

# **A Closer Walk With God**

## **Growing as a Disciple in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

- I. For several weeks on Sunday evenings we have been engaged in a series of studies entitled "A Closer Walk With God."
  - A. Obviously, the purpose of this series has been to accomplish two things – two objectives:
    1. First, I've wanted us to take a close, personal inventory about our relationship with God our Father and with Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.
      - a. Are we truly as close as we should be, or is there room for improvement?
      - b. If we are going to call ourselves a disciple of Christ – a follower of Jesus Christ – then there must be a genuine closeness with Christ.
      - c. There must be a deep and genuine love for Jesus Christ, and a desire to do everything we can to please him.
    2. And secondly, if we realize there is room for improvement in our relationship with Christ – and I think that would be true of all of us –

then I've wanted us to think about all the things we can do to improve that relationship – things we can do to make it closer and more intimate.

B. And so, in this lesson in our series "A Closer Walk With God", I want us to consider what I believe is one of the most critical aspects of our being a disciple of Christ.

1. We're going to take a look at "Growing in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ."

II. So, as we consider "Growing as a Disciple in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ," let's focus on just two important points.

A. Let's talk about why it's necessary to grow in the "*knowledge*" of Jesus Christ, and also try to understand what this really means and how to achieve it.

1. The reason it's so critically important for us to grow in this manner is simply because it's commanded by God.

a. In 2nd Peter chapter 3, the apostle Peter had just warned Christians of the dangers of inadvertently twisting those things in the Scriptures that are hard to understand – and as a result, doing so to our own destruction.

b. Therefore, Peter concluded: **2 Peter 3:17-18a** – *You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware*

*lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

- c. Growing in the "*grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" is the only way we can be assured of treating the Scriptures with the respect they demand, and to ensure that we will never be led away by false teachers.
2. But, how do we "*grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,*" and perhaps even more importantly, how can we be sure we're growing in this "*knowledge*"?
- B. Fortunately, Peter has defined what is meant to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"
  1. **2 Peter 1:2-11** – *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness*

*brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10*

*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2. So, let's take a closer look at these verses and understand what it means to experience this kind of growth, and then determine whether or not there is room for improvement in our own lives.

**Body:**

- I. A very simple definition of what it means to "*grow in the grace and knowledge*" of Jesus Christ is say we must be growing in the eight specific areas Peter outlines in these verses.
  - A. These eight areas of grown are often defined as "The Eight Christian Graces" and are listed in verses 5 through 7. They are briefly identified as:
    1. "Faith" – which is more properly defined "conviction, or strong assurance."

2. "Virtue" – which is defined as "moral excellence, or goodness."
  3. "Knowledge" – which we could define as "having correct spiritual insight."
  4. "Self-control" – which is nothing more than simply exercising "self-discipline" in the spiritual sense.
  5. "Perseverance" – which means "bearing up under trials."
  6. "Godliness" – which is defined as "having a godly character out of a deep devotion to God."
  7. "Brotherly kindness" – which is more correctly defined as "having love for brethren."
  8. And finally, "Love" – which, in this context, is defined as "active goodwill toward all."
- B. But I want you to notice what Peter says about these "graces," as we call them.
1. **2 Peter 1:8** – *For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
    - a. Peter says these eight areas of growth not only need to be found IN us, but also abounding in us.
    - b. The word "*abound*" means "a super-abundance through constantly increasing more and more."

- c. Therefore, these eight areas of growth must be constantly increasing in our lives – we must be increasing more and more in all areas.
  - d. Peter says it is only through this constant growth that we can avoid being *"barren"* and *"unfruitful"* in the *"knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
2. It should also be rather obvious that we're talking about a *"knowledge of Jesus Christ"* that is far more than a mere intellectual knowledge.
3. While having an intellectual knowledge about who Jesus was and what He came to do is important, the knowledge Peter is talking about is a fuller and more personal knowledge.
- a. He's talking about getting to know Jesus in a close and intimate way as we would come to know our best and dearest friend.
  - b. And the only way we can truly come to know Jesus in this close and intimate way is to develop all the Christ-like attributes often called *"The Eight Christian Graces."*
  - c. The more we grow in these eight areas, the more we will really know and understand Jesus – He's the perfect personification of all these *"graces."*

4. In fact, the word Peter uses for "*knowledge*" in verses 2, 3 and 8 come from the Greek "epiginosko."
  - a. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines "epiginosko" as meaning "to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know thoroughly, to know accurately, know well."
  - b. So, perhaps you can see why I said this kind of "*knowledge*" is a deep and intimate knowledge similar to that we would have for someone we know and love deeply.
- C. And there's something else I want you to notice about these so-called "graces." The only way we can grow as the Lord intends is to build one upon the other.
  1. Notice the word "*add*" (or "supply" as some versions render it) in 1 Peter 1:5.
    - a. Peter begins by telling us we need begin with the foundation of "*faith*" – and we must "*abound*" in faith by constantly growing and increasing in this particular area of our lives more and more.
    - b. But we don't stop there. Now we must "*add*" to our faith – or "*supply*" or enhance our faith – with another critical area of growth. Virtue!
  2. This little word "*add*" (or "*supply*") has a very interesting meaning.

- a. The word in the Greek is "epichoregeo." Do you see the root of the word "chorus" in this word?
  - b. Originally, the word meant "to start or support a chorus," or "to lead a choir," and then "to lead a choir in order to keep in tune."
  - b. Finally, the word evolved to simply mean "to add, supply or provide" that which is necessary to "work in harmony with others."
3. In the context of 2 Peter chapter one, the word "*add*" (or "*supply*") means that we must "add, supply or provide" something to each of these so-called graces in order for them to all work together in harmony.
- a. If we leave even one of them out – we have disharmony in our growth as a Christian.
4. That's why Peter uses the word "*to*" when speaking of each of these areas of our lives.
- a. We must "add, supply or provide" one of these aspects of our spiritual growth "*to*" another.
  - a. And when we do, they all work in harmony with each other to produce an overall effect.
  - b. Each one of these areas of growth helps to increase and complete the one which goes before it.



5. So, the bottom line is simply that each and every one of these so-called "graces" are absolutely necessary.
  - a. The only way we can grow as the Lord would have us grow is to develop all these areas in conjunction with each other.
  - b. We can't be selective and pick and chose the ones we like and leave the others out – they are all essential.
- D. One more thing is important to notice about these areas of growth – they all involve a diligent effort on our part.
  1. Notice that Peter uses the word "*diligence*" twice in these verses – in verses 5 and 10.
    - a. The word simply means "earnestness, zeal, sometimes with haste."
  2. So, to "*grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" is going to require some effort.
    - a. These areas we need to develop in our lives aren't "natural" – they have to be developed.
    - b. Nor do we develop these areas in our lives by "accident" – we don't wake up some morning and suddenly realize we're abounding more and more in "godliness."
    - c. All of these areas take time and effort to develop.
- E. But, let's be real honest. Some may be tempted to think, "Sure. I know I need to improve in these areas, and I'll get around to it someday."

1. However, in the verses that follow Peter gives us five reasons why we should *"give all diligence"* to grow in the *"grace and knowledge"* of Jesus Christ.
  - a. In other words, if we fail to take this serious and don't start now working on improving these areas of our lives, there will be some serious consequences.
  
- II. So, let's look at five reasons why Peter says we need to get busy in growing as the Lord wants us to grow in these specific areas.
  - A. First, Peter says grace and peace are *"multiplied"* by growing in this knowledge.
    1. **2 Peter 1:2** – *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. . .*
      - a. The words *"grace"* and *"peace"* are commonly found in greetings in the New Testament.
        - (1). Asking for *"grace"* to be upon someone is asking God to give His unmerited favor to the person being addressed.
        - (2). Asking for *"peace"* means we are asking God to grant freedom from worry toward those whom God has given His grace.
    2. But notice how Peter says these two blessings are *"multiplied"* in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

- a. We all enjoy God's favor to some degree: **Matthew 5:45** – Jesus said, ". . .for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."
- b. However, the only way we can enjoy the fullness of God's favor and peace is to be "*in Christ*" – to be a disciples of Christ.

(1). **Ephesians 1:3** – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. . .*

(2). **Philippians 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

- 3. So, if you want to have "*grace and peace*" "*multiplied*" in your life then you need to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

B. Another reason why we need to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is because "*all things pertaining to life and godliness*" are given through this knowledge.

- 1. **2 Peter 1:3-4** – . . .*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to*

*us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

- a. The word "*life*" in this context refers to our spiritual life and well-being.
  - b. "*Godliness,*" on the other hand, refers to the way we live our lives before God and before others.
2. I can pretty much guarantee you that those whose spiritual lives are weak, and those who have problems living a godly and righteous life, are those who are not growing closer to Jesus Christ through an intimate knowledge of His character and nature.
- a. They are missing out on the "*exceedingly great and precious promises*" given to the Lord's disciples – not only those "*great and precious promises*" in this life, but also those "*great and precious promises*" in the life to come.
  - b. Those who fail to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are also unable to truly become "*partakers of the divine nature*" – meaning they have trouble living a life that mirrors the life of Jesus Christ.
  - c. And because of that, they also have problems freeing themselves from the "*corruption that is in the world through lust.*"

3. So, if you want to enjoy those *"great and precious promises,"* and become a *"partaker of the divine nature"* so that you can escape the *"corruption that is in the world through lust,"* then begin by cultivating a close, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.
  - a. There is nothing the Lord wants more than to share that kind of intimacy with you.
  - b. And you can have that kind of relationship by simply adding to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and so forth.
- C. A third reason for growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is to avoid spiritual "myopia" and amnesia."
  1. **2 Peter 1:9** – *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.*
  2. The ultimate objective for growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is to become more Christ-like.
    - a. But if we fail to grow we will soon become seriously *"short-sighted"* – spiritually "myopic" or "near-sighted." And seriously *"near-sighted"* Christians are simply not able to see those things that will trip us up spiritually and cause us to fall.
    - b. Not only that, but failing to grow causes us to develop a kind of spiritual "amnesia" – we forget that it took the precious blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from our old sins.

3. If we don't grow closer and closer to Jesus Christ, we soon begin to take for granted the terrible sacrifice that Jesus paid to free us from the very sins we have a tendency to stumble back into.
- D. A fourth reason for growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is to keep us from stumbling.
1. **2 Peter 1:10** – *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble. . .*
    - a. This doesn't mean we will never sin: **1 John 1:8, 10** – *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*
    - b. What it does mean, however, is that we will never lose our salvation.
  2. The word "*stumble*" in 2 Peter 1:10 (translated "*fall*" in other versions) is from a Greek word that means "to fall into misery, become wretched; cf. the loss of salvation." (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT)
    - a. In other words, we will never stumble and fall to where we can't get back up on our feet, spiritually speaking, and continue our walk as a disciple of Christ.

3. But let me add a word of caution here – the same admonition Peter gives.
  - a. The only way we can keep from losing our salvation is to *"be even more diligent to make your call and election sure."*
  - b. This is just another way of saying we need to do our part to guarantee our home in heaven.
  - c. The Lord has certainly done His part in cleansing us from our sins through His blood. But we need to do our part by fostering that close, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ by growing in the knowledge of Him.
  
- E. And finally, if we cultivate that intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and if we add all these so-called "graces" to our lives as His disciples, then heaven will be our home.
  1. **2 Peter 1:11** – . . . *an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*
  1. This *"everlasting kingdom"* is the *"heavenly kingdom"* Paul mentioned: **2 Timothy 4:18** – *And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.*
  2. But what does Peter mean by us receiving an *"abundant entrance"*? I think most of us would be happy just to have an "entrance"!

- a. It seems that Peter is describing the manner in which we will enter heaven – meaning we will be able to enter heaven victoriously as one who has conquered and defeated Satan.
  - b. It will be as though the gates of heaven will be swung wide-open as we make our triumphant entry while the host of heaven cheers us as we enter paradise as a conquering hero.
  - c. Just imagine what it will be like to enter heaven with that kind of welcome!
3. We'll talk more about this in our final lesson; but this is the kind of welcome Paul was expecting – and the kind of welcome that every faithful Christian will receive.
- a. **2 Timothy 4:6-8** – *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
  - b. That reward is waiting for you too, if you'll only be diligent to "make your call and election sure" by growing "in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."



## CONCLUSION:

- I. Let me close by asking you to do a little self-examination here.
  - A. As you look at your life as a disciple of Christ, do you see some room for improvement?
    1. All of us should be answering that "Yes." There is always room for improvement, no matter how faithful we may be.
      - a. But perhaps some of us need to work a little more at improving our relationship with Jesus Christ than others.
      - b. No one is saying you don't love the Lord, or don't deserve to be called a disciple of Jesus Christ.
      - c. It just means you have some work to do to truly become a *"partaker of the divine nature"* – you just need to be more diligent in your efforts to be more like Jesus.
  - B. So as you take a closer look at your own life, here are some questions that will hopefully encourage you to fix those areas of your life that need it most.
    1. Which of these "graces" do you think you have developed best; and which are you most lacking?
    2. Do you feel you're making progress growing in *the "knowledge of Jesus Christ"* – making progress toward cultivating a close and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ?
    3. If not, what do you think you need to do to begin making progress?

II. I hope this lesson has helped you see the need to deepen your relationship with Christ.

A. There is nothing the Lord desires more than to have that kind of deep, intimate relationship with you that we've been talking about.

1. But only you can make that possible.

a. If you're not a disciple of Christ, you can become one right now by coming to Christ in faith and repentance, and by being baptized into Christ for the remission of your past sins.

b. And if you are a disciple of Christ, but need to do some work on improving your relationship with the Lord, you can begin right now by coming to Christ in genuine humility and repentance, confessing your sins and past failures to God.

2. The Lord stands ready to help you make the dream of heaven a reality – and we stand ready to help every way we can as well.