

BEARING FRUIT

CBC Vision: Deep roots. Bearing fruit.

2 Peter 1:1-11

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I trust everyone was able to grab an apple on the way through the doors this morning. I trust some of you are enjoying them already! If there's leftovers when you go to leave, don't be afraid to grab one more. But I was thinking this morning that that fruit comes from a strong, healthy, and life-giving tree that someone put a lot of work into planting and growing and maintaining. And not that it had much choice, but the tree itself didn't grow that fruit for itself to enjoy either. It grows fruit for others to enjoy. It's a producing tree and not just a consuming tree. A tree like that is a good picture of a healthy Christian life and a snapshot of what we're going to talk about from 2 Peter 1:1-11. This is one of the most practical and helpful passages in the New Testament dealing with spiritual growth and bearing fruit—both as to why and to how. We're going to look at two steps to bearing fruit. The first step is to be rooted in God's resources.

I. FRIST STEP: BE ROOTED IN GOD'S RESOURCES. (1:1-4)

1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

So our author is the Apostle Peter and, as is not uncommon in the first century, he identifies himself by two names. **Simon** is his Hebrew name and **Peter** is his Greek name, Peter being a translation of his Aramaic name, **Cephas**. Remember, Jesus changed his name from Simon to Cephas which means “rock” (Jn 1:24), presumably based on his testimony and destiny. He professed “the rock” of the testimony that Jesus is the Christ—the testimony that the church is built on (Mt 16:18). He also became a rock-like figure in the newborn church, being known as the apostle to the Jews (Gal 2:8), but Jesus also used him to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Ac 10). At times when Peter acted like his old brash self and wasn't the rock he was supposed to be, Jesus might refer to him by his old name, Simon. But Peter now, writing this letter, is a man who is a living example of someone who experienced significant spiritual **growth** over his lifetime (2 Pet 3:18). Though not perfect (Gal 2:11), he really did become a “rock” in the early church. And when you compare the Peter of 1 Peter and 2 Peter with the Peter of the Gospels, you can see how much he grew spiritually (due in large part to the Spirit's coming!). He grew a ton and became a useful and fruitful instrument in the Lord's hands! Peter's story is a wonderful story about God's patience and grace. His renaming of Peter shows us that God doesn't look at us so much as what we are but what He's going to turn us into—who we have the potential to become.

But even though Peter is a high-profile figure in the church, look at how he identifies himself first: as a **bond servant**. A slave to Jesus Christ. He isn't living for Himself, but for Jesus. That's part of why he's fruitful. He is a man who is living for Jesus. He also cites his credentials as an **apostle** because he is writing to scattered believers in northern Asia Minor (Turkey; 1 Pet 1:1; 3:1) who are dealing with false teachers and his readers need to remember that the letter they are reading comes from an authoritative, genuine apostle.

He also says that these believers **have received a faith of the same kind** as his own ("ours"). Even though these scattered believers are living somewhere else, they have the same faith freely received through **the righteousness of Jesus Christ**, their **God and Savior**. Notice how Peter doesn't come at them with some spiritual elitism here. He doesn't act like he's on the A-team and they are on the B-team. He is a slave of Christ. He has the same faith. Both he and the believers he writes too are accepted by God—given **grace and peace** with God—only on the basis of the righteousness they've received in Christ. Peter's leveling of the playing field is intentional because this letter is a polemic against the spiritual elitism of the **false teachers**. He is saying, "*The faith that I have—the relationship I have with God—you have it too. It's available to you.*"¹ Because of that reality, he'll make the point that he expects them to bear fruit for God.

To understand this letter, you really must see it as a polemic against the **false teachings**. The false teachers Peter was dealing with probably embraced **dualism**, the idea that that which is spiritual is good and that which is physical is evil and that God doesn't care about the physical so you can live it up! Sin away! On the contrary, Peter is saying that how you live in this life, in this physical existence, does matter. And he's exhorting them to live in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ. He didn't save them so they could live in sin but be free from it—to **escape the lust of the world through the power and promises of God**.

These false teachers also professed to have special "**knowledge**" that others didn't. They made people feel like they needed something more than Christ. Peter is reminding them that they have **everything** (v. 3) they need in Christ already. It's not a head-knowledge either, but a relational knowledge of their relationship to Christ. If Peter can get these believers to understand their relationship with Christ—their identity in Him and relationship with Him and His sufficiency for them—they are going to be **protected** from the onslaught of false teachers who are going to distract them from Christ and stunt their spiritual growth and fruit-bearing. If we don't understand our Christ-relationship, that lack of knowledge will keep us from growing in Christ and become useful and fruitful Christians. The longer a Christian refuses to grow—to put himself in a position to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ—the more vulnerable they become to false teachers. False teachers prey on the immature and unstable (2 Pet 2:14). Too many Christians fall prey to the kingdom of the cults because they know little or nothing about their faith and the sufficiency of Christ. They start to feel like they're missing something because they don't understand He is everything. I like what one man said that if we lack anything, it may simply be the understanding that we lack nothing.

Be planted in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

So I would say that the **theme**, the heart of this letter, is to **grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ** (2 Pet 3:18) **so that you are protected from the false teachers**. D. Edmond

Hiebert said “[our] safety lies in [our] clear apprehension of the nature of the new life in Christ and [our] spiritual growth and maturity in the faith as the best antidote against error.”² That means that our first step to bearing fruit is just to be **rooted, or planted, in Christ** (Col 2:6-7), growing in our knowledge and understanding of Him and what He has accomplished for us. Paul says we are **complete** in Him (cf. Col 2:10). No need for a second baptism or second blessing or experience or dead religious work. We have been born again (1 Pet 1:3-4). We have the **divine nature** of the Holy Spirit in us. We have the iron-clad **promises** of God that we have eternal life and He’ll never leave us or forsake us. So now that we have everything we need to grow and bear fruit, the next step is to just do it! Tap into those resources by faith and bear fruit!

II. SECOND STEP: THE COMMAND TO BEAR FRUIT. (VV. 5-11)

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

Peter reminds these believers that because they have the resources they need to grow and be fruitful, they are now responsible for doing such. Basically, God entrusts us with His resources and expects us to use them as faithful stewards. So we’re kind of moving here from salvation to sanctification here, aren’t we. Saving faith is already assumed. Now, we are to **supply** to our faith—on top of our faith, mixed in with our faith—all of these **virtues** or **qualities** listed here to be fruitful. The word supply here is a **command**—an imperative. So we can tell if we’re growing and being fruit if we see these virtues **present and increasing** (v. 8) in our lives.

These virtues, by the way, are a sharp **contrast** to the shameful characteristics of false teachers in chapter 2. Many Bible students question whether the list is meant to be chronological, like a ladder or staircase where we have to cultivate one before moving on to the next, or if we apply them all at once. I don’t think we can get too mechanical about in one’s life, but I don’t think that the progression is accidental either when you think about it. We just learned that we should start with knowledge of Jesus Christ to grow right, and it’s probably no coincidence that love is the last and primary virtue. Love is the essence of all Christian ethic. If I love my neighbor, I will be Christlike in my interactions with them. I won’t steal from them. I won’t curse them. I will serve them even when they don’t serve me back. Dr. Thomas Constable said the “*literary device [Peter uses] simply arranges the virtues in an advancing order but presents them so that each one receives emphasis. The total effect is to create the impression of growing a healthy tree... in which several branches are vital.*”³

This passage also begins to address what “fruit” exactly is. According to this passage or Galatians 5, fruit can be **virtuous, Christlike qualities** (Rom 6:21-22; 7:4-6; Gal 5:22-23). John 15:5 says we bear fruit when we **obey** Christ and so abide in Him. Titus says we are to engage in **good works** so that we are not unfruitful (Col 1:10; Tit 3:14). People who come to Christ through our Christian **witness** are fruit (Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 16:15). We bear fruit with our lips

when **giving praise** to God (Heb 13:15) and we bear fruit when we **give money** to God's causes (Rom 15:28; Phil 4:17). Our church board is going through *So Great Salvation* by Charles Ryrie. In it, he has a really helpful chapter on fruit-bearing. He says every Christian will bear fruit somehow, someday, sometime. No believer is *fruitless*, but not every believer will necessarily be *fruitful* (as we see in verses 8-9).⁴ The main point Peter is making though is this:

We are responsible to grow and bear fruit.

Consider it this way: imagine that your dream is to be a farmer. But like many young people who want to be farmers, you need some help to get started. You have nothing and so you need a benefactor. Well pretend I'm your benefactor. I buy you the land, the equipment, the seed, the fertilizer. I buy everything you need. All you need to do is farm! I'm not going to do it for you. You have to do it. You have to plant the seed. You have to irrigate. You have to spray and cultivate.⁵ That's a great picture of what this is teaching us. God is our benefactor. He has given us His resources to steward, and He expects a return. This week, someone gave me an oak tree. I want it to grow strong and bear fruit. But it isn't going to happen automatically. I have to plant it and water it and care for it. I have to do something.

A lot of Christians I think have the idea that sanctification and growth is automatic. We can place a Bible under our pillow and wake up spiritual. But Christians don't just grow automatically or inevitably. Peter's use of the word "**if**" (v. 8) reminds us it's not automatic. It requires some effort. He has done His part. We have to do our part. The reason why many Christians don't grow is probably because it requires hard work and **discipline**. It requires spending time in God's Word, in prayer, in saying no to self (John 12:24) and sin and the things of the world and prioritizing the things of God. Growth can be painful. It requires pruning. It requires us to be real about how *unspiritual* we are.

Peter says that "if" we fail to grow in Christ we will be **useless** and **unfruitful**. But on the contrary, if we do grow, we become **useful** and **fruitful**. How can you be a useful and fruitful believer? By applying these qualities to your life. And what I love about these qualities is that **these are qualities every believer can apply**. He didn't say that you have to be a preacher or missionary or famous evangelist to bear fruit. You don't have to be rich or affluent or have dramatic talents or an exciting personality. You can be a nobody as far as the world is concerned, even confined to a hospital bed, and still bear fruit for God. We are fruitful when we're faithful where we are.⁶

Now focus on verse 9. Peter says that Christian who fail to apply these qualities are not only useless to the Lord and unfruitful, but they are also **blind** and **short-sighted**. Short-sighted is the word *myopazo*. It reminds us of our word myopia. Near-sightedness. Believers who don't grow, tend to lack spiritual vision, living for the here and now only, not beyond this life to what's **eternal**. Peter says folks like this have **forgotten** their **former purification from their sins**. They've forgotten their forgiveness of sin in Christ. I think we all know people like this. We know they're Christians and we know they know Jesus, but they were stunted in their growth because they didn't get in the Word and didn't gather on Sunday and put themselves in a position to grow and maybe even like the Galatians, fell prey to false teachers. And now you wonder whether they're saved or not because they're living in license or legalism. They've forgotten their

former purification from their sins. Peter deals with this in chapter 3, but the false teachers **mocked** the idea of **Lord's return**. If you don't believe in the Lord's return, His wrath on the sinful world and restoration of the world from sin, you are going to be severely stunted spiritually. You're much more likely to live for the here and now. That's why study of the future and end times is so important. We live now in light of what is coming, as we see in vv. 10-11:

10 Therefore, brethren [notice, again, these are saved Christians], be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

So now we're getting into the doctrine of glorification. First, salvation. Then, sanctification. Now, glorification. They're all tied together. But what does he mean by being **more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you**. First, I'll say that an Arminian will say that Christians can lose their salvation if they don't bear fruit. A Calvinist would say that that person never really was saved if they aren't fruitful. But if you study the verse in context as a good Biblicist, it is clearly referencing people who are saved.⁷ Faith is assumed. They are believers. They are in Christ. They have the divine nature. They have God's promises. They are purified. They have been forgiven. But... they have been influence by false teaching and thus have been hindered from being productive. So I would say that the reason he says this is because fruit, though not a *requirement* for salvation, is the expected *result* of salvation.

Fruit furnishes evidence of saving faith.

Jesus said we will know people by their fruit, so when we don't see any fruit or the fruit in a professing Christian's life is private or erratic or minimal at best, there are legitimate grounds for wondering if they are a believer or not. But just because we don't always see it or someone is not consistently fruitful, doesn't mean they aren't or that it isn't there.⁸ According to Peter, there is such a thing as a useless, unfruitful, blind and short-sighted believer.

I would say that if we have trusted Christ as Savior, we have *objective* assurance from God that we are saved because God says so (1 John 5:11-13). There doesn't need to be any doubt. But if we fail to live out our salvation and we don't walk with Christ, there's a good chance we will doubt and stumble in many ways. We won't experience a fuller, albeit *subjective*, assurance. When you live out your faith, the assurance starts to deepen.⁹ This is why many Christians struggle with assurance of salvation. They aren't growing spiritually. Their condition doesn't match their position, and they lose the sense that they're a child of God. But with all of that being said, I would caution us against focusing so much on ourselves or our performance. Our *primary* assurance comes not from what we do, but from God's promise that we have eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-13). We all have many moments where we fail to bear fruit.

Jesus rewards fruit-bearers.

Our final encouragement is found in verse 11: to those who "supply" the virtues to their life and become fruitful, Christ will "**supply**" them with **an abundant entrance into His eternal kingdom**. I don't know if many Christians have thought about this, but we are going to be given

rewards based on our faithfulness. All believers will be rewarded with eternal life and entrance into the kingdom, but not all will be equally rewarded. 1 Corinthians 3 talks about this a bit. Some will get into heaven as though through a wall of fire. Everything but themselves is burned up. They don't bring any eternal fruit with them. But we want to be among those who hear, "Well done good and faithful servant." We want our works to remain and to receive a "full reward" (Rev. 3:11; 2 Jn 8). Either way, we all get in 100% by pure grace.

In summary, this passage shows us that our church's vision is biblical, realistic, and doable. We can bear fruit. We have all we need to bear fruit. We've been commanded too. There's only one question: Will we? Eternity will tell.

¹ Andy Woods, *2 Peter 003 – Grow Up*, <https://slbc.org/sermon/2-peter-003-grow-up/>

² Hiebert, 43. D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Necessary Growth in the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:5-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:561 (January-March 1984):43.

³ Constable, *Notes on 2 Peter*, 2023 ed. <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/2peter.pdf>, 19-20.

⁴ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1997), 41.

⁵ Bryan Clark, *Gospel Living*, <https://www.lincolnberean.org/sermon/hope-filled-living-1-2-peter/gospel-living>

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 2:439.

⁷ Andy Woods, *2 Peter 005 – Benefits of Maturity*, <https://slbc.org/sermon/2-peter-005-benefits-of-maturity/>

⁸ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 42-43.

⁹ Ibid.