography by Friends pastor Anna J. Winslow. Before it arrived at my home, I was already hearing about her amazing faith and daring as a follower of Jesus in the mid- to late 1800s. I was compelled to know more about her, so I started doing online research. The more I investigated about Anna, the more I wanted to read her book, and I wasn't disappointed when it finally arrived.

In Peter's list of virtues (2 Peter 1:5-7), he builds one virtue atop another. First he asks us to add goodness to our faith. Then he suggests adding knowledge to our goodness. Here knowledge means investigation, a seeking to know with clarity. Peter suggests with this word that we are to seek certain knowledge of reality, not just our opinions about it. So what is reality for Peter? In a word: Jesus (2 Peter 1:8; 3:18). We can know reality because God has revealed it to us through the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh and through the Scriptures. When we grow in our knowledge of Jesus, we become effective and productive for his kingdom. Our growing knowledge of Jesus also keeps us from being carried away into error and spiritual failure.

We live in a world that questions the nature of reality, telling us that we craft our own individual realities. Others in our world distort reality, even God's reality as expressed in Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). We need to stay extra close to Jesus and his Word, growing in his grace and knowledge.

*SONG: O Jesus Christ, Grow Thou in Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God, I am hungry to learn of you, to be taught by you to walk in your ways. Keep me growing in your grace and knowledge. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Galatians 5:16-26*

At a recent conference in Pasadena I encountered a booth hosted by the Women's Christian Temperance Union. I was asked to take the pledge to abstain from all alcoholic products both in personal use and in promotion of it. Temperance is a worthy goal that I support because I have experienced the devastating effects of alcohol upon families and society. Temperance requires a firm amount of self-control. We all recognize the need for self-control in our daily living. We'd be in serious trouble if we gave in to each impulse to buy something, or to voice every complaint that enters our mind, or to sleep in every day instead of getting up for our jobs.

Peter asks us to add self-control to our faith and knowledge (2 Peter 1:5-7). Self-control means temperance and strength in the face of pressures to give up on faithful living. Perhaps the best-known use of self-control is in Paul's list of virtues called the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul lays out his reasons for including self-control, namely that we war against the sinful nature with its passions and desires. A lack of self-control not only hurts us, but hurts others as well. Peter lists self-control after knowledge, suggesting that we should put what we have learned about Jesus into practice. Most of us learn that living the Christian life effectively requires a growing strength and temperance about the temptations that surround us and call our names. Let's keep walking steadily toward Jesus, not looking to the right or the left or giving in to the siren songs of our sinful and corrupting natures.

*SONG: What God Hath Promised*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I know that self-control is a faraway ideal if not empowered by your Spirit. I invite you to fill me so you can use me for your purposes. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 12:1-3*

In my years of bike riding, I have found that the more challenging part of the activity is mental in nature. Bike riding would be a fairly easy activity but for two major obstacles: headwinds and hills, both of which require my mind to overrule my body and tell it to keep going in spite of the difficulty. The reward for doing so is greater endurance over longer and more difficult terrain. We have a great capacity to seek comfort and ease, much like a bike rider seeking level paths with no wind resistance. We give up so easily and quickly without putting up much of a fight for what's important. Complacency settles in, and before we know it, we have no endurance to accomplish much of anything worthwhile.

Peter tells us to add perseverance to our self-control (2 Peter 1:5-7), as though all our faith, goodness, knowledge, and self-control would amount to little in the end if we didn't keep going at it with constancy and persistence. The writer to the Hebrews pictures perseverance as a race and us as the athletic participants (Hebrews 12:1-3). God marks out the course for us—which is our faith in Jesus Christ—and gives us the unparalleled example of a persevering athlete in the person of Jesus himself. What helps athletes and Christians alike is seeing the finish line. For Jesus the finish line was the joy set before him—you and me!—which enabled him to endure the hills and headwinds of cross, shame, and death. Today you may need Peter's encouragement about perseverance to keep going in spite of the difficulties of Christian living. The finish line is worth it!

*SONG: He Giveth More Grace*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Dear Jesus, move me beyond my desires for comfort and ease so I may live a persevering life. I look forward to the finish line. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 3:10-14*

One sign of the times we live in is so-called reality television, and it seems that the more outlandish the concept, the better. Producers often add a liberal dose of narcissism and hedonism into the mix. A potent brew emerges, one that suggests we live in an age of personal excess and egocentricity as the new standard of morality. If it makes you happy, it can't be so bad, right? Not all reality television is of this variety, of course, but it's hard to imagine a reality television show depicting godliness and piety. We live in a Western world that glorifies individual expression and personal fulfillment above all else. Consumerism enthralles us, fueling the fires of personal ungodliness. It even invades the church as we too often seek to make folks happy without much of a call to holiness and devout living.

Peter adds godliness to his list of virtues in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Holiness, piety, and devotion are other terms for godliness, leading us to understand that we are to have a God-ward attitude in being pleasing to him. Later in his epistle Peter says this is especially important in light of the Lord's imminent return, one that will come with fire and destruction. What kind of person should you be? A person who lives a holy and godly life, strenuous in your efforts to be found spotless, blameless, at peace with God. Imagine our churches filled with people who are adding godliness to our faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance in Christ. This would result in dynamic communities of faith, worship, mission, and nurture.

*SONG: Have Thine Own Way, Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, the one desire of my heart is to please you. I want my living to reflect Christ Jesus in me each step I take this day. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Romans 12:9-14*

A recent movie about baseball legend Jackie Robinson is full of biblical allusions and references, including one to the Greek word for *sympathy*, meaning to suffer with like feelings, and another to the Greek word for “brotherly love”—*philadelphia*. The irony in the story is that some in the City of Brotherly Love had anything but sympathetic feelings toward Robinson’s plight with racism, or in their reactions toward him as the first black man to break into the major leagues. We can all do with a little more brotherly love, especially as Christians. Far too much of contemporary Christianity involves us attacking one another, and far too little has us laying down our lives for each other. Jesus implies that the character quality which best marks a Christian is love for one another.

Peter lists brotherly kindness near the top of his list of virtues (2 Peter 1:5-7), for it is the distinctive quality that describes the relationship between Christians. This was especially important for the people who first heard Peter’s letter, as they were enduring hardship together for the sake of the gospel. Their mutual suffering could either bring them together or tear them apart. Central to Paul’s advice about loving actions for Christians to practice was his admonition for Christians to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (Romans 12:10), in part so we can then bless those who persecute us (Romans 12:14).

How would people today react if they saw Christians practicing genuine brotherly love?

*SONG: They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, this is a new day to begin loving my brothers and sisters again. Show me today how to be devoted to other Christians in brotherly love. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: 1 John 4:7-12*

Our church elders have spent this year focused on how we are to love one another in the body of Christ. My attention has been drawn to the many Bible passages which exhort Christians to be people of love, convicting me that I have a long way to go in my love for Christ, my brothers and my sisters in the faith, and people of the world. The church is a laboratory filled with all kinds of people from all walks of life, brought together not by natural affinities nor the will of any person, but by the Spirit of Christ, and here we get to research and explore the limits of our love. Jesus builds his church and puts the members together just the way he wants. By necessity we learn to love the other in our midst, people often very different from ourselves.

It is no accident that Peter crowns his list of virtues with love (2 Peter 1:5-7). This *agape* love, in distinction to brotherly kindness (*philadelphia*), points us beyond feelings and family relationships to selfless actions for the sake of others. This is God's love which compelled him to send Jesus in flesh (1 John 4:9) as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). This love bears the burdens of others with no thought to self. Peter is all about this kind of love in his first epistle, telling us to "love each other deeply from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22 VOICE), to "love the family of believers" (1 Peter 2:17 NRSV), to "love as brothers" (1 Peter 3:8 NKJV) and "above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Ask the Lord to send you a new experiment in your love laboratory to make his love complete in you.

*SONG: I Love You with the Love of the Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, nothing seems as difficult or rewarding as practicing your love toward my brothers and sisters in Christ. Today I recommit myself to the sacrificial giving of myself for the sake of others. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler