
THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE IN THE BIBLE

• STUDY GUIDE •
WITH LEADER'S NOTES

2 PETER

LIVING WITH THE END IN MIND

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Lesson

1

MAKING YOUR SALVATION SURE

BIG IDEA

We should put every effort into godly living, diligently building on all Christ has granted us, while we wait for the coming heavenly kingdom.

BIBLE CONVERSATION *20 MINUTES*

The book of 2 Peter is the Bible's second letter from that apostle. It was likely written to a similar audience as his first letter, to churches in Asia Minor. Peter had been with Jesus and was appointed to lead the church after Jesus ascended to heaven. Peter wrote this letter as he anticipated his own death: "I know that the putting off of my body will be soon" (1:14), which tradition says happened at the hands of the emperor Nero.

Yet despite the persecution from outside the church, Peter's great concern in this letter is dangers inside the church. Peter writes to his fellow believers with an urgent warning. He wants them to resist false teachers who dismiss the Scripture's authority and advocate worldly, sensual pleasures. He urges the believers to keep their focus on the greater pleasures found in Christ. He especially points out how these pleasures are connected to Christ's second coming, the day of the Lord.

Have someone read **2 Peter 1:1–11** aloud or have a few readers take turns. Then discuss the questions below:

The opening four verses describe the life believers have in Christ. What do you find most attractive about the life Peter describes, and why?

Verses 5–7 describe efforts we make as we embrace this godly life. Which of the character traits listed catches your attention, and why? (Focus on the qualities themselves, not the order in which Peter lists them, since he says they all should keep increasing and not just lead to the next in his list.)

Verses 8–11 give reasons why we should work on these Christian qualities. How do Peter’s reasons compare to other reasons for living like a Christian that you’ve heard?

Now read the following article, written by this book’s author. Take turns reading aloud, switching readers at each paragraph break. When you finish, discuss the questions at the end of the article.

Lesson

1

ARTICLE

CONFIRM YOUR RESERVATION

5 MINUTES

Several years ago, I was flying home from Nairobi, Kenya, and nearly missed my flight because I had not confirmed my reservation. In those days, before there was anything like online check-in, airlines would ask passengers who were flying internationally to phone beforehand and confirm. But I had not phoned. I just presumed I could get on the flight, and then was told when I got to the airport that I most likely could not.

That's what this opening passage in 2 Peter is all about: confirming our place in heaven. "Be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. . . . For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (vv. 10–11). Picture an Olympic athlete returning home in victory to a welcoming crowd. The Lord Jesus Christ will welcome us home after our victorious Christian life. Peter wants to ensure we catch our flight, so to speak.

Peter's letter includes at least ten explicit references to the coming day of the Lord when Christ will punish the wicked and bring the righteous home. And Peter's point is that you can't get to heaven without hard work. We must "make every effort" (v. 5) and "be all the more

diligent” (v. 10). The letter is an exhortation to diligent, godly living while we wait for Jesus’s return.

Now, that all sounds a bit like salvation by works, doesn’t it? It sounds like salvation might be conditional on practicing qualities like self-control and love that Peter mentions. But notice that the call to be diligent is the *climax* of Peter’s opening statement. The *context* begins in verse 1, where Peter says he is addressing those who already “have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Christ graciously gives the godly life Peter describes. It is a life of equal worth to the life Peter and the other apostles possess.

Such a precious life cannot be earned; it must be received. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (v. 3). The word *granted* carries the idea of an allocation from a royal bounty. This royal grant we receive is far beyond the ordinary life—breathing, eating, working, playing—that everyone has. Through Christ “who called us to his own glory and excellence,” we have been given an extraordinary kind of life. We are Godlike, “partakers of the divine nature” (v. 4).

Peter does not mean we actually become God or a part of God. But our destiny is to be *like* God. We will become immortal, morally perfect, and eternally happy. This is the corruption-free state God originally intended when he made us in his image. Adam failed to raise us up to that life, but Christ has promised it to everyone who comes in faith to him.

Jesus is leading us to a new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells. This will be a life thick with godly morality, grander than just having Christ’s righteousness counted as ours. All our thoughts and desires will actually *be* righteous. We will be free of every evil that corrupts us. We will embody the goodness of our Savior and enjoy the constant happiness of our God. C. S. Lewis wrote that if we were to see now the kind of creatures we will become, we would be tempted

to worship them—so like God we will be.¹ John Calvin commented on these verses in 2 Peter by saying we cannot imagine anything more outstanding.²

What's more, Jesus has also called us into this life *now*. We have already begun to escape the corruption of our sinful natures. Part of the royal grant is that we get to start practicing a Godlike life today.

This means our effort flows from how Christ has already graciously provided and promised life. How do we respond to that gift of life? Peter says we should supplement or add to it. It's like what we do with our physical life, which came to us from our parents, by grace, without our choice. We supplement that physical life by giving ourselves food, vitamins, sunlight, exercise, and more. We must do this to live. So too, we must add to our Christian life if we love what Christ has given us and expect it to grow.

We never stop receiving, always relying on Christ's work in us. And yet, *we* need to care for our own life too. Peter gives us a list of virtues, like a list of vitamins that will grow our godly life. These counter the self-willed, greedy, sensual indulgence of the false teachers.

There's **faith**, steadfastly relying on Christ and receiving from him. There's **virtue**, which is moral goodness. There's **knowledge**, which here means wisdom and discernment. There's **self-control** and **steadfastness** and **godliness**. There's **brotherly affection**, which is surprising because first-century people used it to speak about blood relations, but Peter says to express it to all believers. And there's **love**, the crowning virtue that encompasses all the others.

This is hard work. With grace comes responsibility. Don't presume on your reservation in heaven; confirm it. You see, the reason I didn't confirm my reservation that time in Nairobi is because I couldn't be bothered to make the effort. I was staying in Tanzania, and I would have had to find a phone and pay for an international call. And so, I only got on my flight by the skin of my teeth.

Here's the difference with the Godlike life: although the life Christ provides for us is one of grace from beginning to end, a true response to that grace is never effortless. No one gets in who does nothing to supplement their Christian life or confirm their calling. So, let us strive to make our calling and election sure.

DISCUSSION *10 MINUTES*

How much is the coming, heavenly life a part of your daily thoughts? Why is that?

What beliefs do you have that Peter would challenge, or what teachings have you encountered that Peter would confront? (For example, have you harbored too small a view of heaven, or the idea that heaven is earned rather than granted, or that grace means the Christian life can be lax, etc.?) Explain.

Lesson

1

EXERCISE

FOUR MOTIVATIONS

20 MINUTES

Although diligent effort is always part of a true Christian life, that effort flows from the grace of the gospel. At the end of our passage, Peter gives four motivations that can help you be diligent. He anchors these motivations in what Christ has granted and promised.

Each motivation is explained below using a mental picture to help you remember it: a master musician, a blindfold, a bicycle, and a front-row ticket. On your own, read about each motivation. Then pick one that seems especially helpful to you. Take a few minutes to think about why you find it helpful. You might underline or otherwise note parts of the illustration that catch your attention. Be prepared to share your responses at the end of this exercise.

THE MASTER MUSICIAN. “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful” (v. 8).

The first motivation is the promise of a fruitful life. A job well done that makes an impact is hugely satisfying. Imagine Mozart, who composed sublime music we still enjoy today. Or think of someone who plays that music with exceptional beauty. A life that’s diligent about imitating Jesus is even more delightful than a Mozart symphony.

When you practice goodness and affection and love, you bring healing and beauty wherever you go. One of Christ's gifts to you is a Spirit-led heart that puts wind behind such a life. In him, you are equipped to master the music of godliness and impact the world for Jesus.

THE BLINDFOLD. “For whoever lacks these qualities is so near-sighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins” (v. 9).

The blindfold is a negative motivation—a fate to avoid. Peter warns of blind forgetfulness. That's when you stop being diligent and instead get used to your sin so that it starts to master you. You lose sight of how Jesus forgives your sin, releases you from its controlling grip, and has made a sin-free life your destiny. You forget how good godliness is, and you grope in the dark for other pleasures. An awareness that the blindfold is a real danger in the Christian life will help you make an effort to look at Jesus daily and keep following him.

THE BICYCLE. “If you practice these qualities, you will never fall” (v. 10).

If you stop moving on a bicycle, you fall over. But if you keep pedaling, you reach your destination. In the same way, Christians are people who keep moving so as not to fall. The bicycle is a warning against being satisfied with a spiritual standstill—making peace with pet sins or neglecting prayer and God's Word. At the same time, it is also an assurance that Jesus always saves those who do repent of sin and turn to him in faith: *you will never fall*. This promise is yours by grace. It is not based on how far down the road you progress in this life, but on God's pledge that when you keep pedaling through bumps and hills and tiredness you will finish the race upright.

THE FRONT-ROW TICKET. “For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 11).

Imagine the most expensive ticket to the grandest game, concert, or exclusive party. Most people would never splurge for such a ticket (if they could even afford the experience at all). But Jesus has richly provided for you to enter his eternal kingdom. He is giving you access to live with him and be like him forever, a life too wonder-filled to imagine fully. When you know the surpassing honor and delight that awaits you, you are able to set aside worldly enticements and be hard-working about godliness.

When the group is ready, discuss the four motivations. Which one do you find especially helpful, encouraging you to be diligent about the godly life? Explain why.

WRAP-UP AND PRAYER *10 MINUTES*

Prayer is for those who know that the entire Christian life, including our effort to obey, is about receiving from God. Together, you will ask your Father for the gifts he loves to grant his children. Be sure to include requests that he will help you to be diligent in the ways described in our passage.