

Never Stop Growing 2 Peter 1:12-15

Can I just make a confession right off the bat tonight? I had what I thought was a great idea for an intro to this message. It struck me yesterday morning as I was getting ready, and I thought, I'll write that down when I get to the office. Do you know what happened in the time it took to drive from my house to my office? I totally forgot the idea. It just left me. I sat at my desk for a good 20 minutes trying to remember it, but it was gone, flown away like a bird. Poof, gone like a cloud of smoke. So now, you get this as an introduction instead. I guess I needed an object lesson for a message that's all about the need to remember. We all sometimes get a bad case of functional amnesia in the Christian life. We are so prone to forget things, even the most basic truths of the gospel, and to stop letting those truths have an impact on the way that we are living. Forgetfulness is perhaps the primary cause of stifled growth in the Christian life. Peter understood this. He knew that the key to continued growth in the faith is continued remembrance of the truth.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Peter 1:12-15)

The first way to never stop growing is to remember where your strength comes from. We all need daily reminders. I am a huge fan of sticky notes. I almost always keep several sticky notes on my desk to serve as reminders of different tasks I know I can't forget from day-to-day. Why? Because I know I would forget without the sticky notes. I need something in front of me that will keep what I need to remember at the front of my mind. It never ceases to amaze me how much I forget. I can't even keep track of it. There's no way to calculate how much I've forgotten because, well, it's been forgotten.

Our minds have been deeply impacted by the fall. We lose way more than we retain. Don't ask me how they figured this out, but some studies suggest that our brains forget approximately 50% of new information within an hour of learning it. Within 24 hours, that number goes up to an average of 70%. I find those numbers to be very low based on my own experience. What makes matters worse is that we tend to forget the things we should remember, and to remember the things we should forget.

What should we remember? We should constantly remember what Peter has already laid out in verses 3-11. Remember, first of all, that Jesus' divine power has given you all that you need to lead you on toward life and godliness. He has made you a partaker of the divine nature. You are a new creation. Living by faith in that internal reality, you can therefore add to your faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. If these are yours and are increasing, you are confirming your calling and election, and are on your way toward an entrance into Christ's eternal kingdom, which will be given to you at the future time

of the resurrection of your body. Peter intends to constantly have us be mindful of all of these things.

Why? Because they are the truth that has already established or strengthened us. This word “established” was deeply significant in Peter’s life. It would have triggered some powerful memories in his own mind, going back to what was probably the darkest night in his life. Jesus had spoken this word to Peter in the upper room, just hours before he would deny his Lord. I want to give us as much context as possible, so I’m going to read several verses in Luke 22.

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

²⁸ “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (So, here you have the disciples still fighting with each other over power and prominence. Here on the very night when their Lord and Master was preparing to display the greatest act of servant leadership this world has ever known, when He would pay for our salvation with His own blood, here are His disciples still missing the point about what true leadership looks like. Watch carefully what he says next.)

³¹ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, (Do you think Simon might have had a word or two to say in that dispute about who was the greatest? You see how his desire to be the greatest among the Apostles is connected with Satan’s great efforts at having ownership of him? This is telling about Satan’s strategies in the church, isn’t it? He is seeking to sift us like wheat by playing upon our fleshly desires for power over one another. But that is not how this story ends. Satan doesn’t get his way with Peter. Why?) ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” ³³ Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” ³⁴ Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:24-34)

On that night, Peter learned the hard way. Peter learned that his strength was his greatest weakness. What he thought was his greatest asset was his greatest liability. His self-confidence and bravado were exactly what Satan used to bring him down on the night Jesus was betrayed. Matthew tells us Peter said in this same conversation that he would NEVER fall away. Never came very soon, didn’t it? That tends to be the case with our self-confident nevers. We are never closer to falling than when we self-confidently and self-righteously assert our own ability to never fall away. Peter was operating in the flesh that night. That was the night Jesus taught him that the flesh is weak, while the Spirit is willing. Peter was the perfect picture of fleshly confidence that night. He was so confident in himself, but he couldn’t even stay awake for an hour to watch and pray. He could confidently swing his sword, but not very accurately, and certainly much less wisely. That was the night Jesus would teach him the lesson of godly sorrow

that leads to repentance. In the midst of Jesus' darkest hours, Peter would deny Him, and with a single loving glance, Jesus would remind Him that His grace is sufficient, and His power is made perfect in weakness. Jesus had already prayed that his faith would not fail, and so it wouldn't.

Jesus said, "when you turn again," not "if," but "when." Guess what that means. Peter would turn again, meaning he would stop trusting in himself, and he would begin trusting completely in Jesus again. And upon turning, Jesus told him what he'd need to do. "Strengthen your brothers." That's the same word Peter uses in 2 Peter 1:12, "You are established (*sterizo*, strengthened) in the truth that you have." The word itself conveys the picture of a support that fixes, plants down. It's the securing down of a house on a solid foundation. We are secured down on the foundation of the truth that we have. That truth is that we bring nothing to the table in regards to our salvation. God is 100% responsible for our salvation. All things have been granted to us by *His* divine power. Do you want strength? Believe that. Believe that you can do nothing apart from Christ, but that you have all that you need through Him. Seems counter-intuitive doesn't it, but it's the truth that strengthens. It's the truth that will keep you firmly secured on a foundation that will never fail. It's the truth that will set you down in a place where you will neither be ineffective or unfruitful. It's the truth through which you will earnestly supplement your faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

There's something lost in translation here in the words "that you have." The Greek word here is the word *parouse*, which means being present in you, or having come to you. It is the verb form of the noun used throughout the New Testament to describe Jesus' second coming. That glorious and climactic future event is called His *Parousia*. Here, Peter says the truth has come to us. The verb is in the present participle form, which means it could be translated more accurately like this, "established in the having come to you truth," or "the being present in you truth." Peter is emphasizing the abiding nature of the truth, and I believe he is pointing to the fact that the truth is connected with the Person who has come and is still to come. It is always with us, even as Jesus Christ has promised that He will always be with us. What remains future, what is not yet here, Jesus' Parousia, is already present, *parouse*, with us in the form of the truth. This is already present truth that shapes the not yet here future as our lives are strengthened by it. We don't know what He's doing, but we know what He's done. And because of that, we know that we can be confident of what He's said He will do in the end.

Which in turn gives us a clear view of how to live our lives today. Peter gives a very personal look into his own heart as to why he is so earnest in writing about these things.

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Peter 1:13-15)

Here, we see the second way to never stop growing. Change the way you look at your life and death in this world. Listen carefully to how Peter speaks about his life in this world. He says, "as

long as I am in this body,” and, “since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon.” Once again, we have something lost in translation here. Peter doesn’t actually use the word *soma*, the typical Greek word for body, here. Instead, he uses the word σκηνώματι, which means tent or tabernacle. He is using metaphorical language to convey a deep truth that had a deep impression on him. The metaphor itself reveals a changed perspective on life. Why does Peter refer to his body as a tent? Because he understands what his earthly life truly is.

The Apostles spoke about life and death in very different terms than we do today. I fear we have lost something of how the resurrection of Jesus completely revolutionized their view of life and death. They almost never referred to physical death as death after Jesus’ resurrection. What terms did they use? Falling asleep, putting off the tent, being sown, being away from the tent, or, Peter refers to it here as his departure, or more literally, exodus.

That last one is the exact same term that is used to describe Jesus’ death on the mount of transfiguration.

³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

Elijah and Moses came and conversed with him concerning his exodus from this earth. This was the purpose of His incarnation. This was why He had taken on our flesh and blood in the first place. He entered this world as a man so that He could depart this world as a man. What were the words He used to call people after Him? “Follow Me.” Those words did not *only* apply to His time in this world. We do not *only* follow Him as our moral Teacher. Following Him certainly does not exclude that, but we cannot reduce discipleship to Christ to merely a matter of modeling our life in this world after His because His life in this world had a purpose beyond this world. He calls us to follow Him wherever He goes. His own exodus out of this world was central to His purpose as our Savior and Shepherd. It was His hour, when He parted the Red Sea that stood between us and the Promised Land. He made a way through death into life. His death was the death of death. Which means that through Him our death is not ultimately death at all, truly. We have it on Jesus’ own authority that this is the case.

In that famous instance when His good friend Lazarus died, which happened right before His own death and resurrection, Jesus spoke very clearly about His mission to put death to death. His purpose was to transform our death into slumber. He said to Martha, who was struggling to understand why Jesus had allowed her brother to die, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25b-26)** When does a believer die? A believer died when Jesus died. We have been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). That is why Paul asks a rhetorically obvious question to the believers in Rome who ask if we should keep on sinning so that grace can abound, **“³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3)** He goes on in that passage to clearly explain the mystery that Jesus’ death was our death. He says (and remember, he is describing not only what is true of Christ, but what is true of the believer), **⁹ We know**

that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. (Romans 6:9-10) Immediately on the heels of that deep doctrine, comes the very first command of Paul's letter to the Romans. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:11) Reckon yourselves, account yourselves, truly dead already and alive already. How? By remembering that Jesus died once for all.

Can you see now more clearly how deeply Jesus means the words, "Follow Me." What His disciples didn't realize at the time He first spoke those words, and what I think we ourselves often fail to realize, is that He meant we need to follow Him through His death and into His resurrection. By faith, we pass through, we are baptized into, the waters of His death and are cleansed from every defilement of sin, and we enter into the power of His resurrection today. This is why He was so laser-focused throughout the gospels on His hour? He was laser-focused on what Elijah and Moses discussed with Him at His transfiguration: his exodus from this world, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

We follow Him in the same way by faith. We, too, should be laser-focused on our departure from this world. We lay our lives down willingly every single day. Saving faith is that which willingly surrenders what is already dead and joyfully receives the life of the Spirit today, every day, as long as we are in this body, or tent. This is not something abstract. It is something true. It is something real. It is the realest reality there is. Nothing is more deeply true than the fact that all those who are saved by Jesus Christ have already died with Him and are raised up with Him. But at the same time, we have the responsibility to constantly do the accounting job. Death will continue to loom large in your life as long as you fail to do this reckoning. If you are living in the fear of death, it is because you are forgetting that you have already died.

Howard Hendricks put it this way. He said one of our greatest failures in the Christian life is that we so often think that this world is the land of the living. He said, "You and I are in the land of the dying on our way to the land of the living." We are not in the land of the living as long as we are in this world. Our problem is we become deluded into thinking that we are in the land of the living now, and our laser-focused attention is this life, which is actually just a slow march toward death. We become ineffective, the seven growing qualities that Peter enumerated, which we've been studying, cease to grow when we become overly worried and anxious over this short, fleeting time that we have in this earthly tent. Here's how C.S. Lewis explained this,

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.

The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven.

It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither.

-C.S. Lewis

When he says you will get earth thrown in, he means not that we get to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin when we aim at Heaven, but that our life in this world can only be meaningful, satisfying, and fruitful as it is lived with hearts and minds aimed at the next world. Sin means missing the mark. It means aiming in the wrong direction. If you lack a sense of meaning or fulfillment right now, if you feel an overwhelming sense of worry and fear at the specter of death, if you are not seeing the fruit of the Spirit in your day, the explanation is simple. You are not aiming at Heaven, so you don't get what you are looking for on earth, either.

What is your life, after all? It is but a passing breath. It is but a vapor. It is a short, uncertain sojourn through the valley of the shadow of death. You will find that you are a worried and anxious wreck if all you think about is a life like that. If this life in the land of the dying looms larger in your thinking than the life that awaits you in the land of the living, you are bound to lack peace. You will stop growing as a fruitful branch. You will cease to bear fruit, and you will become ineffective because you have become short-sighted.

But, here's the beautiful reality, the more you begin to focus on the world to come, which is truly the land of the living, the more you will see the Spirit bearing fruit in your life today, even here in the land of the dying. This is why we sing the Hymn of Heaven. "How I long to breathe the air of Heaven." Not because we just want to detach ourselves from this world and give up and lay down in despair. No, because we believe that our life has already begun, and we can already begin to experience a small foretaste of what awaits us if we keep our eyes on Jesus' return.

Are you awake? Peter's desire was to stir up these believers, which means to wake them up from sleep and idleness. He wanted to wake them up from the stupor that comes when we begin to think that this life is all there is. Sir Walter Moberly wrote a book called *The Crisis in the University* back in 1953, in which he leveled a tremendous charge at evangelicals for their lack of gospel penetration on the university campus. He said, "If 1/10 of what you believe is true you ought to be 10 times as excited as you are." What's he mean? We should be way more enthusiastic about our faith! We should not be a morose, cold, unfeeling people! We should be excited, and that excitement should only be growing. From the moment of your salvation, you are called to grow, and to never stop growing. You have to start thinking about your body, and your life in this world, in the same way that Peter and the Apostles thought.

Peter lived with the putting off of his earthly tent in view because our Lord Jesus Christ made it clear to him that it would be soon. This is likely a reference to the moment in John 21 when Jesus gave Peter a clear indication about how he would die. He told him, **¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.** ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) **And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."** (John 21:18) Isn't it interesting that immediately after telling him how he was going to die, Jesus said, "Follow Me?" This "follow Me" likely resounded with greater clarity than the "follow me" He had spoken years earlier on

the same shores. At this moment, Jesus had already died. Now, Peter could understand more clearly that following Jesus meant following Him as the One who had died and risen again.

Here's the thing, Jesus may not have told us in quite such specific terms how we are going to die as he did for Peter, but He has made it abundantly clear that the putting off of our tents will be soon as well. We ought to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

¹⁰The years of our life are seventy,
or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
(Psalm 90:10)

Don't live for that which is but a tiny span of toil and trouble, for that which will soon be gone. There is a day coming when numbered days will be no more. There will be no need to number our days when the glorious day of Jesus Christ dawns upon us. Number your days. Understand that the time you have here is a short while. There may be no clearer statement of this than what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4,

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Don't lose heart! Wake up! Though you are wasting away, and the putting off of your tent will be soon, remember that there is divine power that can renew you day by day. What you see when you look in the mirror is transient and it is wasting away. It is just a bare kernel that will fall to the ground very soon, but if you have faith in Jesus, that seed will sprout up into a tree more glorious than you can even imagine in the resurrection. We have this treasure in fragile clay jars. Don't put all your stock in this life, for the moment you start to invest only in this life is the moment you stop growing. Invest in eternity. Never stop learning. Never stop loving. Never stop serving. Never stop growing.