

## **How To Get Unstuck And To Start Growing Again**

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January 5-6, 2008

How A Christian G.R.O.W.S. (Spiritual Growth Series)

2 Peter 1:3-11

Anyone looking at the American church today would come away with the unfortunate conclusion that we have millions of Christians who are not very Christian. Do you agree with that? There are millions of Christians who do not seem to be any different than anyone else in the world.

### **The Problem: Christians who don't look like Christians**

The premier religious poll taker in America right now is a man named George Barna. According to Barna's statistics, the only difference between Christians and non-Christians in America are over religious matters. That is, Christians go to church more than non-Christians, Christians read their Bibles more and pray more; they give more to the church than non-Christians do; but, in terms of the way that people live their lives, Barna finds no discernable difference between Christians and non-Christians.

So Christians get divorced at the same rates as non-Christians. Despite our vocal opposition, Christians get abortions at almost the same rate as the rest of American society. If you examine the spending habits of Christians or the use of pornography, or the premarital sex rate of Christian teens and young adults, you would not find many Christians who act like Christians. Christians are more religious than other people, but are hardly distinguishable in all the other areas of life. That's what the statistics tell us.

And we don't need to go to statisticians for this conclusion. We Christians just need to look in the mirror. Compare the picture of the Christian life that you read about in the Bible with our own lives. Look at yourself and say, "Are you a content person? Are you inwardly pure? Do you tell the truth even when it hurts you; even when it is inconvenient; even when it is totally embarrassing? Do you tell the truth? Are you close to God today and growing in your relationship with him? Are you generous and open-handed with your money, especially towards the poor? Are there cherished sins in your life that you will not allow God to deal with? Are you generally free from anxiety and anger?" Do you love your enemies as Jesus commanded?

Bottom line: For those of you who consider yourselves followers of Christ, do you look more like Jesus this New Year than you did last New Year? That, after all, is the goal of the Christian life. The goal of the Christian life is not to increase your religious activities – praying, Bible reading, church attendance, fasting. Your religious activities are simply a means to get to the goal, which most Christians know – that the goal is to act and think more and more like Jesus, to have more and more of Jesus' attitudes about life, to be kind like Jesus, to tell the truth like Jesus, to be generous like Jesus, to be content with life like Jesus.

Those of you who consider yourselves to be followers of Christ, how are you doing right now in your pursuit of Christ-likeness? Have you made lots of progress this past year?

The apostle Peter, in 2 Peter, speaks to Christians who have not changed very much and who do not look very much like Jesus. His audience is Christian as we are going to see. He is not writing to unconverted people, or to pagans. His audience is Christian. He is writing to people who are born again, who have trusted in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as the only payment for their sins. And they are Christians who are stuck in their spiritual lives; they are Christians who do not look very Christian. Peter is writing to angry Christians. He is writing to self-indulgent Christians, Christians who are full of lust and pride. He is writing to materialistic Christians who spend way more on themselves than they need. And Peter calls his audience ineffective and unproductive Christians.

2 Peter 1:8 says:

**2 Peter 1:8**

For 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.

They are ineffective; they are of no help to other people. They are not agents of God's Kingdom in the world. They are not making any real difference, in terms of the Kingdom of God, in their families, in their communities, or in the larger society. And they are unproductive. They are not fruitful. They are not bringing forth the fruit of God's Spirit. They are not more loving this year than last year; they are not more joyful this year than last year; they are not more peaceful; they aren't more self-controlled. They are ineffective Christians, unfruitful Christians.

Does this sound like an unflattering, but honest assessment of most of us as American Christians? Ineffective and unfruitful?

The God of the Bible loves truth even when it hurts, even when it is not flattering. The God of the bible tells us the truth. And the truth for many of us as followers of Christ is that we are stuck in our Christian lives. And there are many of us, in fact, who are going backward.

What I would like to do over the next few months in this series is focus this year in 2008 on getting us unstuck, on moving us forward again and having us growing again as followers of Jesus. One of the goals that I know that God has for our church is that on January 1, 2009 every one of you who is part of this church then would be able to say, "I made forward progress in 2008. I look more like Jesus now than I did last year. I am more content. I am more truthful. I have mastery over habits that have pinned me down for decades. I feel closer to God than I ever have. I feel like I've made a real

contribution to other people's lives. I can honestly say I am becoming an effective, fruitful Christian."

My series for this New Year is titled "How A Christian G.R.O.W.S."

How a Christian G.R.O.W.S.

This is an acronym,

**G.R.O.W.S.**

**G**= Giving

**R**= Relationships

**O**= Outreach

**W**= Worship

**S**= Spiritual Disciplines

Now, we are going to go through each of these elements, but first I want to lay a foundation over the next few weeks to think about our Christian growth. My first message in this series is titled "How to Get Unstuck and to Start Growing Again."

Let's pray.

The book of 2 Peter is all about not being taken in by false teachers, but instead learning to grow as Christians. And so Peter concludes the entire book of 2 Peter with this exhortation in 2 Peter 3:17-18:

**2 Peter 3:17-18**

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. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

The Goal: Christians are meant to grow

Christians are meant to grow. The goal of the Christian life is not simply to accept Jesus as your Savior and stamp your ticket to heaven while continuing to live a hellish life here on earth. It is not the plan of God that you have a hellish marriage, or live a permanently discontented, angry, anxious, addicted life. The goal of the Christian life is to grow and become more and more like Christ – to progressively think like Christ, act like Christ, and in an increasing way to enjoy more of the life the Kingdom of God right now.

Now the theological term for Christian growth is sanctification. It comes from the Latin word Sanctus which means holy.

Sanctification = to become holy

And so it is God's desire that you and I in an increasing way become holy, to become like God. The New Testament regularly encourages us to think about our Christian lives as lives of continual growth. One of the images that the New Testament uses to communicate this is movement from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood. So we read, for example, in 1 Corinthians 13:11 these words:

**1 Corinthians 13:11**

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

And in a similar way we read in Hebrews 5:11-14 these words:

**Hebrews 5:11-14**

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Other images that the Bible uses to communicate this idea that the Christian life is a growing life is a seed and fruit; or a seed and a growing plant. It also talks about growing like the growing of a building.

But how do we grow? How do we become sanctified? There are lots of mistakes about Christian growth that keep us stuck. One of the fundamental errors in our thinking is,

Spiritual growth is not a matter of age

Just because we are getting older, friends, doesn't mean we're getting better. We all know 45-year old babies and 60-year olds who still act like immature teens. We all know people who are older and are not getting better. Christian growth is not a matter of age.

And Christian growth is not automatic.

Spiritual growth is not automatic

Just because you have been a Christian for 30 years doesn't mean you are a mature Christian. Peter says that you can be an ineffective, unfruitful Christian. There are lots of people who have been Christians for 5, 10, 20, 30+ years and do not look very much like Jesus.

Spiritual growth, by the way, is also not a matter of academics or achievement.

Spiritual growth is not a matter of academics or achievement

You can be absolutely brilliant; you can have lots of degrees and look nothing like Jesus. Any of you who work in a hospital or at one of the local universities, or in any law firm, you know this – that people can be incredible researchers, brilliant business people and be utterly immature spiritually. Isn't that true? Street thugs have nothing on academics in terms of competitiveness or pettiness. And so achievement and academics don't make people less self-centered, or more content, or more loving, or more generous.

How do we grow?

Well, how do we grow? How do we become unstuck this New Year? We get unstuck when we:

Embrace Christ's provision

## **2 Peter 1:3-4**

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1:3 tells us that Christ has given us everything we need to grow as Christians. Now, Christ does not give us everything we want. He doesn't give us everything we lust after. He doesn't give us everything we desire for every conceivable purpose we come up with. So you may have it in your heart to be part of a really successful Christian rock band, or to be a physician, or to have a lovely home. The Bible does not promise that Christ will give us everything we need to fulfill our desires, or our lusts, or even things that we think would advance God's Kingdom. Christ gives us everything we need, it says in 2 Peter 1:3 for life and godliness.

Christ gives us everything we need for life and godliness.

In other words, Christ gives us everything we need in order for us to live a godly life. A godly life is a God-centered life; it is a God-saturated life; God-drenched; God-honoring; God-pleasing life. Christ will give you everything you need, in whatever circumstances you are in so that you can honor God. That's a godly life. It is the God-honoring life; it is the God-pleasing life.

Christ may not heal your body or the body of a loved one, but Christ will give you what you need to honor him whether or not your body is not healed. Christ may not give you the job you want; the position you've been begging God for, but he will give you what you need to honor God whatever your financial situation. And Christ may not give you

what you want in terms of a happy marriage, or even a marriage at all, but he will give you what you need to live a godly life. And that's Christ's goal for you. Christ's goal for you and me in this coming year, and Christ's goal for you and me every year is not our comfort, but our character. God wants us to look more and more like his Son. God wants us to desire to honor him whatever hand life deals to us. That's what life is all about.

And so what is included in Christ's provision? We read in 2 Peter 1:3,

**2 Peter 1:3**

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Christ has given us his divine power

Now there are different ways that people attempt to live the Christian life. Some people attempt to grow simply by will power, by their own determination and grit, looking inside themselves for their own resources and their own positive thinking. But Jesus tells us that the end of our will power and self-effort is failure in John 15:5:

**John 15:5**

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

And what you are going to find, and what I always find, is that my solo efforts at producing change in my life always result in frustration and failure. I cannot and you cannot produce the fruit of God's Spirit in your life by simply trying harder.

Now, the second approach to getting unstuck and spiritually growing that is also doomed to failure is usually as the result of a reaction to the first way since we find that we can't produce growth through self effort, we go to the other extreme and do nothing at all. We just turn it all over to the Lord. Now there are situations that we need to just turn over to the Lord. There are people that we just need to turn over to the Lord. There does come a time and place in a Christian's life where like Jesus in Gethsemane after striving, seeking and praying, released a matter to God and we say, "You've heard what I want, Lord, you've heard what I've asked for, but ultimately Thy will be done. I surrender this whole situation to you. I surrender this person to you." There is a time to turn people and situations over to the Lord.

But you do not turn your spiritual growth over to the Lord and say, "God, you've got to do it all for me," because any of you who have tried that method of getting unstuck and growing as a Christian will find that that didn't work either. God is not going to do all of the work for us.

What does it mean that his divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life? How does Christian growth work?

Well, let me take a simple illustration. You are asked to move a big rock by God. The “solo, self-effort approach,” is “OK, God, I’ve got this.” And you grunt and strain to move the rock. And you find that you can’t do it. The “God’s got to do it all” approach is you sit on a chair and say to the Lord, “Well, I know you’ve commanded me to move this rock, but you’re the only one who can do it, so go for it. I’ll be sitting here watching TV while you do the work.” The Biblical message is “I am going to work as hard as I possibly can to lift this rock, and to outside appearances it may look like all the work is being done by me, but in fact, I am entirely relying upon you and your energy and your strength to empower me to lift this out of the way.” And that is what Paul is communicating in Philippians 4:13:

**Philippians 4:13**

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

The rock that Paul was trying to move in that instance was learning to be content in every situation. Learning to be at peace and not freak out whatever happened in his outward circumstance. Paul was able to meet the challenges in life and to grow as a Christian by depending on God’s total enabling. We go all out pursuing spiritual growth constantly depending on the Holy Spirit to empower us to make the changes we need to make. This is all through the Bible.

**Colossians 1:28-29**

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

**1 Corinthians 15:10**

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Christ gives us everything we need to live a godly life. He gives us his divine power. And he gives us his great promises.

Christ gives us his great promises

So we read in 2 Peter 1:4:

**2 Peter 1:4**

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Knowing and embracing Christ's promises by faith is a key to getting unstuck and growing as a Christian this year. See, everyone makes promises. Politicians make us promises about how life is going to be better if they're elected. The world makes promises to us – save your money and you will have enough to live on in your old age; work hard and you will succeed; get good grades and you will get a great job. But whatever promises politicians make, whatever promises the world makes, we know that these promises are frequently broken. Work hard and you might succeed. But often along the way, you might get cancer. Save and you might have enough money to live into old age. But alternatively inflation or a bad investment could eat up all of your retirement savings.

Christ's promises are nothing like politicians or the world's promises. Christ's promises are never broken – ever. Christ promised that if we turned our burdens over to him, he would give us rest. Christ promised that he was going away to prepare a place for us and he would come again and bring us to where he is. Christ promised that if we confessed our sins and repented, we would be forgiven for every sin we've ever committed. Christ promised that he would be with us to the close of the age. Christ promised that we would not have any temptation too great for us to bear. Christ promised that he would complete his work in us. Christ promised us his Spirit. Christ promised us the church would endure; that the gates of hell would not be able to stand against the church.

And Christ keeps his promises. It is by depending upon Christ's power and trusting in Christ's promises that we Christians get unstuck.

But we also have to embrace our personal responsibility.

Embrace our personal responsibility

## **2 Peter 1:5-7**

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

Now, look at verse 5:

## **2 Peter 1:5**

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

Not making every effort

Peter uses the phrase “make every effort.” Some of your bibles might say “apply all diligence,” or giving all diligence. I like the NIV translation – “make every effort.” The



NIV actually uses this phrase 8 times in the New Testament – make every effort. So we read in Luke 13:24:

**Luke 13:24**

Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

And in Hebrews 12:14:

**Hebrews 12:14**

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

And in 2 Peter 3:14:

**2 Peter 3:14**

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

John White, who was an older and dear friend of mine, he was a Christian psychiatrist who went to be with the Lord a few years ago, wrote one of the best books I've ever read on Christian growth and discipleship. It is called "The Fight." We have copies of it in our bookstore. But what an appropriate title for Christian growth and for the Christian life. The apostle Paul calls the Christian life a fight in 1 Timothy 6:12,

**1 Timothy 6:12**

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Notice, it is a good fight; it is not like fighting with your spouse, or your parents, or your neighbors. The Christian life is a good fight.

Spiritual growth is a struggle; it is a labor. We are salmon swimming upstream in this fallen world. If we do nothing, we move backward in our Christian lives. The tendency of our own sin is to draw us backward. The tug of the world is drawing us backward. The opposition of Satan is pulling us backward. And as I said before, one major error in the church is to believe that growth is automatic. That God will somehow pick you up by the seat of your pants and somehow throw you upstream. You've got to fight with this stream and waterfall of your own sinful tendencies, Satan, and the world constantly in your face. You've got to fight to move upstream.

But a second major error that has confused the Christian church about spiritual growth is that we have confused effort and works-based salvation. We Christians know that salvation is all about grace from beginning to end. It is all grace. It is all God's unmerited favor. And so we say that must mean that growing as a Christian requires no

effort, no struggle, no fight because if I get involved in fighting, laboring, or struggling, or striving, then I don't understand grace.

### Seeing effort as a contradiction of grace

But this is wrong! You see, grace is the opposite of merit. Grace is the opposite of trying to prove your worthiness before God. Grace is the opposite of earning. Grace is not the opposite of effort. Let me say that again. *Grace is the opposite of earning merit.* You can't ever put God in your debt. Grace is the opposite of earning, it is not the opposite of effort.

No one in history ever understood grace better than the apostle Paul. He was a teacher of grace. He hated self-righteous, works-based religion, trying to put God in our debt. He turned his back on his old pharisaical merit-based religion. Paul constantly taught grace. And so we read in Ephesians 2 these words:

#### **Ephesians 2:8-9**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Paul, the world's best teacher of grace, the one human being who totally understood grace, always spoke about the need for human effort and embracing our personal responsibility in order to grow. Listen to some of these verses:

#### **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

#### **Philippians 3:12**

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

#### **1 Timothy 6:12**

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

You will never get unstuck if you are a lazy Christian. You will never get unstuck if you procrastinate and say, "I know I need to make some changes in my life; I know that this particular appetite of mine is out of control, but I will take care of it manana." If you look at the life of any Christian you admire, you are going to find this incredible effort, this

drive, this labor, this attitude of making every effort – swimming hard upstream in the face of everything that is thrown at you. You are going to see this incredible labor.

And isn't this true by the way of growth in any area of your life? I mean to learn to play the piano, or if you want to learn a new language, or you just want to learn how to hit foul shots, or sink a putt, or to chip well – you've got to apply yourself. You've got to work hard. More and more Americans have the attitude that if it requires lots of hard work, you are probably not that gifted in that area and you should look at doing something else. Other cultures don't think that way. Other cultures still admire really hard work. And this is closer to the Bible, which says:

**2 Peter 1:5**

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

Again, if you look at people you admire, people who respond really well under pressure, who seem unruffled by circumstances, who seem nearer to God – people you could wake up in the middle of the night and expect that you would get a wise, thoughtful response to your upset, they are probably people who don't just sit around playing computer games, or spending four hours every night in front of their television. Making every effort means functioning contrary to your mood in the moment. It means doing something that you don't feel like doing – like going to bed at a reasonable hour instead of staying up and watching the Late Show so that you can get up in the morning and spend time alone with God each day this year. Making every effort means setting your alarm clock and then getting out of bed to be with God. Making every effort might include going in for marital counseling, or joining one of our recovery groups so that you can finally overcome that stubborn habit or addiction that has been dogging you for years. Making every effort might mean that you finally join a small group this year or you finally get involved in serving through the church this year, or you finally give a full tithe.

It is doing things that are not natural; doing things that you haven't been doing.

Now, what does Christian growth look like? It looks like adding to your faith. 2 Peter 1:5

**2 Peter 1:5**

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

We don't add to our faith for the purposes of salvation. Faith alone in Christ alone saves a person. But we do add to saving faith certain virtues if we are going to spiritually grow. And this little phrase "add to" is an interesting one in the original Greek. It literally means to "furnish out" and it was used in Greek theatre when a wealthy person would furnish out or fill out a drama by supplying or paying for a choir. And what Peter is saying is that you need to fill out your Christian life. You need to add a choir of virtues beyond just stamping your ticket for heaven, if you are going to look like a Christian.

I haven't the time to go through all of these virtues, but I would like to list just three. First of all, it says in 2 Peter 1:5:

**2 Peter 1:5**

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

Now, many Christians, especially those who are my age and who have grown up in a kind of Christianity which is anti-intellectual and opposes learning almost as a matter of principle - the Jesus Movement that I was saved in, in the early 1970's, had almost a fundamental tenet that Christianity was simply a matter of the heart and not the head. Why would you bother going to seminary? Seminary means cemetery the Jesus Movement folks used to say. Doctrine was just a head trip.

Now there certainly are many Christians for whom Christianity is just an intellectual exercise. They've learned to spit back the right answers to doctrinal questions, but there is no life transformation. There is no love of God in their life. There is certainly no love of people in their lives. There are certainly lots of Christians for whom Christianity has become a head trip. But I would suggest that there are many more American Christians who are utterly unreflective and unthinking in their Christian life. There are many, many American Christians who have been Christians for 5, 10, 20, 30 years and have not thought deeply about their faith than the average Sunday School person. There are many Christians who have not thought deeply about how their faith would intersect with their workplace or their profession. They haven't thought deeply about what does it mean to be a Christian parent, or a Christian husband or wife. Many Christians who have been Christians for many decades can not answer the basic objections of the Christian faith like "If God is good, why is there so much suffering in the world?" Or how can you say that Jesus is the only way to God?

The only kind of faith that is going to make a difference in this city and in this world is an intellectually engaging faith, a reflective faith, a faith that has mature thinking behind it. We are not going to change anything in the lives of society unless we have lots of people who are willing to out-think the rest of the culture regarding sexuality, or money, or ways to make peace in this troubled world.

Why not in the year 2008 resolve become a reader of good Christian books. I don't mean to just read any kind of schlock that counts itself as Christian. I mean why not resolve this year to become a reader of good Christian books. And if you want recommendations for good Christian books, you can ask anyone of the pastors. You can email them and say, "Can you give me a recommendation of 2-3 Christian books that I ought to read?" Or a recommendation in this or that area? Why not apply your mind this year to your Christianity?

And then Peter says to add to knowledge, self-control in verse 6:

**2 Peter 1:6**

and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

Talk about something we all aim at this year, to set as a goal collectively, we want to grow in this virtue of self-control. It means controlling your passions and your appetites, not being controlled by them. You say, "Well, what would it look like for me to grow in self-control?" Start with eating or your drinking. Start with food. Say, "God, give me control. I'm going to have to depend on you; give me control in my eating, the quantity that I eat, what I eat, how I eat, when I eat. I want mastery. I want to gain mastery this year, Lord, over my body."

Self-control means I am not controlled by my moods and I'm not controlled by other people. I stop saying, "You make me mad. I just can't handle this situation." Self-control is self-mastery. How do you feel like you're doing regarding self-mastery?

And Peter talks about growing in love in verse 7:

**2 Peter 1:7**

and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

If we want to look like Christians, we are not going to look much like Christians if in 2008 we don't grow in our ability to love people. The word here is "agape." And what agape is, is love that is generated from the heart of the lover, not love that is elicited by the beauty of the beloved. Agape. You say there is someone in your life that is hard to love. There has to be someone who you don't have warm feelings towards; someone you find irritating; someone you find annoying; someone whose behavior just absolutely makes you want to gag. What we often try to do is we try to find something good in this person that we could then love.

"Well, they are really obnoxious, but they have great singing voices."

"I find their personality really grating, but they are doing a good job for the company."

That's not agape. Agape is not "I'm trying to find something in this person that will elicit from me a feeling of love, something worthy in them; I want to find something loveable." That is not agape. Agape is your desire for this person's highest good.

Agape is our desire for a person's highest good.

And, friend, you and I can have agape love towards the most unlovely person. We may not be able to have warm feelings towards the person. We may not see any good in that person. But you can always, always desire another person's highest good. The most wicked person in the world, you can desire that that person repents and comes to know Christ. You can desire that the person get freed from their addictions. You can desire that the person be released from their anger or self-indulgence, or self-centeredness.

This list is a picture of what a fully furnished out Christian would look like, a Christian who has not only the Christian drama playing, but a whole choir of Christian virtues singing along with them.

How do we get unstuck? Finally, we get unstuck by keeping the end in view,

Keep the end in view

Look at verses 8-11:

**2 Peter 1:8-11**

For 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. 9 But if any of you do not have them, you are nearsighted and blind, and you have forgotten that you have been cleansed from your past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, vision is crucial for everything that you and I wish to accomplish in our lives. You have to have a picture in your mind of what you want to see happen. And then you have to drive towards that goal trusting in the enabling power of Christ and in his precious promises. But vision, a picture of a preferred future for you, or for your family, or for your business, is essential for any labor or any effort at all. You might have a picture of you dancing with your spouse on a cruise ship. And it is that picture of you being comfortable out on the dance floor dancing that inspires you to take dance lessons. Or you might have a picture of you being able to order from a menu in French when you travel to France. Or a picture of being able to sit down at the piano to play some tunes for pleasure. Or maybe it's a picture of losing 50 pounds and becoming physically healthy and more attractive.

Maybe your vision for this year would be in the year 2008 you have a vision of you and your child not fighting all the time, or your child doing better in school, or your child telling the truth, or not hanging out with the wrong crowd. And it is this vision that might drive you to go in for family counseling, or continuing to take your child to church or to teen group. It is vision that sustains us in making an effort. It is vision that inspires us; yes, I'm going to swim upstream; I'm going to go back to the gym; I'm going on a diet with a friend.

You might have a vision this year in 2008 of living your life without a particular addiction. What would it be like to be freed from smoking? Or from pornography? Or from drugs? Or a vision of being a mother or father that your kids look up to? Vision is what sustains us through opposition. You say, "It is worth it to drive out in the cold when I'm not in the mood to participate in this group because I have a vision of what I'm going to be like when I'm freed up from this particular problem."

And so Peter gives us two different ends for the Christian life. Quickly, the negative end, verses 8-9:

### **2 Peter 1:8-9**

For 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. 9 But if any of you do not have them, you are nearsighted and blind, and you have forgotten that you have been cleansed from your past sins.

I just want to focus here in one little phrase, “nearsighted.” The ineffective Christian, the Christian who is of no help to anybody in this world and who is not making a difference, the unproductive Christian, the Christian who is not growing or bearing fruit, the Christian who is stuck is a Christian, Peter says, who is nearsighted. What does it mean to be nearsighted? It means that you can only see things close up. In other words, the stuck Christian is always going to be a Christian who thinks only of the near term, he is the short-sighted Christian; she is the Christian who only thinks about this moment and how she feels in this moment. She never thinks about the long-term consequences of her particular behavior.

The nearsighted Christian is the Christian who charges up their credit card like crazy at Christmas and then has to live with the hangover of past-due bills over the next six months. The nearsighted Christian is the Christian who constantly gives into their kids’ whining and manipulation because they have no long-term perspective of what kind of teenager or adult they want their child to turn into. The nearsighted person is the person who constantly gives into their sexual urges, or their appetite for food or drink or TV because that will give immediate gratification.

And over against this nearsighted person, Peter speaks to us about a positive vision for the long-term in verses 10-11:

### **2 Peter 1:10-11**

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Long-term, what would it be like to be freed from your addiction this year? Instead of what will satisfy me in the next moment, think about what kind of person you want to be a year from now, or ten years from now, or twenty years from now, or 30 years from now. Where do you want to be in your marriage? Or your relationship with your kids? Or your career? Or your health? Or in your closeness with God?

Peter stretches out the time line even further and in verse 11:

### **2 Peter 1:11**

and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Imagine dying and not being afraid to die. Imagine knowing that when you get a disease that is fatal, or you are aging and you know that your time on earth is growing shorter, imagine knowing that you are going to be received into God's kingdom with applause. Imagine not looking back on your life with tons of regrets; imagine having a heart that is assured of Christ's abundant welcome and his "well done good and faithful servant." That is the ultimate driver for spiritual growth – that one day your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, would look at you and say, "well done good and faithful servant. You lived a life that honored me!" Let's pray.



# How To Get Unstuck And To Start Growing Again

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Rich Nathan

January 5-6, 2008

How A Christian G.R.O.W.S. (Spiritual Growth Series)

2 Peter 1:3-11

## I. The Problem: Christians who don't look like Christians

## II. The Goal: Christians are meant to grow

### A. Mistakes about Growth

1. Spiritual growth is not a matter of age
2. Spiritual growth is not automatic
3. Spiritual growth is not a matter of academics of achievement

## III. The Means: How do we grow

### A. Embrace Christ's provision (2 Pt. 1.3, 4)

1. Christ has given us everything we need
2. Christ has given us his divine power
3. Christ has given us his great promises

### B. Embrace our personal responsibility (2 Pt. 1.5-7)

1. Mistakes
  - a. Not making every effort (2 Pt. 1.5)
  - b. Seeing effort as a contradiction of grace
2. Qualities
  - a. Knowledge
  - b. Self-Control
  - c. Love

## IV. Keep the end in view (2 Pt. 1.8-11)

### A. Negatively

### B. Positively