

Add to Your Faith

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3-11

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People of God: I'm not sure whether you are a fan of New Year's resolutions, but I find the idea helpful. I like the idea of being able to start fresh and to establish some new goals (or to try again at some old goals). It doesn't have to begin at New Year's, but a new year allows for a fresh start.

It's like getting my new office equipment. If you haven't peeked into my office lately, feel free to do so after the service. A new desk and other accessories have forced me to get organized, with the resolve to stay organized—or at least, nothing on the floor. The old desk is now at my kitchen and it has allowed me to get my personal life in order. No more bills lying on my dining room table for months—mounting up into a huge hill. I have been given a new opportunity to get organized.

In the same way, New Year's resolutions allow people to re-evaluate their lives and to start some new practices that will be beneficial for them—like getting more exercise, or to stop smoking, or to eat healthier foods.

In our walk with God, we too can re-evaluate how we are doing. While every day can be a new start with the Lord, at the beginning of a new year we can ask some basic questions: Will I be a faithful disciple of Jesus? Am I growing in my faith, developing godly virtues, putting aside the sinful nature and putting on the righteousness of Jesus Christ?

In our text, Peter speaks about “adding to our faith”. Being a Christian is more than simply saying: I believe in God, or even I believe Jesus died for my sins. Being a Christian means living out what that confession of faith means. It means shaping our lives in accordance with God's design for faithful living—which we heard this morning again through the responsive reading of the law. It means following the way of Jesus. It calls us to develop our faith into a well-rounded, fruitful Christian life.

Let's unpack how we can add to our faith, by considering: First, its

possibility. Second, its components. And third, its benefits.

First of all, let's deal with its possibility. It is possible to add to our faith. Peter puts it this way in verse three: *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness*. Everything is in place. We don't have to worry whether or not we can accomplish our goal. It is possible.

Its like if you wanted to build a house very quickly. Normally, you can't do it in a few days, or even a few weeks. But if the foundation is already in the ground and ready to be build on; if all the material is on the job site and ready to be put in its place; if there are plenty of skilled laborers willing to work hard; then a house can be finished in record time. It is possible. It's the way Habit for Humanity builds a house in a short period of time.

It is possible to spiritually grow and develop godly virtues. Why? Because of what God has already done. He has laid a solid foundation upon which we can build. That foundation is Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for our sins. How can you go wrong if you are building upon that foundation? Now if you are building on some other foundation--perhaps your own sense of self-righteousness--then you are in trouble. But if Christ is your foundation, then you have a solid anchor. God has provided that firm foundation.

God has also provided the materials we need to build a good spiritual house. How? Peter says it is *through our knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and goodness*. Knowledge is one of the key words in this second letter of Peter. What we need for spiritual growth and godly virtue is the knowledge of God. We need to know who God is, his majesty and greatness, his tenderness and mercy, his love and justice. We need to know what God has done for us, his creating and continued care for this world, his redemptive work through his plan of salvation that reached its climax in Jesus Christ. Through this knowledge we are able to build a solid house. It is a knowledge that God has revealed through his Word. This is the material God has provided for us.

God has not only provided the foundation and the materials, he has also provided a skilled laborer to work in us and through us. God has provided his Holy Spirit. The Spirit is at work within us. His presence fills us with the knowledge of God. The Spirit has equipped us with gifts and abilities so that we can grow in the Lord. The Spirit can protect and defend us from the assaults of the evil one. A divine laborer is at work within us. We do not labor alone.

As a result, it is possible to grow spiritually and to develop a godly life. We don't have to be hesitant in making the resolution about becoming

more Christ-like. It is possible. But only when we keep this essential starting point in mind. Of Christ being the foundation and the Spirit being the laborer. If you don't start with this beginning point then you will fail. Because we cannot grow spiritually on our own strength. We cannot look inward to get us to the goal. Instead, we need to look to God for strength and support. We need to lean on him each day. Only then we will be able to achieve our goal of living a more godly life—to add to our faith.

But what are these components we need to add to our faith? Verses 5 through 7 provide a list of virtues that we must seek to cultivate. Let's hear them again: *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love.*

Now we ought not to view this list as an exhaustive catalogue of Christian virtues. In other places of the Bible, there are other lists that describe the Christian life. Just remember the fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians. This list is not exhaustive, but it is very good starting point.

Nor ought we to view this list as if one virtue must be in place before the other can be started. Its not like in building a house that the frame must in place before you put on the rafters that must be in place before you put on the shingles. No, we must work at these virtues at the same time, realizing that they support and re-enforce each other.

Nor can we can say that this virtue is for me; that virtue is for you. I'll strive for knowledge while you strive for self-control. That's not the way it works. While the Spirit does equip us with different gifts, we are all to give evidence to each one of the virtues listed here. No one is off the hook when it comes to developing these virtues.

Nor should we view this list as if it applied only to individual Christians. There is also a corporate aspect to them. As a community, we must give evidence of these virtues. They must be alive within the body of Christ. As a church, we must possess these qualities in increasing measure.

Faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love—these are the components we need to develop in this coming year. Are they part of your New Year's resolutions?

Now Peter goes on to describe the benefits of what happens when these virtues are shown in the life of believers. In verses 8-11, he mentions four benefits. He says: *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.* The first benefit is that we will be effective and productive as a Christian.

Isn't that what we want to be as Christians and as a church? Shouldn't we want to be effective as Christians in the midst of this community, bearing witness to the name of our Savior as well as living a life that brings honor and glory to the name of God? Don't we want to be productive; doing good deeds, showing mercy to those in need, being kind and compassionate to those who are sick or lonely? In order for us to accomplish these goals, we must develop these virtues.

The second benefit Peter mentions in verse 9: *But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.* Adding to our faith, developing these godly virtues, gives the benefit of the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. Sometimes we struggle with the assurance that we are forgiven. But Peter reminds us that the very fact that we can develop these godly virtues should remind us that we are forgiven people in Jesus Christ. Remember all this is possible because of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ.

The third benefit is closely related to this second one. Developing these components of a Christian confirms our status as being a child of the Lord. Peter puts it this way in verse 10: *Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.* One of the questions people have concerning the mysterious doctrine of election is: How do I know whether I am elect? In other words, how do I know whether I am chosen by God, that I am his child? The key answer is whether you believe in Jesus Christ. If you believe, you are elect. But giving evidence of these virtues also confirms your status as a child of God. If you display these virtues, if you have a desire to lead a godly life, then you can be assured that your name is written in the book of life. The genuineness of your profession of faith in Jesus Christ is shown as you express these virtues.

The fourth and ultimate benefit of developing these virtues is expressed in verse 11: *For if you do these things you will never fail and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* That's the ultimate benefit. When we develop our faith, when we express these components of spiritual life, then we can be assured that we receive a warm welcome into the Kingdom of God. Developing these godly virtues has benefits in this world and for eternity. When we strive to live for Jesus, then we will be able to hear Jesus say to us: Well, done good and faithful servant.

I don't know whether you'll make some personal New Year's resolutions for yourself. But I do know that we are all challenged to grow in our faith. It doesn't take a New Year to challenge you in that regard. Each day we are challenged to grow in our faith, to develop these godly virtues.

But sometimes it is good to pause and consider your walk with the Lord.

Are you adding to your faith these components of a godly life? It's possible because of what God has already done in Jesus Christ. Living them out may be hard work. It may require giving up some sinful habits. But the benefits are worth it.

As we wish each other a happy New Year, as we want this year to be a good year, may we also desire to grow in our faith in the Lord. Amen.