

## 2 Peter 1:3-12 How I Got Spiritual Growth Wrong Sermon-based Discussion Leader's Guide

**Purpose of Discussion:** To better understand how we are to run in this race God has marked out for us by correcting four misconceptions about spiritual growth.

**Sermon Refresher:** In thinking about *how* we are to run the race God has marked out for us, Keith continued our reflection from 2 Peter 1:3-12. The church, as well as individual Christians, have a danger of being a mile-wide and an inch-deep. What the world, our country, our city need is to see Christians with more depth. As we strive to grow deeper in our faith, it's easy to have several misconceptions. We'll explore these in our sermon-based discussion this morning.

**Icebreaker:** Have you ever gone by a different name or wanted to go by a different name?

**Transition:** Being a Christian is bearing the name of Christ. It means to be "little Christs." Yet, we don't always live like Christ. There is often a disconnect between who we ultimately are in Christ and how we live. What does it look like to become more of who we are? Let's tackle some of the confusion we have on what spiritual growth looks like.

### **Discussion:**

1. Keith outlined four misconceptions about spiritual growth. The first was that growing as a Christian was going to be easy. What are some areas of your life where you have been disappointed by the lack of change?
2. Read 2 Peter 1:5 and 1:10. Why do you need to hear the command to make every effort and to be all the more diligent? What would it look like to make every effort?
3. The second misconception of spiritual growth was having a superficial understanding of what it meant to mature as a Christian. Read Matthew 15:8-9. There is a danger of focusing on outward behaviours instead of heart change. Why

do you think Christians might focus attention on outward behaviours as the goal of spiritual growth?

4. Read 2 Peter 1:5-7. Why put the emphasis on these heart qualities instead of outward behaviours?
5. The third misconception is having wrong expectations about how quick spiritual growth occurs. Read 2 Peter 1:8. What is challenging and comforting in thinking about your spiritual life as a process?
6. The fourth misconception is approaching spiritual growth through self-reliance by following the rules, doing the right thing, and doing your Christian duty. Read 2 Peter 1:4. What is the means and the motivation for spiritual growth from this verse?
7. Read Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 6:3, and Matthew 16:24-25. How do God's promises motivate us to surrender our will to God's will for our lives?

**Set up this week's exercise:** Peter tells us that we grow in holiness through his very great and precious promises. This week's exercise is meant to explore how a deeper understanding of what God promises us moves us to fight sin and unbelief and to grow more and more into God's likeness.

8. Read 2 Peter 1:9. What is the connection between our effort to grow and our past decision to believe and become a Christian?

Spiritual growth is rooted in a past work but requires ongoing effort. These deeper discussion questions explore further the connection between the two.

**Digging Deeper (Optional) 1:** Read 1 John 2:18-19 and James 2:14-18. How do these verses unpack the connection between our ongoing response and the validity of that definitive past work?

**Digging Deeper (Optional) 2:** Read Romans 6:1-23. How is the grace we are shown to us when we first believe in Jesus not just an excuse to indulge our worst vices?

**Sharing and Prayer:** Break into smaller groups. Have everyone share a trait that they wish was more true of them in this stretch of his or her life than it is now. Pray for each other in light of what was shared.

## ***2 Peter 1:4- His Very Great and Precious Promises***

*“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 1:4

Far too often, we try to grow in the Christian life by motivating ourselves with duty, guilt, or a debtor’s ethic. “If I really loved God, I would...”, “Jesus did so much to save me, how can I not...”, “A Christian should...”, or other phrases like these can express these sub-motivations. This is not how the Bible primarily motivates us to live the Christian life.

The Bible’s motivation is God’s continued grace he offers us in Christ: power to do the hard thing, wisdom to see the world rightly, and the hope of why it’s worth it. Growth does not occur as we now do our part, but only as we live in more and more dependence upon God. We find these grace motivations in the form of promises in the Bible. As we believe more in these promises, we live in more and more dependence upon God, and we grow more and more into the people that He is calling us to be.

Our hope for this exercise is that it’s not just a one-time devotional thought, but a tool to believe more deeply a promise of God that applies to an area of frequent struggle or sin. Perhaps, you can even copy the promise on a notecard, stickypad, or a note on your phone this week to equip you to fight the fight of faith this week.

But, the first step is being willing to expose our areas of weakness, unbelief, and sin. Spend a minute asking God to search your heart:

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

Psalm 139:23-24

What area of life is God pointing out where he is wanting you to grow?

What are the beliefs that are underlying your area of weakness or sin? What is being “promised” to me? What desires am I experiencing that make this sin enticing?

What does God promise us instead? Sometimes, it's hard to know. See below for some common areas of sin and promises to fight with. Or is there another verse that applies?

How is what God is promising better and more satisfying than what sin is promising me?

What would your life look like if you believed more and more in that promise?

### **Anxiety**

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God*

-Philippians 4:6

*My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

-Philippians 4:19

### **Greed**

*Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he said,*

*"I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say,*

*"The Lord is my helper;*

*I will not fear;*

*What can man do to me?"*

-Hebrews 13:5-6

### **Feelings of Inadequacy for Ministry/Service**

*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

-Colossians 1:29

### **Lust**

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

-Matthew 5:8

### **Grumbling/Complaining About Circumstances**

*11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have*

*plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

*-Philippians 4:11-13*

### **Bitterness**

*Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

*-Romans 12:19*

### **Impatience**

*The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;*

*-Lamentations 3:25*

### **Fear of Death**

*We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

*-2 Corinthians 5:8*

### **Facing Hardships/Suffering**

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

*-Romans 5:1-4*

### **Sorrow/Grief**

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted  
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

*-Psalm 34:18*

### **Guilt**

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

*-1 John 1:9*

### **Lack of Love for God**

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

-Ezekiel 36:26

### **Fear**

*So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

-Isaiah 41:10

### **Comparison/Judging Others**

3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

-1 Corinthians 4:3-5