

“MAKE EVERY EFFORT.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: II Peter 1:5-8

Introduction.

Every Sunday we gather here for worship with our minds and hearts filled with the concerns and challenges of the past week and the week ahead.

We live our days filled with temporal concerns. Our daily bread and daily needs consume our thoughts and our time and our energies. But how are we different from non-Christians? Are they not also anxious about their days and their lives and livelihoods?

As Christians we are called to a higher calling, we are called to live in two worlds at once, to have a foot in two countries, to have one eye on temporal things and one eye on eternal things.

The challenge, the goal, is to attend to the temporal things of our lives our eyes and minds fixed on eternal things. Jesus did this while He took on human form and walked this earth.

Hebrews 12:2 Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus preached about this in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:31-33 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Seek first things first and secondary things will take care of themselves. I am aware of so many life issues and concerns among us, things at home, at school, at work, things of body and soul.

How do we do this dual citizenship thing? How do we do our marriages and parenting and careers and retirement with an eternal perspective always in mind?

Where is this high country and how do we get acclimated for that elevation without getting headaches? How do we get fit for heaven and being in the presence of God while living here in the low lands of earth?

How? God has written us a letter through Peter. Peter is a pastor, he knows the hearts and lives of his people. He writes to help them and us by not aiming lower, but aiming higher.

This is God's holy, Spirit-inspired, eternally true and relevant word from heaven to us. It is written for our joy, for our blessing and benefit. This is meant to be life giving and soul-enriching. Savor this, treasure it, welcome it, receive it and apply it.

For this reason.

Remember the reasons. Verses 5-7 are built on the foundation of verses 3-4. In other words, they are built on what God has already done for us. God has rescued us from sin and now enables us to share in His divine nature and will fulfil His great promises to us.

For all these previous reasons, make every effort. Since God has given us His divine power, strive for these things. If you reverse the order you will lose the Gospel, you will have nothing of what the NT teaches. God first, then us. Grace first, then our response.

Some of us have grown up in homes where we didn't feel loved and we were always trying to earn love or approval or favor. Others of us grew up in homes where there was no question we were unconditionally loved and accepted no matter what. There is a vast difference between those two homes and how we respond and why.

A husband or a wife who is not sure they are loved and is trying desperately to earn it, is in an entirely different kind of marriage than the person who has absolutely no doubt. They aren't trying to earn love, they are trying to be worthy of it and not mess it up.

People trying to earn God's love, know nothing of the joy of striving to please a God who they confidently know loves them to the moon and back and will not stop loving them.

We strive not to earn God's love but to live in the light of it, in a manner worthy of it. We want to please the God who is already pleased with us.

Make every effort.

What kind of effort? Make every effort is meant to be strong, make *earnest effort, strenuous effort*. Put your back into it, put your heart and soul into it. True faith is marked with sweat, sometimes blood, sweat and tears.

Peter is concerned that we take our spiritual lives too lightly, too casually. These things are not automatic. They won't happen watching baseball or Fixer Upper or playing video games. They don't come intravenously. We don't just let go and let God.

They take effort and require making some plans, some intentionality.

Living things grow. A living faith is a growing faith, it's thriving, changing, progressing, increasing, being supplement, added to. Peter mentions eight ways. Eight steps to a better life, better marriage, better parenting, financial peace.

Eight Things.

It begins with our *faith* in God, our belief in and commitment to Christ, and ends at the goal which is to love God and to love each other and even our enemies.

Faith is always the beginning, but it is never alone, it leads us further up and further in toward the goal of love. Faith and love grow as we add to them these overlapping qualities.

Virtue, is moral excellence, or goodness. This is an honest, well ordered life.

This is those things in a person's life that are worthy of praise, things we would want said at our funeral. We might think of honorable character, something in increasingly short supply in our culture, so should be in increasingly great supply among Christians.

I Peter 2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Knowledge, is insight, discernment, understanding. Through knowledge we can know the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ignorance is not bliss. If we are going to life well, if we are going to do well in this life, we must know God well. In knowing God and Christ we become wise. This is practical wisdom, not just head knowledge. This is the knowledge that will most help us right where we live.

Self-control, is temperance, restraint, self-discipline; it's the ability to say no and flee from temptation; not impulsive like Peter was.

Titus 2:11-12 The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

This is one of the greatest challenges in life, to learn to control ourselves, our thoughts, our habits, our tongues, our attitudes, our reactions. And even harder is trying to teach others the quality of self-control, like our kids.

I have a friend who has asked me to pray for him to grow in self-control over his tongue. I told him I am praying this verse for him, to tap into God's power more and more to know when to speak and when to be quiet.

Peter learned over and over the lessons of controlling his out-of-control tongue.

Those who fight to gain control over their habits, appetites, sinful desires and tongues dramatically change their lives.

In our culture that is obsessed with consumption and self-indulgence and binge eating and binge watching, we must take this one seriously. Self-control is especially necessary to deal with the pleasures and temptations of life.

Steadfastness, is patience, endurance, especially in face of affliction, trials.

If self-control helps with the pleasures of life, steadfastness helps with the pressures of life. And it is in the pressures of life that we learn this virtue and gain this quality.

For this quality I think of the phrase that sums up the Christian walk as a long obedience in the same direction. And when we fall down, we don't stay down, we get up and start walking again.

Peter certainly knew by experience what it means to fall down, then get up and move forward.

Isn't this one of our greatest needs in our life as Christians? We are constantly faced with challenges, they come in so many forms, marriage, parenting, school, work, friends, enemies, finances, bosses, health, approaching death.

We are born into a life of trouble. In this life we will all have trials and afflictions. It is only on this hard path that we get to heaven. We will all bear the cross, we are not above Jesus in this.

Oh, how we need to cultivate and grow in our ability to endure, to be steadfast in our faith. Life is hard, hard things happen, we need to learn to persevere by faith through trust and hope.

We are growing when we are able to guard our hearts against grumbling or complaining against God or accusing Him of injustice or lack of love.

We grow in this trait, as we gain confidence that God is at work for His glory and our good.

Godliness is simply the desire to live and speak and act in a manner that pleases God. Peter already mentioned it in verse 3.

II Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him.

God gives us the ability and we are to take that grace and power and use it to become godly.

This is a person who lives above the petty things in life, is not critical and complaining. This is a person who people look up to, honor, want to be more like.

You tell me how big a difference the effort to be godly would make at home or work or school?

Brotherly affection, is family love and care and concern. It's acts of kindness, of generosity.

Christians are family, we are brothers and sisters and treat each other as family. We have the same Father, we serve the same Lord, we travel the same path and we share the same inheritance in heaven.

Peter had to learn this along the way. Remember how the disciples debated and disagreed and jockey for position with each other. It took a while to develop brotherly affection, genuine care for each other and humbling themselves and deferring to each other.

Love, let love rule over all. Last but not least, rather lastly and most importantly.

This is the chief virtue, the greatest. This is not an emotion, this isn't about warm feelings, but about loving actions. Love does. This is sacrificial love, agape love. This is Fruit of the Spirit love, the Holy Spirit given ability to put others ahead or over ourselves and treat them as we would want to be treated. This is I Corinthians 13 love.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

Then.

Make every effort to grow and increase and advance in these Christ-like qualities. Ask for them. Apply yourself to all of these things. Don't be satisfied with where you are. Don't drift along, if you do you are actually losing ground.

If any of you are familiar with an old set of children's books called "The Incredible Series" you might remember one called Glenda's Long Swim.

"Labor Day weekend 1970 Robert and Glenda Lennon were four miles off the coast of Florida fishing alone from their yacht. Glenda decided to take a swim and soon found the current had carried her too far out from the boat. Her husband, hearing her cries, without thinking dove in and swam to her, but then realized they were both being carried out. He was a champion swimmer, but not she. They made a plan. He would swim against the tide to keep the boat in view until the tide ceased and he could reach the boat. She should save her strength and just float with the tide and he would come and get her. He fought the tide for six hours and just as the boat was about to disappear on the horizon the tide turned and his strokes carried him to the boat exhausted. The sun had set. His searching was futile—he could not find his wife. The next day on one last effort of search, the search party found his wife—twenty miles out and still alive. It was an incredible story" (John Piper).

The man kept swimming against the tide to keep the goal in sight. He didn't give up, he didn't float or drift, his life and his wife's life depended on it.

The tide of the culture and the tide of temptations to sin and the tide of complacency is strong and will carry you away from God. You know how easy it is to neglect God and prayer and Scripture and worship, before we know it a few days have passed and then a few weeks turns into months and years and then where do we find ourselves?

Are we drifting, floating, getting farther from the shore, or are using what God has given us to make progress against the tide?

If we float we never stay in the same place, we drift away at the risk of our souls. Even if we aren't making much head way, the person straining toward the prize will eventually have it.

Are you feeling unhappy, joyless, discouraged, depressed, defeated? Those things can be defeated by a disciplined pursuit of these qualities.

What practical, daily steps are you taking to exercise your faith and strengthen it and grow in it? What are you doing with the challenges and trials God sends along to test you and try you and prompt you to make every effort?

The call is to strive, to move toward, to make every effort. Keep swimming, keep the goal in view, the distant shore. In doing this we will avoid being ineffective and unproductive (without fruit) in our Christian faith journey.

None of us have arrived in all of this, we all have fallen far short of the goal. We admit our weakness and dependence on God and lean on Him and ask His divine power to help us.

Every one of us is a long ways from the goal. There is much for each of us to do. I have confidence that each of us can make progress because I have confidence in the power of God at work in us.

Philippians 1:6-7 I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace.

Philippians 2:12-13 ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.